

Inspection report for Cherry Tree Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Birmingham |
| Inspection number | 367775 |
| Inspection dates | 6–7 April 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | David Speakman |

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| Centre governance | Birmingham City Council |
| Centre leader | Olivia Delaney |
| Date of previous inspection | Not applicable. |
| Centre address | Graham Street |
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| Linked school if applicable | None |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Cherry Tree Nursery. EY331786 |

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 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, centre staff and representatives from the advisory board and the local authority. Inspectors met with a number of representatives of services who work through the children's centre, including health visitors, outreach workers, instructors and nursery staff. Inspectors spoke to groups of parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Cherry Tree Children's Centre has evolved from a Sure Start local programme, covering the Lozells and Duddleston area into a fully operational designated children's centre providing the full core offer. In January 2008, Cherry Tree Children's Centre became a part of a cluster of children's centres serving the Lozells and East Handsworth area of Birmingham. The other centres that are part of the cluster are Lime Tree and Birchfield, each within a mile of the other two. Working together, centre leaders have developed practices that enable sharing of expertise, as teams are deployed between the centres. The centre is funded by Birmingham City Council. The three centres have a joint advisory board consisting of parents, professionals from partner agencies, stakeholders and the three centre leaders. The City Council is represented on the board by the strategic area lead for Birmingham East.

The centre has a 28-place nursery, open 50 weeks of the year on weekdays from 8:00am to 6:00pm. The level of skills and knowledge shown by children on entry to early years' provision is low in comparison to that typical for this age. The centre hosts a breakfast club between 7:30am and 8:45am each weekday morning during

term time. This provides for children of primary school age from Anglesey and St Francis Primary Schools.

The centre offers provision on site and within community venues such as the local youth centre. The centre is located in the middle of residential housing, close to Anglesey Primary School and a crisis centre for families who have experienced domestic violence.

The reach area for Cherry Tree consists of 726 families with children under five. Socio-economic ratings make the area one of the 288 most deprived wards nationally and the 16th most deprived in Birmingham. More than 80% of the population of Lozells and East Handsworth ward are of a black minority ethnic background. Within the Cherry Tree reach area, the largest ethnic group is Bangladeshi, followed by Pakistani, Black or Black British Caribbean, White British and Indian. In 2009, the highest new-birth rate in Cherry Tree's reach area was of Bangladeshi origin at 38%, followed by Pakistani at 25%, Black or Black British Caribbean at 18.5% and then White British.

Unemployment is high with 41% of households having a dependent child with no adult in the family working. Lozells and East Handsworth also have 33% of all dependent children living in single-parent households. Within the Cherry Tree reach area, 70% of lone-parents are claiming out-of-work benefits, which is higher than the city average.

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

Cherry Tree Children's Centre has an outstanding impact on meeting the needs of families in its area and on improving their lives. Outcomes are consistently good or better and the extent to which users feel safe is outstanding. The quality of the provision is outstanding, particularly how staff assess the needs of the community and the quality of care, guidance and support. Leadership and management are outstanding. The centre manager has led the centre staff exceptionally well to achieve some significant improvements. The percentage of families, who live in the

reach area, are registered with and use the centre, has increased and now stands at 71%.

Cherry Tree has highly developed, efficient and effective collaborative working practices with the other two children's centres in the cluster. The centre is highly effective in assessing individual and community needs and in providing services that address these needs very well. Centre staff and service providers use self-evaluation well for continuous improvement. Effective processes for monitoring the performance of all staff ensure high-quality provision. Consequently, the capacity to improve even more is outstanding.

The key strength of the children's centre's operations is the way in which staff use the 'team around the child' (TAC) approach to identify, very accurately and thoroughly, the needs of individuals, families and the whole community. Each new family shares in this process as it is used universally on registration. The same procedure is used in subsequent assessments and reviews of users' needs to make sure that appropriate and effective action is taken at all stages. This also means that the centre is effective in identifying and reaching those groups which are harder to reach or more reluctant than others to take advantage of the services offered. A very successful Bengali women's group has been established. This was so successful that the group has asked to continue meeting at the centre, rather than another venue used initially. However, the centre has been less successful in engaging fathers and male carers. For example, of the 32 adults seen last year by the training and employment service, 28 were female and four were male. Considering the employment situation and the high frequency of domestic violence in the area, the centre is keen to make contact with more male clients.

The advisory board has been recently reformed and now covers the three children's centres in the cluster. It consists of local stakeholders, families and parents. Terms of reference, roles and responsibilities for each member have been agreed. Members have not yet decided upon a structure by which they can monitor and evaluate the centre's operation, community needs and outcomes, and tailor future provision to match need in an efficient way without duplicating work and still meeting the needs of each centre. While the new advisory board finalises arrangements for its operations, its work is being very successfully continued by the centre managers and lead professionals from each service provider, who are all members of the new board, but in a less formal way than in the past.

The centre has the safety of vulnerable children and adults as a cornerstone of its work. This is achieved by high-level input and multi-agency working, very effectively coordinated by the centre. Staff have developed a culture within which adults feel confidence and trust in the centre. Many mothers spoken to by inspectors reported that they feel confident to disclose to staff any issues they feel may put them or their children at risk. Very secure recruitment procedures for centre staff, volunteers and service providers, and comprehensive policy translated into highly effective practice, result in an outstanding level of safeguarding.

The initial assessment process defines and monitors outcomes for key targets groups and supports their progress, effectively narrowing gaps between the majority and the most disadvantaged. However, because the centre has not been as effective in reaching out to male members of the community as to other groups, the equality of opportunity is judged to be good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Set up formalised structures for the working of the advisory board to:
 - ensure its efficiency and avoid duplication of its work
 - place it in a strong position to engage fully in monitoring and evaluating the centre's work
 - monitor and evaluate community needs and outcomes, and tailor future provision matched to need.

- Implement effective processes to engage more fathers and male carers in the services offered by the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

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The centre is effective in encouraging parents and carers to adopt healthy lifestyles. Reflecting their success in promoting healthy eating, physical and emotional well-being and staying safe, the centre was awarded Healthy Setting status in March 2011. Groups, such as the antenatal group, are well attended, and expectant mothers become knowledgeable in regard to adopting a healthy lifestyle so that babies stand a better chance of being born healthy and infant mortality is reduced. Parents, carers and children enjoy healthy menus in the nursery and eat healthy snacks in the crèche and 'Stay and Play' groups. Outcomes for children in the nursery are good. They eat plenty of fresh fruit and take exercise. The centre achieves a good record in toilet training. Initially, 93% of children on entry are in nappies and by the time they move to nursery almost all are toilet trained. There is a good uptake of vitamins supplied by the centre which improves women's and children's nutrition. The centre has not yet had a significant impact on helping adults to give up smoking or to deal with substance abuse because adults have not come forward to join the groups. The centre is currently showing early success in addressing issues surrounding children's oral health and this is work in progress, as is tackling the referrals for child obesity. Parents have a clear understanding of the procedure in relation to administration of medication to children attending the nursery.

Parents, carers and their children are exceptionally safe when using the centre and its services and feel increasingly at home. The initial assessment for all users on registration identifies any vulnerability and enables the family support team to coordinate and provide highly effective support at an early stage. Parents and carers confirm the centre provides a safe environment, particularly for their mental and emotional health. Mothers speak very highly of the family support workers. 'My support worker is very caring and looks after me when I am feeling low. I get a lot of

emotional and physical support and get told off when I haven't eaten.' Another said, 'I feel very safe to open up and share feelings.' Children and adults are safe from accidents when in the centre. In the event of an accident, high-quality care is available. All nursery staff have paediatric first-aid training and there are always designated first aiders in the centre. Home safety checks are offered and outreach team records show a good uptake, good levels of safety equipment issued and a reduction in the number of recorded accidents in the home. Children behave in a way which is safe for them and others. They control their own behaviour to create a safe environment. The early years outreach team carries out resilience intervention with children who are displaying challenging behaviour to good effect.

Case studies of vulnerable mothers and children who are on child protection plans show a high level of success, even though some cases are on-going due to their severity. Initial assessments are reliable and judged against established, tried and tested criteria. Centre staff use a variety of assessment tools, including the Common Assessment Framework, graded care profiles and resilience assessment. On-going evaluation ensures the most appropriate support at any time is given.

Children make good progress in the nursery and are prepared well for their next steps. The percentage of children achieving the expected levels for their age within the Early Years Foundation Stage is on the increase. Assessment data show the gap is closing between the lowest 20% and the rest through targeted support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and behavioural problems, and the promotion of language for communication skills. Children enjoy exploring and investigating the learning environment. 'Stay and Play' 'Yum-Yum' activities give opportunities for parents and children to play, have fun and learn together and have a positive impact on children's and babies' learning through play.

A good range of quality courses for adults supports their development well, although most of the adults engaging in training and employment initiatives are female. The centre records good levels of success for courses held within the centre, such as those for English as a second language, health for parenting, first aid and childcare levels 1 and 2. Adults enjoy the courses and achieve significant benefit to their future prospects. The centre does not yet follow through the eventual success of children after transfer to nursery and of adults taking further training at other partner institutions to complete its picture of users' achievements.

The centre has identified that one of its main focus points this year is to enable service users to make a greater contribution to decision making and the development of the centre's services. This is to be achieved through the advisory board where there is a good level of parental representation. Users play a significant part in helping service providers evaluate the impact of services through surveys. Children in the nursery have an input into the nursery rules and abide by them. Outreach work, particularly for those adults and children identified as being vulnerable, is highly effective. Coordinated support is valued highly by the centre's users. However, not enough male members of the community engage with the centre's services, and the outreach team is considering other ways of reaching this section of the community.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

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| 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 | 1 |
| The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development | 2 |
| The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre | 2 |
| The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training | 2 |

How good is the provision?

1

As well as the highly effective initial assessment made to identify individual and community needs, assessment is used to ensure adult learning programmes are suitable for users' needs and that applicants have sufficient basic skills to cope with the challenges. Service Information Directories are used. This is an evidence-based way of analysing and delivering services for a specific need. Through surveys of initial assessments, these directories provide evidence of needs assessment carried out. They also contain an evaluation of impact, so the effectiveness of provision is evaluated and monitored. If the basic skills of applicants for courses, such as competency in English, are considered to be too low, then they will be directed to courses that will provide them with the skills to cope.

All learning opportunities provided by the centre have a specific purpose. Child-based provision is planned and assessed following the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance to prepare children for their next steps. A strong feature of the centre's provision is the number of tailored programmes of learning provided through the initial assessment programme. These include training and advice, workshops, incentives for attendance such as pamper days, supporting families to build their confidence and initiatives to help users back into employment. The centre highlights and promotes achievement for both children and adults in different ways, such as through bring-and-share lunches, children's graduations and the use of reward systems.

Through the initial assessment process, the centre provides a good range of quality services, activities and opportunities that meet the needs of users and the wider community well. Services provided are matched to the needs of the community and specific groups, as identified through initial assessments. There are many targeted services such as parenting workshops, teenage mothers' group, Bengali women's

group and tuition in English. Within the centres, families can access a wide range of universal services such as day care, midwifery services, adult education, employment and training advice, advice and advocacy, early years' activities and holiday clubs. Adults have access to a toy library, crèche, out-of-school clubs, childminders and drop-in sessions where they can use one of the centre's computers.

The centre is very active in providing the highest quality of care, guidance and support for all of its users. The quality of childcare provided is good. The nursery has good provision. The commissioned childminders in the area have been assessed and meet the centre's high expectations. Parents are being encouraged to have their babies and children immunised and this is very effective as many parents are using this service. The impact of family and parenting support, including outreach, is excellent. For example, a number of mothers said that they have learned to understand their children and their own needs better, helping them be better parents.

The quality of information, advice and guidance for parents on accessing support, benefits and seeking work is good. Adults receive individual care and support to help them overcome barriers to learning and successfully complete their learning programmes and development goals. The quality of impartial information, advice and guidance on appropriate learning programmes, services or employment to meet learners' needs is very good. Advice is from a qualified and knowledgeable professional and is based on individual needs highlighted in the initial assessment.

The quality of care and support offered to families in times of crisis is excellent. Specific needs are identified early, and coordinated multi-agency support is designed to meet these needs. Regular case reviews ensure the centre and service providers are fully up to date and can adjust support provision to match changing needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| 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 | 2 |
| 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

Under the outstanding leadership of the centre manager, very strong teamwork has been established. All who work through the centre show total commitment, and an

exceptionally strong 'can do' culture pervades all areas of the centre's work. This is evident in the work in the nursery and child-centred activities, where children are brought up with a positive and confident attitude to challenge. Service providers have the same attitude and, if one approach fails, they always try another or have contingency plans ready. Service providers work exceptionally well together and with the centre to the benefit of the community. Cohesive services for children and families benefit from highly effective information-sharing arrangements. This process is carefully monitored by the strategic area lead for children's centres in this area of Birmingham, who holds a position on the advisory board.

Challenging targets and key strategic priorities are set and closely monitored by lead professionals from service providers, the centre manager and senior staff. They are disseminated through the hierarchy via supervision, team meetings, service meetings, centre meetings, away days and professional development reviews. This supports the good evaluation of the centre's services, which underpins further the excellent capacity to improve.

Resources are used very efficiently as the teams work across the three centres sharing skills and knowledge, and establishing consistency for both the service user and the wider community. The centre welcomes users from other areas in the cluster, so that they are not disadvantaged if there is no appropriate provision in their area. The cluster has very efficient arrangements for the highly effective use of available funds. Each centre pays its own expenses but also contributes to a fund to support services common to the three centres. This arrangement provides excellent value for money. Value for money is also achieved because the centre's services and sustained support for families are highly targeted and have an excellent impact on improving their outcomes. The centre has a creditable record in relation to the proportion of households registered and making use of the centre's services.

The centre operates very secure recruitment procedures for the centre staff, volunteers and service providers. All required checks are made and the centre records all details to confirm identity, qualification, rights to work in the United Kingdom and suitability to work with children. The initial assessment process is an integral part of the centre's high-quality practice for safeguarding. All staff are trained in child protection to an appropriate level and are fully aware of the centre's practice and the policy adopted. Relevant staff have had specialist training, such as use of the Common Assessment Framework and how to deal with cases of domestic violence.

All policies are in place. Each team of staff has a competent lead professional responsible for safeguarding within its department. There are systems in place to protect and safeguard staff from abuse by the public and against any allegations made by children, parents and carers. Parents have a clear understanding of the centre's responsibilities for safeguarding and of their responsibility for safeguarding their children. Risk assessments are fully in place and appropriate to the work of the centre. These apply to activities taking place in the centre, such as the storage of kitchen cleaners in the event of children being in the kitchen, and for events taking

place outside, such as family walks.

A staff team with diverse skills and backgrounds supports service users with a range of home languages, enabling them to access information and provision. Publicity is produced in various forms, including pictorial and written, and some is produced in users' home languages. The centre operates an inclusive service that allows all children with special educational needs and/or disabilities to access a range of coordinated services. However, this information is not yet fully effective in engaging with male members of the community.

The site is fully accessible for adults and children with mobility difficulties. Ramps and a lift enable access to all rooms and activities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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| 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 | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults | 1 |
| The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |

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

The Early Years inspection of Cherry Tree Nursery (5 April 2011) was used to help inform the outcomes of this inspection. The Early Years inspection found the quality of nursery provision to be good.

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 Cherry Tree Children's Centre on 6–7 April 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Thank you to those of you who gave up your time and went out of your way to contribute to this inspection. Your views and comments were very useful in helping us make our judgements. Like you, we found your children's centre to be very welcoming and friendly. The centre gives high priority to your and your children's safety and welfare. Professionals regularly share information and work very well together to make sure that they understand what you need and that you get the right support quickly. This is having a very positive impact on your lives and those of your children. However, most of the people using the centre are mothers and female carers. It would be better if more fathers and male carers engaged with the centre and its services. We have asked the centre to look at ways of achieving this.

You are developing healthier lifestyles. A high number of children are immunised and this is improving their resistance to disease. Although a good number of you now understand the importance of healthy eating for your families, the centre is still getting reports from some agencies working through them, that some children are still obese. To recognise its success in promoting healthy lifestyles, the centre has recently been given Healthy Setting status. Many of you are taking advantage of home-safety checks and these are reducing the number of accidents in the home. You and your families are developing a very good understanding of how to keep yourselves and your community safe, through the advice and guidance provided by the centre.

Your centre is supporting your children to be prepared for school. Your children are making good progress and inspectors could see that you all enjoy your time at the centre. Some of you told us how the centre has helped you to develop personally and educationally. Your centre supports many of you with improving your education and skills so that your future prospects of employment are improved.

Your centre provides many opportunities for you to tell staff what you think about the centre and the services provided. Through initial assessments you are involved in

deciding what activities and services the centre needs to provide you with. Your centre is supporting many families who are vulnerable and need help. It also works hard to reach out to more families who do not yet use the centre's services and encourages them to do so. The centre has registered almost three quarters of all families in its area and this is a creditable achievement.

Many of you told us how your centre has supported you, particularly in times of crisis. Those of you we spoke to, spoke very highly of the family support workers. 'My support worker is very caring and looks after me when I am feeling low. I get a lot of emotional and physical support and get told off when I haven't eaten.' Another said 'I feel very safe to open up and share feelings.' We agree that the quality of support provided by the centre is excellent. Centre staff and other professionals, with whom they work closely, care a great deal about you and are committed to improving your lives. They never give up whatever the challenge, and always persevere to help you in times of crisis.

The centre is exceptionally well led and managed. The managers of Cherry Tree, Lime Tree and Birchfield centres work very closely in partnership. They share their resources, and professionals work across all three centres to make sure that you all receive a good range of services to meet your needs and improve your lives. This arrangement reflects the outstanding ambitions and the high expectations that centre leaders have of themselves and the impact of the work of the centre on users' lives. The centre leader has encouraged a strong 'can do' culture among the people who work for and through it. They never give up on you and, even if one initiative fails, then they try something else. It would help the centre if more of you came forward for help, such as those among you who would like to give up smoking.

The advisory board, which runs the centre for the city council, has recently reformed and now covers the three children's centres in the cluster. The board is now much bigger and needs to reorganise the ways in which it monitors the centre's work and how effective it is in helping you. The roles of each member have been agreed, but the board members have not yet fully decided how they are going to organise their work to make sure they are efficient and effective in planning the way forward. The centre leaders and professional leaders from the service providers are currently continuing the board's work very effectively. We have asked the advisory board to implement the most efficient and effective way to meet its commitments.

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