

Inspection report for Washwood Heath Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	362614
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Dr Anna Coyle AI

Centre governance	The governing body
Centre leader	Mrs Valerie Daniel
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Washwood Heath Nursery School Sladefield Infant School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Sunnydene Community Centre EY286950

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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, the care manager, the family support manager, representatives from the governing body, advisory board and local authority, groups of parents, teachers and other staff, health workers and family support workers.

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

Information about the centre

The centre is a phase one children's centre located in the densely populated ward of Washwood Heath, which is in the 5% most deprived areas in the United Kingdom. Local housing is mainly older terraced houses and there is a relatively small amount of council housing compared to other areas, as the majority of homes are either owned or rented. A relatively young population live within the reach area, and approximately 30.7% are aged under 16. Many children live in workless households as the area has the highest unemployment rate in Birmingham, and many families receive benefits. There are concerns about health such as high levels of smoking and rising obesity rates as well as very high incidence of perinatal mortality. English is the most common spoken language but community languages such as Punjabi, Urdu, Mirpuri, Bengali and Pushto are also strong and, with the newly arrived communities, now include Arabic, Somali, Kurdish and Eastern European languages. Local authority data indicate that a significant proportion of children in the reach area live in poverty, as defined by the Children in Poverty Indicator. Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are much lower than those expected for their age, and many have specific educational needs such as speech and language difficulties.

The centre provides the full core offer and has its own advisory board which is made up of representatives from the governing body, local community, health

professionals, family support services, parents, carers and centre staff. The governing body of the nursery school oversees the provision for childcare and day care in the children's centre.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

This outstanding children's centre achieves its aim to provide users with, 'A place to question, laugh, play, learn and dream'. As a result, children achieve exceptionally well in their personal, social and emotional development and rise to adults' high expectations of them. Many adult users grow rapidly in confidence as a result of attending the good range of activities at the centre. This is because high-quality provision is delivered in a safe environment where caring and trusting relationships are nurtured very effectively. The views expressed by parents and carers reflect the exceptionally high standard of care, guidance and support provided by the centre: 'We love coming here. The staff are so approachable and friendly, and they look after our children really well.'

The rich cultural and linguistic diversity in the reach area is interwoven extremely well into the education and services provided by the centre, and community cohesion is embedded exceptionally well. The location of the nursery school on the same site contributes well to the needs of users by providing easily accessible facilities. The centre has a wide range of integrated services and staff deal calmly and positively with all who choose to use the facilities and those who are referred by external agencies. Parents, carers and families receive plenty of practical advice and support within a very warm and welcoming environment. High quality, sensitive advice is available for new mothers, fathers, childminders, carers and children. The most vulnerable users receive outstanding care from centre staff, health professionals and educational, social and outreach services. Safeguarding arrangements are good. Staff offer very useful support to help families adopt safe working practices at home and help them understand how to keep themselves and their children safe. Strong links with local providers and Jobcentre Plus professionals mean that adult users have good access to employment opportunities.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The centre leader, who is also the headteacher of the nursery school, is a charismatic and inspirational leader. She is highly dedicated to the children and their families, and is the driving force behind improvements. Together with a very supportive deputy, a strong senior leadership team and committed staff, she manages the provision very effectively. The centre's very strong focus on promoting equality and diversity within an exceedingly well-integrated environment helps to ensure that all adults and children feel highly valued as individuals. The advisory board makes a positive contribution to the work of the centre and conscientiously seeks the views of users. The governing body provides effective governance for the centre and is supportive. However, its monitoring procedures are not sufficiently rigorous to help the governors keep a check on the range of services provided. Nevertheless, the excellent co-operation between leaders, managers and external agencies and the staff's dedication to providing the very best for children and their families indicate that there is outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen the governance of the centre by improving the procedures for monitoring the range of services provided and checking provision.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Children and their families enjoy a wide range of activities that raise awareness and encourage good healthy lifestyles. Staff promote health outcomes well through initiatives such as the school travel plan and physical activities in 'Forest School' and 'Yoga Bug'. They also hold joint 'Walk to School' events with the infant school to encourage family groups to walk to the centre. The centre encourages children and families to adopt healthy habits, such as good hygiene, which has been very effective in keeping health hazards to a minimum, such as swine flu. However, perinatal mortality rates and childhood obesity levels are much higher in the reach area than they are in other areas of Birmingham. The centre provides a wide range of health-promotion activities to help families tackle these issues, such as healthy eating sessions and exercise classes for parents and cooking sessions for children. These are well attended and parents speak highly of staff and how they have helped them change the eating habits of their families. For example, the centre's developing links with a local supermarket have encouraged parents to adopt healthier eating habits. In addition, the use of an allotment to grow fruit and vegetables has influenced the children in talking about and selecting vegetables when they are shopping with parents. As a result, parents are beginning to provide their children with healthier snacks when picking them up from the centre and for birthday celebrations.

Immunisation is promoted well during 'New Birth' home visits to new mothers, when staff also encourage healthy lifestyles and signpost the services available. Improving trends in breastfeeding and the reduction of teenage pregnancy rates have stemmed

from strong links between professionals, inter-agency working and carefully targeted individual support. Effective support for parents in accessing benefits and debt advice, reducing alcohol and drugs intake, smoking cessation and weight management is successfully established in collaboration with the centre's cluster group and extended schools' network. Family support staff are highly trained to support parents in a wide range of healthy aspects including weaning, healthy diets and exercise. The centre also helps children and families develop a social conscience; for example, they have contributed in many creative ways to charities like 'Children in Need' and 'Breast Cancer' and responded readily to situations like the earthquake disaster in Haiti.

Children feel safe and secure, and are confident about sharing any concerns with staff. They behave well, have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and get on well together. Children are encouraged to take risks and identify possible dangers and how to avoid them. Consequently, they know how to use resources safely and take care when using real tools. The centre works effectively to raise the awareness and develop the knowledge of parents and carers about how to keep their families safe and secure. Through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), keyworker group supervision and team meetings, children's individual needs are discussed and excellent support is provided to help them and their families, including looked-after children and those who have child protection plans. Activities like the 'Saturday Inclusion Club', which is run in conjunction with Brays Special School, have been very successful for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Children make outstanding progress from their starting points in developing skills to help them in the future. They achieve exceptionally well in their personal, social and emotional development, and their early communication skills increase rapidly. The centre's data confirm a steady trend of improvement in children attaining the expected goals in all six areas of learning by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Most children love to explore and investigate the learning environment through an excellent balance of free-choice and adult-led activities, such as handling jelly and watching staff blow bubbles. Personalised learning means that from a very early age children are encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings so that they express themselves freely, indicating their choices and preferences with confidence. The centre has been particularly successful in meeting the needs of vulnerable users, those with special educational needs and hard-to-reach groups through one-to-one family support. Despite an increasing range of languages spoken at the centre, children's language and literacy skills are improving steadily, supported by a speech therapist. The centre commissions services such as 'All about Me' to help to raise users' self-esteem. Children attending day care are settled and happy because the adults working with them are very friendly and they provide an excellent nurturing environment in which children are cherished. Parents and carers say that they thoroughly enjoy the varied opportunities to play with their babies and toddlers at the centre and so develop their parenting skills. They especially like the activities at the Sunnydene Community Centre, such as musical sessions when children, staff, parents and carers all participate happily together.

Parents and carers make notable improvements in their parenting skills and attend a wide range of courses to support them. They make positive contributions to the centre's work through decision-making processes and involvement in the governance of the children's centre. Staff signpost users to high-quality services and all adults are particularly sensitive to parents who are in need of emotional support. Activities like 'Stay and Play' sessions provide valuable opportunities for parents to make friends and feel less isolated. Antenatal and postnatal groups have a significant impact on safe living, and parents say that they have benefited from support in how to organise a baby's and toddler's routine. Courses on eating, sleeping and behaviour management have all contributed to making homes safer for the children. Home safety is introduced in the antenatal clinics, postnatal sessions, new parents' groups and through one-to-one support for users. Specific support has meant that parents have received home-safety equipment and had smoke alarms installed. The centre signposts users to relevant courses at local colleges and to job vacancies to increase parents' and carers' independence and access to employment. Literacy courses and regular sessions for 'English Speakers of Other Languages' (ESOL) help users build their English vocabulary and signpost access to support networks in the reach area.

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	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	1

How good is the provision?

1

Meticulous procedures for assessing and tracking children's progress are skilfully maintained and thoroughly reviewed by senior managers. The information gathered carefully in children's profiles, learning journeys, daily diaries and formal records known as 'Broad Brushstrokes' contributes exceedingly well to the ongoing assessment of their individual needs and is used effectively to help staff plan activities. Centre managers hold regular multi-agency meetings to discuss the needs of users and to provide targeted support. Progress and outcomes are measured and monitored using assessments of well-being, audits of special educational needs and Early Years Foundation Stage profiles. The staff promote the emotional needs of the children and monitor family attitudes to all aspects of health through referrals and case files within the context of the supportive framework of a multi-agency team.

Local authority data, health data, local indicator graphs, parent interviews and the expert knowledge of the family support team who have intimate knowledge of the community's needs, help to inform the centre's monitoring and evaluation processes.

A strong sense of raising aspirations and community commitment underpins the centre's very effective promotion of users' purposeful learning, development and enjoyment. Early support in speech and language for children and their parents through 'Every Child a Talker' (ECaT) and other language groups help to ensure that speech and language acquisition is assured. Families benefit well from the centre's integrated outreach services and especially through the 'Wish upon a Star' project that is utilised during the settling-in period. They also benefit from other types of services that are accessed, such as language classes and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 2 courses which provide parents with skills which enable them to seek future employment.

Very caring teachers, keyworkers and support staff effectively build trust with children, parents and carers. They are excellent role models for demonstrating respect to help children to learn about right and wrong. Each child is highly valued as a unique individual and staff are familiar with their particular circumstances through home visits, family support and the integrated outreach services. Because staff know the children and families so well, they are able to cater effectively for their needs which enables children and families to work towards achieving their full potential and developing high levels of self-esteem. The family support team cooperates very effectively with a wide range of outreach services and external agencies to assess and review the needs of adult users so that the centre effectively meets the needs of the community it serves. However, the current lack of midwives and breastfeeding support limits the health services provided to new mothers, although this situation is being improved in the new year. Even so, users enjoy outreach programmes and they have good opportunities to attend new parents' groups as well as home-safety sessions. Parents and carers especially like the 'Baby Clinic' sessions held at the centre and the 'Pins and Needles' sewing group. Staff have developed a fathers' group, which is well attended, and parents say that they have much improved skills because of the support provided in courses such as 'Promoting Happy Parenting'.

The centre has successfully created opportunities to support families and enable them to contribute positively and grow in confidence as citizens and parents. Regular parenting classes help boost confidence and parents' enjoyment and involvement in their children's learning. Plenty of information and advice is available for parents seeking work, particularly for lone parents and those who are keen to increase their basic skills prior to their return to work. Well-structured programmes engage parents and build their confidence which prepares them well for the future and gives them the aspirations to study for further qualifications. These help them gain basic skills in English and information and communication technology (ICT). Suitable links with Jobcentre Plus further increase their employment opportunities and regular ESOL classes help build their confidence in preparation for the world of work. The excellent use of the wider community to share cultural traditions alongside an outstandingly creative curriculum and the excellent use of creative partners, such as film and

animation artists, textiles and ceramics artist and classical dance artists help to broaden and deepen users' enjoyment and achievement. Multi-lingual practitioners are always available to interpret for parents and carers who prefer or need to communicate in their home language, and the centre also has staff trained in using sign language, which has proved useful for deaf parents.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The dynamic and incisive leadership of the centre leader is pivotal in driving improvement and promoting ambition so that staff are extremely reflective practitioners and well focused on providing high-quality services. All work together closely to ensure that the work of external agencies is integrated very effectively into the centre's day-to-day activities. The conscientious approach of the senior leadership team and the flexible deployment of staff and resources ensure excellent value for money. Governance is good. The advisory board includes a representative from the governing body, as well as parents and representatives from the multi-agency and integrated services. This forum allows information to be shared effectively and ensures that the views of stakeholders are taken into account to help the centre refine and improve its services. The governing body provides the centre with effective support. However, its monitoring procedures are not rigorous enough to ensure sufficient challenge and hold the leaders and managers accountable for the services they provide.

Safeguarding arrangements are good and staff training is up-to-date. Leaders have a secure understanding of the principles for ensuring the safe recruitment of staff, and the centre's records show that all staff are checked carefully before they take up employment. Not all governors have been checked, as the centre requires, although this situation is being rectified speedily. Staff are quick to correct any omissions that are pointed out to them such as the need to insert a missing section in a school policy. They make sure that two- to three-year-old children take great care when going up and down two flights of stairs to get to the outdoor area, although staff realise that it is not an ideal situation to have such young children on the first floor. The centre plans to improve its day-care facilities by accommodating all children on the ground floor as soon as the forthcoming building project is completed. Children and families have excellent access to resources and activities that encourage positive attitudes towards equality, diversity and non-stereotypical views of society. The

centre's environment is infused and enriched with an extensive range of images that promote positive views of diversity. For example, children and their fathers from various ethnic backgrounds make 'Mothers' Day' floral baskets which are much appreciated gifts. Activities such as these help children and their families to become tolerant and comfortable with people who are different to them.

Excellent relationships with others who share the same building ensure that expertise is readily available for those who need it. For instance, members of staff from the nursery school, which is located on the same site, contribute very well to the outstanding effectiveness of the centre. Excellent partnerships with the local Child Development Centre ensure that children with disabilities and special educational needs experience a comprehensive and outstanding service. Regular referrals of children and families in need and outstanding co-operation between multi-agency groups contribute extremely well to users' emotional health and well-being. Other partnerships include many opportunities to see professionals at work in the community, such as the police, local shop keepers, park wardens and artists. The centre's links with Birmingham City University, South Birmingham College, Warwick University further enhance users' learning.

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	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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	1

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

The 2009 report from the inspection of the maintained nursery school and day-care provision was taken into account. The report judged both aspects to be outstanding.

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 the Washwood Heath Centre on 8–9 December 2010. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We really enjoyed talking to you and finding out about the centre's work. We visited a wide range of activities during the inspection, such as the sessions at Sunnydene Community Centre and the 'Baby Clinic'. You gave us an extremely positive picture of the children's centre and we were pleased to hear that you value its work and enjoy the activities it provides every day for you and your children.

Activities are well planned by centre staff and they are of high quality, such as the 'Pins and Needles' sewing group and the day-care provision. You told us that you particularly like joining in with your children during the 'Stay and Play' sessions, which are often great fun! We really enjoyed hearing you all singing with your children and helping them to use musical instruments such as triangles, drums and shakers. Family support workers help you to find out about topics such as how to ensure your family receives a healthy diet and how to access benefits and welfare support. They also provide good advice and guidance for new mothers and fathers on how to look after young children or how to deal with children's behaviour at home.

We were delighted to see that the centre provides outstanding care, guidance and support for you. Many of you told us that the staff show great sensitivity and consideration of your needs. The wide range of services are organised extremely well through very close partnerships between the centre staff and the many professionals who contribute to the centre's activities. These services provide you and your families with a great deal of help for many of your needs. The centre staff and other professionals also provide a good variety of outreach services to ensure that you get the support and help you need, especially if you have specific needs or difficulties at home.

The centre is led and managed exceptionally well by the centre leader and the senior leadership team. All of the staff are passionate about their work and they look after your children exceedingly well. Leaders make sure that they provide a safe environment for everyone who uses the centre and they check that all staff are qualified and suitable for working with children and families. We know that the centre asks for your views and opinions and we are aware that many of you are actively involved with the centre, either during day-to-day activities or as a part of the governing body or advisory board. The governing body provides the centre with valuable support but it does not keep a close eye on some aspects of the centre's work. In order to increase the effectiveness of the centre even more, we have asked the governing body to improve its procedures for checking on the services provided.

Thank you, once again, for talking to us and helping us to find out about all things you do at the children's centre.

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