

# Inspection report for West Street Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Bexley
Inspection number	366339
Inspection dates	25–26 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Jackie Krafft HMI

Centre governance	London Borough of Bexley
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Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	West Street Neighbourhood Nursery EY 287827

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.

## 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 registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. 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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior leadership team, staff, and representatives from the local authority. They also spoke with partner agencies, including from the health service, parents, carers and other users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation, including key policies, the centre's business plan and evaluations of services.

## Information about the centre

West Street Children's Centre is managed by the local authority and was designated as a phase 1 centre in May 2005. It was the first children's centre in the borough. The full core offer of childcare, early learning, health services and family support services is provided at the centre's purpose-built facility and other venues in the locality. The centre is in an area of regeneration that has high levels of unemployment as well as social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of families in the area dependent on benefit is higher than in other parts of the borough. Approximately one third of children under the age of five are living in poverty. The centre serves a culturally diverse community. Almost half the families are from White British and other White backgrounds. Other families are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group are of Black African heritage. Many children in the area enter early years provision with levels that are lower than those expected for their age. Childcare and early learning are provided in a privately run nursery on the centre's site. It offers 70 places and is open from 8.00am to 6.00pm for 50 weeks a year.

The day-to-day running of the centre is undertaken by the centre manager who also oversees the work of three other children’s centres. Advice and assistance is provided by an advisory board of partner representatives. Parents are also represented on the advisory board.

## 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 users and the wider community**

2

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

## Main findings

West Street Children’s Centre is a firmly established part of the local community that is valued by those who use its good range of well-integrated services. This is reflected in the words of one parent who said, ‘I really look forward to coming because I can meet other mums, my child can socialise and I learn a lot.’ Carefully targeted outreach work is increasing the numbers of families who are benefiting from the good provision that the centre offers, including those who are new to the area and teenage mothers.

Strong partnerships with a wide variety of providers, including health professionals and local housing associations, are making a positive contribution to improving outcomes for the centre’s users. Information is shared effectively so there is an accurate understanding of the varied needs of children and families, including those who are experiencing emotional difficulties and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Crèche facilities are provided for parents attending courses. This ensures there are equal opportunities for all groups of users, and resources are used well to provide a cohesive service and interesting, relevant activities which meet their different needs. Consequently, outcomes are good.

Trusting relationships are built with families, partners, local providers and the wider community. Good safeguarding procedures are implemented by well-trained staff which helps keep all users safe, particularly those who might be at risk of harm. Parents say they feel safe and are confident that their children are well cared for at the centre. One parent explained, ‘It is always welcoming, they really get to know you and if you need help, you get it.’

Users are provided with good guidance and support at the centre, and useful information about services available from other providers. Displays, information leaflets and play equipment reflect the diversity of the local community well. Users, including those in the black women’s group, are encouraged to talk about and celebrate their own cultures.

The centre’s leaders seek every opportunity to build the confidence and raise aspirations of its users. Services are evaluated systematically and user views are sought regularly through questionnaires and evaluations of activities. Effective steps are taken to respond to their views. However, there is currently no forum for parents to share their views with each other and contribute to the strategic development of the centre’s provision.

Leadership of the centre is good. Leaders at all levels work together well as a team to improve outcomes. The local authority provides the centre with regular data and useful performance information to support its evaluation and business planning. As a result, there is an accurate understanding of the centre’s strengths and where improvements can be made. There are clear reporting systems and lines of accountability. An advisory board is in place but its role in providing the centre leaders with advice and challenge to support their drive for further improvement is not developed. In addition, the breadth of its membership and role are not yet fully established.

Improving outcomes, good quality provision, accurate self-evaluation, effective partnerships and systematic monitoring demonstrate that the leadership of the centre has good capacity to improve further.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Develop the role of the advisory board so that it is able to provide challenge and advice to further improve outcomes for users by:
  - broadening its membership
  - clarifying the purpose of the board
  - establishing terms of reference.
- Establish more formal opportunities for parents to share their views with each other and contribute to the strategic development of the centre’s provision.

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

<b>2</b>
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Discussions with the centre’s users and a review of case studies identify that parents and carers feel more confident, less isolated and emotionally well-supported, including those who have experienced postnatal depression. One parent described how this was affecting her ability to look after her children. With the support of the centre, she said her confidence has ‘snowballed’ and she is now much happier and

better able to cope. Parents comment that they have made new friends and that their children are also able to socialise more with others. Parents and carers have a greater understanding of the social aspects of eating a meal together. They know how to prepare a healthy family meal, using fresh ingredients, safely. Parents who are new to the country learn how to prepare unfamiliar ingredients, for example through a Nigerian cookery course. One parent noted that a food labelling course had made her more careful about the use of salt and sugar in food. However, child obesity levels in the area are higher than average in the borough. Breast feeding rates in the locality are higher than in other parts of the borough and peer support is having a positive impact. New parents say that they are increasingly knowledgeable about the next steps in their baby's development by attending the baby group. They are better informed about aspects of their baby's health, including how to look after their teeth. An increasing number of teenage parents are accessing the centre's services.

The centre is able to demonstrate clearly through case study examples that good multi-agency working and a clear understanding of the Common Assessment Framework are helping to keep vulnerable children safe. Users are confident that their children are safe at the centre and that they are able to share any concerns, including those who are at risk of harm, for example from domestic violence. Those parents who experience emotional difficulties say that they are better able to cope, are increasingly resilient and feel less isolated. They note that their children's behaviour and communication skills have improved. Users are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe. They are increasingly adopting safe practices, for example when using equipment such as scissors and crossing the road.

Parents and children attending the centre's activities enjoy playing and learning together. Children are inquisitive and participate enthusiastically, for example at stories and crafts in the local library. They interact with each other and adults confidently, develop good social skills and learn to become independent. Parents and carers learn new ways of engaging with their children. For example, at specific activities designed for parents and children with hearing impairment, they learn how to sign together and how to use a range of different toys and resources to support communication. This prepares children well for their next steps in learning and development.

Parents and carers develop a good range of skills that are helping to prepare them well for future employment, including hairdressing, childcare and computing. They have an increased awareness of financial matters such as how to access benefits and manage debt. They learn how to save money by using everyday items around them to play with their children. One parent noted, 'I can test toys out at the centre first without spending too much.' The celebration of achievements, including for those who gain additional qualifications, is raising aspirations and motivating users to develop their skills further. For example, one parent was supported to gain a degree in social work. There are some examples where this has led to employment but reducing worklessness remains a priority.

Users contribute their views readily to help develop services through questionnaires and discussions with centre staff but there is no formal forum for parents and carers to meet and discuss and contribute to centre governance. The establishment of a black women’s support group and the introduction of a hairdressing course are examples of their suggestions. Users attend activities regularly, including community events, and encourage others to access services. This is helping to increase the numbers of parents and carers who are benefiting from the centre’s activities.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all users 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 users 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 are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre knows its users and the local community well. It works closely with local agencies and services, including community safety and housing associations, to understand the needs of families and children in the area. Activities at the centre and in the local community are targeted to involve those in most need and those who are hard to engage. For example, a local community fun day was arranged with local partners on a nearby housing estate. Following the event, the number of families accessing services from the estate increased significantly. Outreach workers visit a range of community venues, including the local library and shops. They successfully promote the centre’s services, identify what children and families need, and support those who are unable to access services directly. This is having a positive impact on the good numbers of families and children who are registered at the centre and benefiting from its services.

A good variety of interesting, accessible activities are provided for different groups of users. They are promoted well through eye-catching displays and attractive leaflets. Events are colour coded so that users can see at a glance which, for example, they need to book in advance. Stories and crafts activities at the local library are enjoyed by parents and carers with their children. The well-attended Dad’s Group provides an opportunity for fathers to meet other fathers, and learn and play with their

children in a safe, well-equipped environment. Baby Group supports new parents with good advice and guidance on child development, breast feeding and weaning. Taster sessions for photography help users to develop new interests and access specialist equipment. Placements at the local hairdressing salon are being developed to help users apply their newly acquired skills in a real-life setting. One parent said, 'I do activities at home with my children that I have seen being done at the crèche.'

Good advice and support is readily available from outreach workers, centre staff and specialists such as speech and language therapists. They provide effective one-to-one support and drop-in sessions for those who need it. Accessible information leaflets signpost users to a good range of other relevant services, although information about local job vacancies is not displayed routinely.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>

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

**2**

Leadership at all levels is effective. The manager has firmly established the children's centre in the community. Staff and partners understand their roles and responsibilities. They work very well together and effectively promote the inclusion of all groups in the local community, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are at risk of harm. Good value for money is secured because services and high-quality resources are carefully matched to the needs of users. This is having a positive impact on improving outcomes for users.

Performance management and supervision arrangements are established. There are clear lines of accountability between the centre staff, partners and the local authority. For example, through the systematic monitoring and review of service level agreements and regular analysis of performance data. Leaders understand the centre's strengths and evaluate the impact of its actions on the different groups it serves. Appropriate priorities, linked to a good range of actions for improvement, are identified in the business plan. However, precise measures of success are not clear. An advisory board is in place which includes representatives from some strong local partnerships. However, its membership and role are not yet developed sufficiently to challenge and advise on how outcomes for users could be improved further.

Safeguarding procedures and practices are good. All checks are carried out and renewed regularly to ensure the suitability of staff and partners who work with children. Staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding practices and training is renewed regularly. The centre provides a safe and secure environment for its users. Strong relationships with parents and good cooperation between a wide range of agencies ensure information is shared. This is making a positive contribution to supporting families experiencing difficulties and children who may be at risk, including those with child protection plans.

*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>	2
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	2
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	2
<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>	2
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	2
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	2
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	2
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	2

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

The inspection of the early years and childcare provision in the nursery carried out on 25 January 2011 judged it to be good. Findings from this inspection have contributed to the children's centre report and judgements on outcomes for users and the effectiveness of provision.



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## Summary for centre users

We inspected West Hill Children's Centre on 26 and 27 January 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Those of you we spoke to told us how much you value your children's centre and what it has to offer. You said that you find the staff very helpful, friendly and welcoming. You said how much you look forward to going to the various activities. In fact, the number of families and children who are now registered at the centre and taking part in its activities is increasing, which is good. This is partly because you are encouraging others to come along and also because the outreach workers and health visitors are, too.

The centre has made a difference to you and your children. You said that one of the main differences was that the centre has made you feel more confident and helped you to make new friends. This was really important for you, particularly as some of you explained that you had previously felt isolated because you were new to the area or do not have family close by. You also feel that your children have been able to learn how to socialise and share with other children by attending activities.

All the correct checks have been carried out by the centre's leaders to make sure it is a safe place for you and your children. You told us that you do feel safe at the centre and are confident that your children are safe, too. Lots of the activities, support and advice that are available help you to learn about how to keep your children healthy and free from harm. For example, the Baby Group, which lots of you go to, includes talks about your baby's development, looking after their teeth, and health and safety.

You said that you have a lot of fun learning about different ways you can play with your children and help them to learn. You particularly enjoy the practical or messy activities that might be more difficult for you to do with your children at home. As well as getting new ideas, some of you explained that learning how to make things with your children, rather than buying toys, can save you money.

The centre gives you a chance to learn new skills which might be helpful to those of you who are looking for a job or considering work in the future. The hairdressing course is an example of this. Some of you are also trying photography for the first time. When you achieve a new skill or a qualification, this is celebrated with you at the centre.

You don't always have to go to the centre's building. Activities are also arranged for you at other places in the area, such as the local library. For some of you who are having particular problems, it can be difficult at times to get to the centre. If possible, the centre tries to make other arrangements to help. This might include coming to your home or putting you in touch with someone else who can help. If the staff at the centre cannot help or advise you themselves, they will do their best to find someone who can.

The centre is well led. Leaders are determined to do the best that they can for all of you. They regularly ask you about what the centre does well and what it could do better. Many of you have made suggestions that the leaders have acted on. However, at the moment, there is no opportunity for parents to get together as a group to discuss how the centre could be improved or developed further. We have asked the leaders of the centre to improve this.

Every children's centre is required to have an advisory board. This is a group of people from different organisations that meet regularly to advise the leaders on how to improve the centre's services. The advisory board for your children's centre is not yet fully developed and does not include the range of other organisations as it might. We have asked the local authority and centre manager to take steps to develop the advisory board further.

Thank you for contributing to the inspection by talking to us and sharing your views.

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