

# Inspection report for Birchills and North Walsall Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Walsall Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	366550
<b>Inspection dates</b>	29–30 March 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Michael Blakey

<b>Centre governance</b>	Walsall Children's Services – Serco
<b>Centre leader</b>	Hilary Hastings
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Stanley's Nursery EY303945

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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## 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents, the programme manager, deputy head of centre, special educational needs coordinator, early years teacher, senior managers and other staff from the centre, local authority representatives, the chair of the advisory board, and staff from a wide range of partner agencies, including schools, health and social services.

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

## Information about the centre

Birchills and North Walsall Sure Start Children’s Centre was purpose built in 2006 and delivers the full core offer of services including education, child and family health services and family support. Children and their families also access services provided by the centre at three other sites: a hostel for women and children who have experienced domestic violence; North Walsall Primary School; and Croft Community Primary School.

There are 1,140 children under five years of age in the centre’s reach area. Of these children, 81% live in the 5% most disadvantaged wards in England. There are 35% of the children using the centre who are White British and 63% are from 15 different ethnic backgrounds. Of all children, 35% are of Pakistani origin. Children’s levels on entry to early years education are below national expectations for age. There are 24% of children under five who live in households dependent on workless benefits, and over 20% of the local population is long-term unemployed.

The centre has an advisory board and accountability lies with Walsall Children’s Services – Serco.

## 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**

<b>1</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>1</b>
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## Main findings

Birchills and North Walsall Children’s Centre is truly inclusive and takes a whole family approach to everything that it does, from promoting and delivering high quality learning to effectively integrating and supporting children with some of the most complex additional needs. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the impact the centre has on their lives. Case studies and case files demonstrate impressive effectiveness. As one parent said, ‘All the staff are absolutely wonderful. They go out of their way to help you.’ Whilst another said, ‘After what they have done for us we just want to give something back.’ The centre’s staff team are inspirational, highly motivated, and have the highest aspirations for the community. Together with their partners, they have made an impressive contribution to improving the lives of children and families, many of whom live in extreme poverty or

face challenges such as domestic violence or drug and alcohol abuse.

Effective partnerships with a range of health services, social care and schools, for example, ensure that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families receive the support they need at the earliest possible opportunity. Professionals who work with centre staff speak very highly of the centre's ability to assess the needs of children and families and coordinate appropriate services to meet those needs. As one social worker said, 'We receive invaluable information and evidence from the centre.' Centre staff members understand the true cost of every intervention and activity that they deliver. Value for money is therefore outstanding.

Leaders and managers know the community exceptionally well, and use a wide range of information to prioritise activities. They take creative approaches to reach out to families in their area. The centre has recruited and trained volunteer community champions to engage other families. They have been strikingly effective at engaging Pakistani women. The centre's approach to evaluating the impact of its work is advanced, and centre staff work together to understand data, set ambitious targets and develop action plans that drive improvements. However, data provided to the centre by the local authority and the Primary Care Trust are not always sufficiently detailed. For example, data on hospital admissions do not enable staff to identify what the issues are and to plan to address these. Nor are the data, as yet, broken down into sufficiently detailed geographical areas to enable the centre to more closely target its services.

The centre's approach to safeguarding is exemplary. For example, centre staff recently used a serious case review, from a high profile national child protection case, to evaluate their own practice and identify any areas for improvement. Case files demonstrate a fully integrated approach, for example with social services, to protecting children from harm and supporting parents to care for their own children. All statutory duties are met and every staff member receives high-quality and regular training.

Promoting equality and diversity is at the heart of the centre and the community. The centre organises a wide range of activities to celebrate diversity in all forms. For example, the well-attended link workers programme for parents encourages them to research different beliefs and then produce displays and present and discuss their findings with each other. As part of this programme parents also produce resources to support children's learning about different cultures and beliefs.

The programme manager, deputy head of centre and staff have an impressive track record of effectively improving outcomes for children and families and they know what the centre should do to continue to improve. Leadership is effectively distributed across the centre, at all levels, and high quality policies and procedures are in place and reviewed regularly. Staff members are involved in strategic and operational planning and a highly effective advisory board and chair support the programme manager. There are clear succession plans in place, with the programme manager choosing this area as her assignment for National Professional Qualification

in Integrated Centre Leadership. Together, these factors demonstrate outstanding capacity to improve.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Walsall Children's Services – Serco should work with partners to support the centre to target provision even more effectively by providing centre leaders with data that:
  - are disaggregated into more localised geographical areas within the reach of the centre
  - are sufficiently detailed to enable staff to prioritise and plan services to make an even greater impact. For example, this may include providing information on the reasons for admissions to hospital so that staff can consider whether they can contribute to reducing the number.

### How good are outcomes for users?

<b>1</b>
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'Without them, I would not have coped,' is a familiar statement from parents who use the centre and there are many success stories told by staff and parents alike. Many of the case studies provided by the centre give examples of individual children and families who have been supported through the effective partnerships with health and education professionals.

The centre effectively supports a wide range of children and families to be safe, many of whom are very vulnerable. Staff deliver childcare at a local hostel for women and their children who have experienced domestic violence. In 2009/2010, 62 children used this service. The centre provides highly effective family support and delivers a range of activities to support emotional development. For example, children at the hostel engaged in an activity to identify what things made them sad and happy, and were encouraged to discuss their thoughts.

There is a wide range of activities to support healthy living, including 'Big Cook, Little Cook', keep fit programmes and healthy eating workshops which are very well attended. In a recent survey, carried out by community champion volunteers, 95% of parents stated that the centre had helped their families to have healthier lifestyles. The community café, which is a hub for parents to meet, provides healthy food that exceeds national standards. Pre- and post-natal services are very well attended. For example, 80 expectant parents attended the parenting courses delivered by midwives in 2010. About 85% of teenage mothers in the reach area access services at the centre. The number of children who are admitted to hospital with accidental or deliberate injuries has fallen significantly.

Parents make a positive contribution to the centre through volunteering as community champions and link workers, or as members of the advisory board. Family learning is at the heart of the centre. Parents and children often learn and play together, for example through 'Play and Stay' or the regular visits to the farm or

zoo. Parents are encouraged to undertake a range of adult learning activities. For example, some parents are currently undertaking an accredited programme, 'Understanding your child' which they greatly enjoy. As part of this programme they develop portfolios about their child's life and development. Many adults have been supported to gain qualifications, employment and improve their financial situation. For example, a parent who completed the 'Children and Family Link Worker' programme said, 'At first I thought that it was too difficult for me to achieve but with the support of the staff I overcame my fears and I am now signing up for the level 2 programme which I can't wait to start.' The crèche provided by the centre ensures that children are well cared for whilst their parents are engaged in their own learning.

Early education delivered by the centre is enabling children to make good progress. There has been a marked increase over the last three years in the proportion of children who attain a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The 2010 cohort of children attained above the local authority and national averages. In addition, the centre has ably supported the lowest attaining 20% of children to improve, narrowing the gap between them and their peers. In 2008 the gap was over 50% and in 2010 this had reduced to just over 30%. The centre also works closely with a number of local schools and has made a significant impact on, for example, children's speech and language development. Children with additional needs, often complex, are fully integrated into the centre. As the parent of one child explained, 'The service my family have received from Sure Start is excellent. While my son is in nursery we can spend quality time with our other three children. We know that our son is well looked after and is provided with lots of opportunities to enhance his development and to learn new skills.' The Common Assessment Framework process is ably used by centre staff to assess children's individual needs, and case files shows detailed records of appropriate and timely support.

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</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 users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>1</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>1</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 and employment</b>	<b>1</b>

## How good is the provision?

1

The centre provides an excellent range of integrated and seamless services which support children and their families to develop and learn effectively together. Joint working with Jobcentre Plus, Family Information Services and Walsall Welfare Rights Service ensures that adults receive good advice and support to access benefits and to return to work. Thirty-four adults attended the 'back to work' workshop recently which included recruiters from a range of partner agencies such as the Fire Service and West Midlands Police.

Partnerships with health are strong. A mobile dental unit visits the centre on a monthly basis and is well used by families. Dental workshops effectively raise the awareness of good dental hygiene. Centre staff meet regularly with health visitors and many parents access health services at the centre. The centre regularly pilots activities to continuously improve services. For example, two recent pilots of relaxed birth ante-natal sessions were well attended by expectant mothers and fathers. The centre has also trained 20 breastfeeding peer supporters to encourage parents to breastfeed.

The way in which assessments of need are conducted, and information shared with partner agencies, is highly effective and leads to appropriate and timely support for children and families. For example, the special educational needs coordinator undertakes the process to apply for statutory statements of special educational needs and is an expertly trained 'Team Around the Child' key worker. Staff at the centre use the Common Assessment Framework very effectively to assess need and coordinate a range of multi-agency services for children and families. Case studies demonstrate how highly-targeted and effective family support enables parents to care for their children and how this support effectively enables children, with a wide range of needs, to transfer to the next stage of their education.

The centre delivers a wide range of adult learning, and effectively signposts parents to a range of other local courses. Programmes on offer at the centre include basic skills courses in English and mathematics, and accredited learning such as the 'Link Workers' and 'What Shall We do Today' courses. These are well attended. It coordinates an annual holiday for families, which this year has activities designed and planned by parents themselves. For most families, it provides a first opportunity go on holiday and spend quality time together. Many families want to take part in this opportunity, and work towards it throughout the year by attending various activities organised by the centre. Local headteachers support older children to attend this with their younger brothers and sisters.

Centre staff know the community well and the data they collect enable them to target resources where they are most needed. For example, they identified that women of Pakistani origin were under represented at the centre and effectively improved their engagement to a point where the women now plan activities for themselves. The centre coordinates activities to promote diversity, such as the



community diversity day. This includes learning about your neighbours, trying new food and learning sign language.

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

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

**1**

Leadership is shared exceptionally well so that all leaders and managers take responsibility for the centre's activities. As one of the senior managers said, 'There are so many things to be proud about at this centre. We've watched this place grow. I am proud of the team I manage.'

The programme manager and senior management team are highly ambitious, effective and driven to improve the lives of children and families. They are well connected locally with an extensive range of private, voluntary and statutory agencies and partnerships are exceptionally strong. The programme manager chairs the local strategic group and the Children's Area Partnership, while the special educational needs coordinator is a member of the local authority's assessment group for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The centre works exceptionally well in partnership with a wide range of agencies. There were 21 different professionals who attended a meeting with inspectors, including four headteachers, two social workers and representatives from a wide range of other services. Their comments were unanimously supportive of the centre. For example, as one partner said, '(Joint working) has had a massive impact on families and parents now engage much more.'

Accurate identification of the needs of children and families in the reach area and the effective evaluation of services delivered are embedded throughout the centre. Staff members use a highly successful approach to explore and evaluate data and set ambitious targets, priorities and action plans. As all staff are involved in this process, there is absolute clarity about what they are jointly aiming to achieve, and all staff can describe the priorities and how they are addressing them. The highly effective advisory board is ably led and officers from the local authority carry out rigorous annual performance reviews and support the centre to plan strategically. The centre meets many challenging targets, and when targets set by the local authority are occasionally not met this is because accurate baseline information was not available to set a realistic target in the first place. As a result of this high-quality leadership, the centre provides excellent value for money.

Safeguarding arrangements are highly effective. Thorough recruitment checks are carried out and all statutory duties are met. Staff members have received a wide range of additional training, for example on domestic violence, and policies and procedures are easily accessible in public and staff areas. Throughout the centre there are signs that clearly inform staff and users about what to do if they are concerned about a child's welfare. Rigorous risk assessments are carried out and inform practice to ensure that children and parents are safe, both in the centre and when taking part in holidays or visits with the centre.

Equality and diversity are integral to the daily life of the centre. Staff have developed a strategic plan specifically for this area and they regularly monitor its impact. Evidence suggests that the centre has improved relationships between different members of the community and helped to reduce gang issues. Children with additional needs, such as those with complex physical needs, are fully integrated into the centre in such a way that other children and parents are respectful of their needs and engage fully with them in activities. This is another real strength of the centre.

<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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</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>1</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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>1</b>
<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>	<b>1</b>
<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>	<b>1</b>

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

Not applicable.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Birchills and North Walsall centre on 29 and 30 March 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Your children's centre provides an impressive range of services that are helping families and children in Birchills and North Walsall. An example of this effective work is the 'Children and Family Link Worker' course, which is well attended and is helping parents to learn about different cultures in your local community. The centre delivers a wide range of effective learning for you and your children.

Throughout the inspection many of you told us how you had benefited from the support provided by the centre. One of you said, 'The centre always offers us somewhere to go, we always feel valued and respected and this has brought the community together and a real worth for our area.'

A major strength of the centre is its strong partnerships with other organisations including health and Jobcentre Plus. For example, the centre has regular meetings with health visitors and this enables support for individual families to be coordinated to ensure that an appropriate range of services are offered to meet your needs. The mobile dental unit also ensures that you have access to a dentist and advice on staying healthy.

The Jobcentre Plus staff, Walsall Welfare Rights Service, and Family Information Service have helped many of you to understand your entitlements to benefits and tax credits and to offer advice and guidance to help you to return to work.

The centre offers an excellent range of activities in other places, such as local schools and at a hostel for women who have experienced domestic violence.

The centre works effectively to ensure the safety of children and there are excellent links with social services. The centre itself is a safe environment and children and families are safe on the wide range of visits and trips. When families find themselves in difficulty or even in crisis, the centre is able to support them effectively by providing information and family support.

The manager is very experienced and has effectively created a strong leadership team that really understand your community's needs and are passionate about helping you. Staff use comprehensive information and data on the needs of families in the area to improve the centre's ability to support individuals and groups, particularly those who may be vulnerable for one reason or another.

The centre has a very effective advisory board to support its work and to help it improve further. Six parents are members of this board and help to make decisions about how the centre is run. Many others among you volunteer at the centre.

When we spoke to some of you during the inspection, you all showed appreciation

for the way in which you were welcomed and supported by the staff.

As part of the report we have made a recommendation to help the centre to improve further. We have asked the local authority to support the centre to gather more useful data so that staff can target services to help you and others in your community even more.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us. We are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.