

Inspection report for Sure Start Soho Children's Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	364596
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Usha Devi HMI

Centre governance	Birmingham Local Authority
Centre leader	Lynn Willis
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Soho Children's Centre Nursery

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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior managers from the centre, parents, members of the executive leadership board, members of the advisory board and a local authority representative. Inspectors also met with a number of partners including Early Years and Foundation Stage partners, health and children's social care professionals. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Sure Start Soho Children's Centre opened in 2006 and was developed from a Sure Start local programme. The centre is a phase one children's centre providing the full core offer of services. It is situated in the residential area of Handsworth, east of Birmingham city centre. Statistical data for the Soho area indicates that the area is one of high social and economic disadvantage. It serves a community which is in one of the 20% most deprived areas in the country. The local population is mixed, with a large majority of families from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are a small number of White British families. The proportion of children who are living in households where no one is working is well above the national average. Free school meal eligibility for children attending schools in the local area is well above the national average. The skills and knowledge with which children enter the Nursery are generally below those expected for their age.

During the last two years, the centre has been through a number of changes. In December 2008 Sure Start Soho was formally clustered with Summerfield and Ladywood Children's Centres. In April 2009 the Soho Children's Centre Nursery manager was appointed to take on the role of the day-to-day management of Sure Start Soho. At the same time, the previous centre manager was appointed as the executive head of the cluster. Centre managers from each site are members of an executive leadership group. Each month they meet with the executive head to review the quality of services offered in the cluster. In June 2010, governance arrangements

changed. An advisory board, which includes parents and users from the three centres, a representative from Birmingham local authority and local professionals, replaced the Benson 0-19 Partnership Board. The Advisory Board covers the three centres in the cluster.

The centre uses a nearby Baptist Church, Bacchus Road Nursery and Benson Primary School to deliver some of its services. Early Years Foundation Stage provision is provided on site at Soho Children's Centre Nursery. It is registered with Ofsted to provide 60 places for children from 0–4 years-old. The nursery is open each weekday from 8am to 6pm all year round. This setting was inspected in January 2010. The inspection report can be found on the Ofsted website www.Ofsted.gov.uk.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The centre offers satisfactory support to children and families. Parents and users describe the centre staff as 'friendly.' They told inspectors that they appreciate the time staff take to get to know them as individuals. A particular strength of the centre is its approach to safeguarding. Staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures, they are well trained and ensure that any concerns are promptly shared with relevant agencies.

Outcomes for users, including those who are most vulnerable in all five Every Child Matters areas, are satisfactory. This is because services and activities are adequately matched to the needs of users. Children behave well during sessions and make steady progress in developing skills. Evidence from case studies and discussions with users show that aspects of provision are having a good impact on some children, adults and families. A strong partnership with Birmingham Law Centre for instance, is helping adults to gain access to the benefits to which they are entitled. One parent, told inspectors about the invaluable advice she received, 'It made a big difference.' Despite the best efforts of centre staff, links with Jobcentre Plus are less well developed.

The centre seeks the views of users through annual surveys, questionnaires and

ongoing discussions. As a result of feedback from users, the centre is increasingly adapting aspects of its provision. For instance the number of 'stay and play' sessions has been increased so that a greater number of users can attend. Leaders acknowledge the need to increase the involvement of users and the opportunities they have to contribute to the centre's decision making process, strategic planning and evaluation.

Equality is promoted satisfactorily. With effective support from the cluster's information and evaluation coordinator, the centre has recently identified the number of users attending the centre from different groups in the reach area. This analysis shows that overall numbers attending from its target groups, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, are relatively small. The centre has yet to identify the precise actions it will take to engage and support groups such as lone parents and teenage parents.

Significant changes with organisation, leadership and governance have resulted in new ways of working for staff and partners. Some developments, such as the formation of the advisory board are very recent and the impact of their work has yet to be seen. The centre's improvement plan identifies most of the priorities for improvement and includes criteria against which success will be measured. However, these criteria are not sufficiently measurable. Neither does the plan make clear who will monitor and evaluate the work of the centre and when. This makes it difficult for senior leaders to assess the impact of actions. Self-evaluation is generally sound but generous. This is because some partner agencies do not make sufficient use of local data to evaluate the effectiveness of their work. Similarly, centre staff do not always take enough account of feedback from users when assessing the quality of the centre's activities. The centre does not yet have a coherent system in place to demonstrate the impact of its services on users. Steadily improving outcomes, together with a sound understanding of strengths and areas for development demonstrate a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes and the quality of provision by identifying and implementing strategies to engage a greater proportion of users from the target groups.
- Work with the local authority to ensure centre staff and all key partners rigorously monitor and evaluate their work and develop systems for demonstrating the impact they have on users' outcomes.
- Extend the opportunities users have to contribute to the decision making process, strategic planning and the evaluation of provision.
- Ensure success criteria within the centre's action plan are measurable and the plan clearly states who will monitor and evaluate the work of the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Outcomes for children, adults and families are gradually improving. The centre has yet to develop systems for demonstrating how it is improving outcomes across all areas. Activities offered at the centre make an adequate contribution to community cohesion. One example involved parents and children working together to design and paint a mural in the centre.

Personal accounts show that through cooking and 'grow your own herbs, fruit and vegetable' sessions, users are developing a secure understanding of how to keep themselves and their families healthy. 'Tomorrow, I am going to buy tools and compost,' wrote one parent in her feedback to the centre. Through partnership working with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) and Home Start the centre has been able to obtain free safety equipment such as fire alarms and window locks for some families. Regular opportunities for children and adults to extend their understanding of how to keep themselves safe are underdeveloped.

The centre is a safe and secure environment where users feel they can share their concerns. Centre staff told inspectors that systems for coordinating support for vulnerable families, including looked after children, have been strengthened. Regular meetings between centre staff and partner agencies mean that families who may be at risk of harm and children subject to the common assessment framework are now more closely monitored. As a result they receive suitable support. Case studies indicate that some users, such as those who have been subject to domestic violence have been provided with a good level of support.

Parental evaluations of projects such as 'sound bounce' which was a musical based event, show that they make a sound contribution towards developing users' parenting skills. Children are keen to participate in centre activities. Their communication, language and literacy skills are developed satisfactorily through activities such as 'active story telling.' There is evidence that some children make good gains in their personal and social development. 'My child is confident and sociable, he is a changed baby,' explained one parent. A recent inspection of the onsite Nursery shows that children make good progress. The centre is aware of the need to increase the proportion of adults engaging in training and adult education.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and	3

governance of the centre	
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The range of services provided in the centre and at the outreach sites meet the needs of the wider community adequately. Senior leaders recognise that more needs to be done to increase the proportion of users from target groups. These include fathers, young mothers and lone mothers. Some success has been achieved with fathers. The number of fathers attending the centre has increased, particularly since the centre started to run Saturday morning activities.

The centre has recently introduced a system for assessing the needs of all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and tracking their progress. Staff are beginning to use this information to inform their planning. The impact of this on children's development and enjoyment has yet to be seen. Children's achievements are celebrated through informal discussions with parents and carers and through 'learning journals.'

Parents and adults make satisfactory gains in their learning and development. Parents who met with inspectors explained how their involvement in the centre had built their confidence. 'I have gained the confidence to become a school governor,' said one parent. Activities and programmes do not always reflect the individual abilities and aspiration of users. For instance, one parent when asked to comment on what she had learnt in the 'young parents' group wrote, 'We already knew this.' Staff acknowledge the need to increase consultation with adults prior to planning programmes and sessions so their needs can be accurately assessed.

Case studies clearly show that the centre is making a noticeable difference to some families. Users particularly appreciate the support they receive at times of crisis. The quality of information and the guidance users receive is not always presented in a way that is accessible for all members of the community. This is mainly the case for users from minority ethnic groups who are learning English and those who have weak literacy skills.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Staff are keen and committed to improving the work of the centre. The impact of leaders and managers, including those on the executive leadership group on improving outcomes for users is sound. The ability of leaders and managers to monitor and evaluate the centre's work and demonstrate impact is developing satisfactorily. Evaluation is sometimes supported by evidence of impact on outcomes for users and has resulted in a few changes to provision, such as Saturday activities to encourage fathers to attend. Leaders recognise that because the improvement plan does not contain measurable targets it makes it difficult for them to accurately assess the impact of actions on users' outcomes.

Members of the newly formed advisory board have met once and clarified roles and responsibilities. While it is too early to evaluate the impact of this group, members who met with inspectors articulated their high expectations for the centre. They have a crystal clear understanding of the part they can play in improving outcomes, strengthening partnerships and holding the centre to account. The contribution that users make to the strategic work of the centre is limited.

Safeguarding is a strength. Procedures to ensure the protection of users as they move around the site are effectively implemented. Staff have a clear understanding about their roles in identifying and reporting concerns. The centre has good systems in place for recording information related to the vetting and recruitment of staff. Families that attend the centre are particularly well supported at times of crisis. Partnerships with services such as health and the family support team contribute to satisfactory outcomes for users.

Centre staff and partnership agencies are committed to promoting the inclusion of all children and their families. Activities are risk assessed to ensure all users, including those with disabilities can be fully involved. Staff have yet to identify how services in the centre and at the outreach sites can be tailored to further improve outcomes and better meet the needs of its target groups. As a consequence, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is	3

integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
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	3

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

Inspectors looked at the inspection outcomes for Soho Children's Centre Nursery. It was inspected in January 2010. The report shows that children make good progress in all areas of learning.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected Sure Start Soho Children's Centre on 6–7 October 2010. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for making us feel welcome. I would like to thank you for contributing to the inspection by sharing your experience of the children's centre. Many of you told us that the staff at the centre are friendly. We could see that children and parents enjoy many of the activities on offer. The centre is particularly effective at ensuring staff have a good understanding of procedures for protecting children. Services also work together well to help families who come to the centre during particularly difficult times.

The centre works with range of partners such as health and social care to support children's development and help the adults who use the centre to learn new skills and gain confidence. Children make satisfactory progress in all areas of learning. Some make good progress in their personal and social development. Some of you we spoke to told us that you really appreciate the services of the Birmingham Law Centre because the support they give in relation to benefits and housing is good. One parent told us, 'It made a big difference.'

Staff have produced a written plan which identifies targets for improving the centre's work. We have asked centre leaders to make sure the targets they have set are measurable so that they can check how well the centre is doing. Centre staff know that there is still more to do if they are to fully meet the needs of the community. Leaders and managers have identified who they could support in the Soho area. We have asked them to develop ways in which they can ensure everyone who needs the centre's help receives it. We have also asked the local authority to help the centre understand how well it is doing in improving the lives of children and parents.

There have been some changes to both the organisation of the centre and leadership. There is a new advisory board which is looking at the work of Sure Start Soho, Summerfield and Ladywood Children's Centres. Although one parent will be attending Advisory Board meetings, we have asked the centre to give parents and other adults more opportunities to be involved in making decisions about the types of activities offered by the centre.

I would like to thank everyone who came to talk to us. I would like to wish you, your children and the families who live in the Soho area the very best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.