

# Inspection report for The Dove Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Wolverhampton
<b>Inspection number</b>	383467
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 March 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Martyn Groucutt

<b>Centre leader</b>	Helen Farmer
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Dovecotes Primary School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	None

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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**Report published:** April 2012



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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

An inspection of the partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's manager, deputy manager and senior staff, and with the headteacher of the primary school to which the centre is attached. Discussions were also held with representatives of the local authority, and from health, education, the adjacent Family Centre, the Voluntary Sector Council and other voluntary sector representatives.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The Dove Centre is one of the children's centres provided by Wolverhampton City Council. It is based within the same buildings as Dovecote Primary School and the headteacher of the school is the line manager of the centre manager. The centre has an advisory board which is answerable to the governing body of the school, which takes on responsibility for the centre.

The centre is a phase one provision that provides the full core offer of services. It was established as a new build in 2006. It currently employs eight full-time and eight part-time staff and also makes use of volunteers, for example as mentors for other centre users. Since October 2011 the centre manager has also taken over responsibility for two phase three centres in adjacent districts. The deputy manager has consequently taken over more responsibility for the day-to-day running of the centre. Staff cover early years provision, family support, community development,

maternity support and administration. Services such as the provision for training and education are commissioned through service level agreements. Through its own expertise and links with a variety of voluntary sector providers, the centre supports victims of domestic abuse and substance misuse, young parents, provides counselling and opportunities for volunteering.

The centre serves a population that is predominantly White British, but there are also significant Asian and Black communities, and recently a small number of people originally from Eastern Europe have moved into the area. While it serves a demographically mixed area it does cover some localities that suffer high levels of deprivation and increasing unemployment, and the percentage of adults with no formal qualifications and those in receipt of benefits are well above the national average. Gang and gun crime are factors in the locality and there is a high incidence of domestic violence and drug abuse in some areas. On entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age.

## Inspection judgements

**Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

### Overall effectiveness

**The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families**

**2**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

**The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management**

**2**

## Main findings

The Dove Centre provides a good, and in some areas an outstanding, service for young children and families. The centre is increasingly successful in engaging the most hard to reach families and those suffering the highest levels of deprivation and providing services that meet their needs.

Very effective leadership and management by the centre manager, well supported by her deputy and coupled with effective links with other service providers, ensure that services for children are of a high standard. Current provision for adult training and education is only satisfactory though, as a former service level agreement that was ended has not yet been fully replaced. However, a variety of successful links with a range of professionals and community groups ensures services meet the identified needs of the community well. The manager, who has led the centre since its inception, displays a clear vision so that leadership is effective and the centre's self-evaluation is of a high quality. There has been little turnover of staff since the centre opened, reflecting high levels of commitment. Effective delegation ensures that staff

feel ownership of their work and demonstrate a drive to achieve excellence.

Inspection evidence shows that while some aspects of links with health services, such as with general practitioner surgeries, are not fully developed, links such as those with health visitors are very strong and serve the community very effectively and support early intervention. This is illustrated by the close collaboration which is enabling the children's centre to identify every two-year old in the reach area and to engage with their families as a key focus for services.

There is a strong and effective commitment to equality of opportunity. Services support very positive outcomes for families, promote healthy lifestyles, keep people safe, and develop wider skills that enhance opportunities and outcomes for centre users. The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding, with the centre frequently working closely with other agencies to maximise support. Nowhere is this better seen than in the outstanding commitment towards keeping people safe.

Effective analysis of needs, supported by effective data produced by the local authority, shows that the centre is increasingly successful in reaching its community, particularly hard to reach families. Year-on-year improvement against the key indicators indicates positive outcomes. Outstanding systems for management and accountability enable the centre to establish annual priorities and set clear targets derived from strong self-evaluation. The centre is aware of areas where provision is less effective and is taking steps to address them. While the capacity to sustain improvement is very strong it cannot be outstanding until all arrangements that ensure the effective delivery of all services are fully in place.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- In conjunction with the local authority, increase the capacity to deliver high quality opportunities for training and education for adults to improve education and training outcomes.
- In conjunction with the local authority, seek ways to improve and develop liaison with local authority adult services and health provision, in particular the local general practitioner service, in order to enhance delivery of identified priorities and early intervention.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>2</b>
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As well as effectively promoting the community's physical health, the centre staff support emotional and mental health well. Staff from The Dove Centre, host and lead the 'Freedom Programme', promoted by the local authority as a city-wide initiative for women who have suffered abuse. They are successful in improving health outcomes for all families. However, liaison with external health agencies, such as local surgeries, is not as well developed as the very positive links with health visitors. These enable the centre to make contact with every pregnant woman in the reach area to discuss their needs, while at the two-year old screening children identified as

vulnerable are identified and offered places on the 'Two Year Offer'. This provides effective pre-school opportunities for the children, with an expectation that their parents will engage in centre activities, such as those aimed at promoting parent-child bonding, or supporting healthy lifestyles.

Activities engage target groups effectively and there is a strong focus on engaging hard to reach families. Key performance indicators around increasing breast-feeding, reducing obesity and cessation of smoking have seen strong year-on-year improvements, although from a low base that reflected the exceptional needs of the community. Programmes such 'Shape Up' reflect effective partnership working, the centre using the fitness suite at a local school to support its work in reducing obesity. Overall there have been some exceptional outcomes in personal health achievement, as testified by parents and other centre users.

All children identified as being at risk and given places on the 'Two Year Offer' are subject to Common Assessment Framework procedures, in which the children's centre is often the lead agency. This process initiates effective inter-agency work in protecting and supporting children. It reflects the outstanding arrangements for promoting and sustaining safeguarding and child protection. The 'Free To Be Me' course sustains this through adolescence, run in conjunction with the local high school. It covers elements of sexual health, decision making and making positive choices. It forms part of the response to the high incidences of drug abuse and gun crime in parts of the reach area. The school reports that this initiative is very effective in tackling these areas of need.

From the outset children are supported in their emotional and intellectual growth. 'Stay and Play' sessions are popular, while 'Parent Puzzle' supports emotional bonding. Special educational needs are identified and supported through the special educational needs co-ordinator, who divides her time equally between the children's centre and school. Effective early years and family support workers support children's school readiness very well. Children who have attended the centre perform better in school from the outset, although their performance remains below that normally expected for children of their age.

Parts of the reach area suffer high rates of unemployment, in some cases running to three generations in the same family. Links with Jobcentre Plus, while reduced over time, enables the centre to promote local employment opportunities and links with the YMCA and the Voluntary Sector Council support opportunities for volunteering, training or support into employment. However, the centre accepts that this is an area where development of services requires improvement.

Centre users spoken to during the inspection all felt that they were well-consulted and their views taken into account. They are able to make a positive contribution through the effective Parents' Forum, which has led a significant number to become engaged as volunteers at the centre. Centre users make a positive contribution to the centre's success.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

The local authority produces clear and relevant data that helps centre staff identify need and assess the impact of services provided. This ensures specific, identified needs are targeted and staff have a clear understanding of the diversity within its reach area.

There are strong relationships between the centre and many of the wide range of professionals with whom it works. This includes the monthly early intervention meetings that identify vulnerable families known to different agencies, so that support can be coordinated. The centre is effective in promoting its professional partners' range of services, activities and opportunities to meet the needs of families in the locality. Information is shared freely between professionals; indeed it is a central element of supporting children through the Common Assessment Framework process, but it extends far beyond this. A range of external agencies are represented on the centre's advisory board, supporting and contributing to the effective management systems.

The centre aims to improve, and is effective in raising, the aspirations of those with whom it works, promoted effectively through sessions such as 'Wellbeing and Life-mapping', which builds confidence and self-esteem. Nursery readiness is promoted through activities such as 'Ditch The Dummy', or 'The Ties That Bind', which helps some parents deal with separation issues.

Centre users told inspectors how the centre had helped them develop much more positive attitudes to life. This includes developing their attitudes and approach to bringing up their children and to the ways they relate to other people, including those in authority. Opportunities to access training and develop employability have been accessed by some, but this element of the centre's work is not as well

developed as others. Adult users feel that their progress is measured and rewarded through the awarding of Certificates of Achievement. Some said it was the first time they had ever felt successful.

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding and the centre makes a clear commitment to engaging the most difficult to reach families through its outreach work. It also works closely with other statutory and voluntary agencies in promoting child protection. Centre staff display a high level of awareness and understanding of issues around abuse at all levels. Support for families or individuals in crisis is immediate and highly effective.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

The centre manager is highly effective, respected by staff, other professionals and users alike. This is acknowledged by the local authority in her wider strategic role and while she is undertaking other duties her deputy demonstrates effective centre leadership. The governing body and headteacher of Dovecote School, who have management responsibilities for the centre, provide both challenge and support. They were instrumental in the establishment of The Dove Centre and have a clear vision of integrated provision to support the considerable needs of the local community. This enables the centre to set and meet very challenging targets.

Delegation of responsibilities with an emphasis on delivering effective services is supported through excellent professional supervision, which extends to supporting the work of volunteers. Centre users have been consulted widely and the advisory board has taken an effective strategic role. Staff feel well supported and say that they feel consulted and valued in fulfilling their specific roles. During a time when the centre's budget has been reduced by 20% over two years and painful decisions made, centre leaders held consultation and discussion with all stakeholders. As a consequence core services have been protected and clear priorities drawn up that will enable the centre to maintain its effective services to its community through the efficient use of resources. The centre is able to demonstrate it is offering good value for money.

There is a clear commitment to promoting equality and enabling those who use the resources of the centre to gain successful outcomes, especially those in the most challenging circumstances. Data show the centre has been successful in increasing



service take up, and performance against key indicators has shown increasingly positive outcomes over time. Leaders accept that there remain challenges that will be more easily met with an increase in the effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration, such as enhanced support for adults with mental health issues. The local authority accepts that it has a strategic role in supporting the centre in developing such links. However, services for children are already excellent, with services to promote safeguarding and the protection of vulnerable children outstanding. This includes undertaking effective risk assessments of all activities held at the centre and in the wider community. Examples of the best practice often demonstrate highly effective collaboration with a range of other providers that enables the centre to meet its core purpose well.

Self-evaluation is thorough and effective, with a pursuit of excellence at its heart. This has led to a noticeable improvement in provision and outcomes over time. Opportunities for professional development, based on a clear understanding of staff's needs, promote good outcomes. In turn this enables the centre to make a powerful impact for good within its local community through raising aspirations and increasing the life chances of those who use the centre.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>2</b>

## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection**

Provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage in Dovecote Primary School, to which

the children's centre is attached, was inspected at the same time. It found that transition arrangements from the children's centre are very effective. Evidence shows that children who have attended the centre, while performing at a level below that generally found in children of their age, enter school with skills above those of who had not. Tracking through school shows this advantage is sustained as they get older.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the The Dove Centre on 27–28 March 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We valued the opportunity to speak with some of you during the inspection and would like to thank you for your very positive contribution. During the two days we spent at the centre we did not hear a negative word said about the services provided, although there was an appreciation that some links with other service providers could be a bit stronger to increase their effectiveness.

It is clear that a great deal of thought and planning has gone into the provision of services and it was pleasing to hear that you feel fully consulted in this process. As a result there is a good correlation between what is on offer and the identified needs in the area. The local authority has provided detailed information that helps the centre to see where difficulties lie and data on the outcomes of services. The centre is therefore able to demonstrate that it has shown good results, especially in the areas highlighted by the government as being crucial. The centre is able to demonstrate its increasing success in meeting the most difficult to reach families and to engage them in services. This is having a positive outcome in raising expectations and outcomes. For example, it is clear that children who have attended the centre go on to do better than local children who have not when they get to school.

The centre has open and positive dialogue with a variety of service providers and these are particularly effective in the provision of help and support to children and young people. Children identified as needing additional help are supported when the centre pulls together the expertise of a range of services to try to provide whatever is necessary to make those children safe and able to thrive. You as parents are supported well in helping you to help your families. This might be at a practical level of improving parenting skills, such as 'Parent Puzzle', in increasing numbers breast feeding, or in reducing obesity and promoting healthy eating, with 'Mary's Kitchen' being a good example. Provision for young people in their teens also helps them to remain safe and make sensible choices in their lives. Courses like 'Free To Be Me' reflect the excellent relationship with the local high school.

However, some elements of services for parents are not yet quite so effective. The centre is aware that work with the Voluntary Sector Council which could strengthen opportunities for your training or returning to employment, is an area that needs to be developed. The same is true for links with agencies such as those who provide adult services, or with local surgeries. We have asked the centre leaders to look into these areas of their work more carefully. This has been identified as key to supporting identified priorities and the local authority acknowledges that it too has a role to play in supporting the centre in this area.

The leadership of the centre is very effective, which the local authority have acknowledged by asking the manager to take on a wider role in the city as well as running the Dove Centre. When she is not there the deputy manager provides very effective management, so the committed and effective staff are very well supported. Since the centre is managed by the governing body of Dovecote School and the headteacher is line manager for the centre manager there is close and positive working that helps prepare your children for school effectively. It is a system that also supports the centre in holding it to account for its performance. Together with the advisory board, made up from organisations that support the centre, it helps the leadership identify and implement necessary services that raise expectations and outcomes for you. There is strong support for those who work and those of you who volunteer at the centre. In return you show a very strong commitment to the centre and the work it does.

From the discussions we held with some of you, staff and other service providers, together with the evidence that we looked at on the impact the centre is having, it is clear that it plays a major role in supporting you and your children.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).