

Inspection report for Bromborough Children's Centre

Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	365652
Inspection dates	30–31 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Linda McLarty HMI

Centre governance	The Local Authority
Centre leader	Tracy Rimmer
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	N/a
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY272471 Bluebells Day 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 the senior leadership team, local authority, partnership and advisory board representatives and parents, carers and centre users. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Bromborough Children's Centre is a Phase 1 Children's Centre which was designated in 2006 and has been providing all elements of the full core offer since 30 November 2009. The centre's workforce and advisory board are shared with Eastham and Bebington Children's Centres. The centre is part of a district cluster model which is co-terminus with the local Area and Social Care teams and Primary Care Trust. A satellite centre in New Ferry is planned to open in May 2011. The centre has a service level agreement with Cheshire and West Wirral Partnership Trust to deliver the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS.)

There are 1,144 children under five years old in the catchment area, of whom 621 live in some of the 70% most disadvantaged areas and 523 in some of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. Of these 523 children, 245 (approximately 42.5 %) are registered with the children's centre. The centre has 417 children registered overall, representing 36.5% of the total number in the reach area.

The Bromborough ward has 19.4% worklessness, and 2.7 % of lone parents and carers are in receipt of benefit. In 2008, 20.9% of eligible families in the ward were in receipt of Working Families Tax Credit. The 2008 figures indicate that the percentage of young people not in education or training in the ward was 13.8%, which is higher than Wirral's average of 11.9% and significantly higher than the national average of 8.6%. The reach area is socially very diverse, with a multiple deprivation ranking of 7,546 out of 8,414 in England. Of its 12 super output areas, six are in the top 30% of deprivation. The majority of families are of White British

heritage, with less than 4.8 % of families representing a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few families speak English as an additional language.

The on-site Bluebells Nursery offers care and education for up to 50 children from birth to five years including no more than 21 children aged from birth to two years. An inspection of this provision was carried out in May 2010 and the nursery was judged as good overall. The report is available on the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre also supports children in a variety of private and voluntary sector settings in its reach area. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage at broadly expected levels.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Through good leadership and management and strong provision, staff at Bromborough Children’s Centre are improving outcomes for users in its local community well. As the centre has only been delivering the core offer since November 2009, this shows a track record of improvement which indicates a good capacity to improve outcomes even further and sustain improvements at this good rate.

Strong partnerships have been established by the manager and these facilitate effective service delivery on and off-site. The manager has forged a highly productive partnership with Arrowe Park Hospital’s neonatal unit which is seen as a model of good practice regionally and is to be rolled out nationally by hospital trusts. Family support workers help the families of the premature babies to cope with extremely stressful situations and case studies attest to the powerful impact of their work.

The family support team is very well trained across the wider safeguarding agenda and therefore can offer a varied menu of support to families in crisis and need. Case studies provided compelling evidence of their impact on some families’ lives.

The centre supports the enjoyment and achievement, learning and development and economic well-being of children and adults well. Good support to improve provision in the private, voluntary and independent sector providers is brokered by the centre through the Early Years Foundation Stage consultant.

Differentiated provision to improve how adults understand and modify their own and their children's behaviour is having a strong impact on positive contribution, as evidenced by case studies. Cognitive behaviour therapy-based courses help users to change their patterns of thinking and acting. 'If you always do the things in the same way you will always get the same result', said one user about how her self-esteem is being reinforced by changing old patterns of reaction and behaviour. However, the leaders know that they need to raise the number of residents actively engaged in the centre's services.

Users' views are solicited and used when deciding which activities to provide, but they are not yet meaningfully involved in decision making, and there is no parental representation on the advisory board. The centre is working towards organising a parents' forum with plans to use this as a conduit for parental and carers' views to be given to the advisory board.

The leader responds swiftly to adapt the range of provision in response to needs indicated by local intelligence and through analysis of the impact of activities, including attendance figures. Service delivery is on or under budget. The campus model of deployment of management and staff across adjacent centres reduces duplication of services. This, and the good outcomes, demonstrates that the centre provides good value for money in the use of resources. Case studies and personal testimony demonstrate that the centre delivers good care, guidance and support through staff, the flexible range of activities and the strong partnerships.

Governance is strong, with clearly understood lines of accountability from strategic to centre level. Performance management is aligned to the centre's improvement targets, thus emphasising individual responsibility for improving outcomes. The local authority is a strong source of support for the children's centres in Wirral. However, the local authority's systems to gather and share information about the reach area are in their infancy, and the leadership team does not have sufficient information about the profile of the residents of the footprint in order to demonstrate that the centre is meeting the full range of needs, particularly those of the more vulnerable groups. The centre's manager and local authority know that they are also at an early stage of gathering and analysing measureable evidence of impact.

Centre targets for improvement derive from the strategic targets in the Children and Young People's Plan. These are not precise enough and do not describe measurable success criteria. This makes it difficult for the leader, local authority and advisory board to measure the centre's progress towards its targets. Self-evaluation is not yet based on sufficient measurable evidence of impact and the centre struggles to provide evidence of the proportions of groups it is supporting.

The manager has fostered effective partnerships with the local authority and with professional colleagues in health, education and social care, to the mutual benefit of outcomes for all services. This is helping to increase the registration through effective cross-referrals. The premises are used efficiently to host weekly health services delivered by health visitors and midwives. It also offers a highly valued base for supervised contact meetings and for counselling sessions for those suffering severe trauma.

Safeguarding is enhanced by close partnership working, and the use of pre-Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and CAF processes are effectively pre-empting statutory intervention. Those subject to CAF processes are monitored carefully to ensure the support continues to meet the needs, and some powerful case study evidence shows successful support for families. Equality and diversity are promoted well among service users, and the centre has established effective systems to track the progress of children using the crèche, in order to begin to gather evidence of how well it is helping to narrow the achievement gap between the lowest-performing children and the median-performing children. Children and parents with disabilities are supported particularly well.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority to improve the staff's knowledge of the reach area, particularly its knowledge of the most vulnerable groups, in order to increase the number of residents who are actively engaged with centre services.
- Work with the local authority to improve the precision of target-setting to:
 - improve the accuracy with which the setting can measure its progress
 - enable the local authority and advisory board to hold the centre more rigorously to account for its impact on improving outcomes.
- Improve the ability of leaders and managers to provide measurable evidence of the impact of its work on promoting outcomes for users in the reach area, and to ensure that self-evaluation is based on accurate evidence of impact.
- Improve the participation of users in the decision-making process.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for service users are good. The emotional and mental resilience of users is greatly improved by their engagement with the family support workers who deliver universal, targeted and tailored support. Families and individuals experiencing crisis and stress are given well-coordinated practical and emotional support. Local health professionals who use the centre weekly are an asset to families seeking easily accessible advice. The family support workers offer high levels of multi-agency

support to families of babies in the neonatal unit. This innovative outreach work is demonstrably reducing the length of time of stay in the unit, as families are supported through extremely stressful situations towards being able to care for their babies at home. Data about breastfeeding are not available at centre level, but Wirral data show a significant increase from 2008–09 initiation rates of 38% to 57% in January 2011.

The centre provides a safe meeting place for supervised contact, and this use is risk assessed effectively to ensure the overall appropriateness and safety of this service. Rooms are available for specialist counselling for men and women who have experienced severe sexual trauma. Those experiencing domestic violence and abuse are signposted to the zero centre and the Freedom programme and some parents told the inspectors that this, '...literally saved my life'. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) scheme was used well to provide safety equipment in the homes of users and is decreasing the percentage rate of emergency hospital admissions from 16.61% in 2008 to 15.69% in 2009 in Bromborough. The leadership will fund this service to continue now that the initial funding from ROSPA has ended. Timely early intervention for children identified as being at risk or in need is helping to protect children well. Courses and advice about managing children's behaviour gives parents and carers new skills and these, too, enhance children's safety.

The centre is contributing to closing the achievement gap between the lowest performing 20% of children in the reach area and their peers, as shown in their Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores. In 2008, the gap was 30.9%, reducing to 23.1% in 2009 and rising to 26.6% in 2010. The centre delivered a four-week programme of speech and language support in a local school, to address the communication concerns in the reach area. This was successful in improving children's skills and will be rolled out to other schools. The centre does not yet have systems fully in place to track the impact of their services on children's attainment on entry to maintained school. However, the system to track the progress of children who attend crèche provision will ultimately provide strong evidence of the impact of the children's centre work in improving the achievement of the children who use its services.

Case study and personal testimony give compelling evidence of the centre providing courses in response to parental need, for example mathematics, parenting courses and First Aid. This is helping the families using the centre to begin the journey towards economic stability as adults gain confidence from gaining accredited qualifications, and staff support them in preparing to enter the world of work. Participation rates are monitored carefully to check that courses continue to meet need. The centre recently enrolled six parents on the European Computer Driving Licence course, although due to lack of interest in the wider community the course was postponed at late notice. Crèche provision is always provided to enable and encourage parents to attend the courses. Volunteers describe how the centre has built their confidence saying, 'I know that if I need help looking for work there's all these people here to help, to talk to'.

Registrations are low but currently rising at a rate of six new registrations per week. Users are not engaged in decision making, and are not represented on the advisory board, and the plans for the parents' forum are yet to be implemented. Self-evaluation has identified that at present the centre is not always attracting those who need its services most.

These are the grades for 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	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	3
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?

2

Despite the lack of detailed information about the reach area, the leader reshapes provision swiftly in response to local knowledge. She uses information gained from participation data and users' feedback about the impact of individual services and activities. Pre-CAF and CAF processes are used sensitively to identify need and to coordinate multi-agency partnership support. Users cite convincing evidence of support. For example, a parent who had experienced domestic violence said that her family went from a 'failing to protect' category to 'children in need' as a result of highly tailored practical and emotional support from the family support team, who accompanied her to court, helped get her rehoused and her children placed in new schools. She credits her current self-esteem, confidence, well-being and hope for the future mainly to the support of centre staff.

The centre promotes the learning and development of children and adult service users well. Local childminders are very well supported by the centre and the Foundation Stage consultant. They are encouraged to track their children's progress using the 'Development matters' statements, and the centre manager briefed the group on how CAF processes are used. 'Stay and play' and 'Messy play' sessions help parents to learn how to maximise learning opportunities for their children through play. The centre hosts targeted play sessions for the Wirral Autistic group and their children, and feedback attests to how valuable users find this. Parents are proud of the achievements they have gained, and grateful for the crèche provision which

facilitated their attendance on first aid, mathematics, parenting and behaviour management courses. Volunteers feel fully included in the staff team, and one volunteer described how genuinely supportive the whole team are: 'When I worked here, my opinion of the centre did not change'.

The centre acknowledges that their universal groups are predominantly attended by more affluent, socially connected women, and the leadership team is prioritising raising the profile of the centre in its community. Staff regularly make themselves a visible presence in the school playground to promote the range of centre services. The outreach work of the family support team is a major thrust of the centre's work with the more vulnerable families and the team works effectively with partner agencies to offer support to families in need. The range of services provided is good, and the centre leader is swift to offer any spare space in the building to partners such as childminders or counselling services to make the most of the premises.

Existing users gave very moving and powerful examples of how they have benefited from the care, guidance and support which underpins the staff's working practices. There are durable systems in place to monitor and record support for the most vulnerable. 'They literally offered me a lifeline', typifies parental comments to inspectors.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance is strong, with good support from both the local authority and the advisory board. Day-to-day management of the centre is good, and the manager has inspired not only her team but the partnerships, who unanimously praise her drive to improve provision and outcomes in the area.

The local authority acknowledges the challenges inherent in a head of centre managing three centres and a satellite centre, and has firm plans in place to support this role. Systems to gather, analyse and share data about the profile of the reach area are developing. The local authority is keen to move forward with this work as it is aware of how the lack of this information prevents the centre having an accurate understanding of the needs of the residents. The recent extension of the footprint

makes this even more vital. The centre benefits from a supportive relationship with the local authority and advisory board, but a lack of measurable targets or clear success criteria limits how well these bodies can hold the centre to account for its progress.

The centre can demonstrate its success on an individual and activity basis because of regular evaluations by users and centre staff. The centre is less able to evaluate how well it is promoting outcomes because sometimes the impact data available are too broad to indicate the effect of the work of individual centres.

The campus model of shared management and workforce, and clear financial accountability systems results in good value for money. The outreach team also works across the linked settings and residents know they can access the same staff and support through any of the centres. This increases access and improves outcomes for a greater proportion of the population, many of whom are not mobile.

Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively, with highly effective targeted services for some particularly vulnerable groups, such as the Wirral Autistic Society 'messy play' session which enhances the inclusive universal provision well. The centre has supported local settings in implementing 'Every Child A Talker' and works effectively with speech and language services in response to local schools identifying weaknesses in the communication and language acquisition of local children.

Safeguarding is a key priority underpinning all of the centre's work, with all staff very well trained to support their roles and responsibilities. Sound procedures exist to ensure the suitability of staff and partner agency colleagues.

Evaluation is less effective in driving improvement because it is not yet based on sufficient evidence of impact. However, self-evaluation processes are supported well by the advisory board, who are invited to scrutinise and challenge the centre's self-evaluation document and the evidence upon which this is based.

Partnership working is one of the strengths of this centre and a major contributor to the responsive, integrated service. Local knowledge is shared well, and partnership representatives on the advisory board value and support the leadership. Partner agencies are clear about the strong contribution the centre makes to their work in the area.

The views of parents and users are routinely gathered through evaluations of individual activities and interventions in order to check the quality and usefulness and to inform the future planning of provision. However, parents and carers are not sufficiently involved in strategic decision making and the centre is prioritising this as an area for improvement.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional	2
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supervision and day-to day management arrangements are clear and understood	
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
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	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	2
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

An inspection of the on-site nursery provision Bluebells Nursery was carried out on 18 May 2010 and the quality of the early years provision was judged 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 Bromborough Children's Centre on 30 and 31 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for making the time to talk to inspectors about how the centre has changed your lives. It was a privilege to hear your accounts of how the centre has helped you at times of crisis, and when dealing with the ongoing problems of life.

Some of you told us that the centre has helped you out of situations of domestic violence, supporting you to find new housing, get counselling and helping your children cope, and turn your lives around. 'I wouldn't be where I am today, I was an absolute emotional wreck, I'd hit rock bottom', said one parent who said that thanks to the family support workers, 'I am a completely new person now.' Parents and carers praised the 'Nurture' course and how it helps you to gain self-esteem through understanding how you have become the people you are now.

You told us you greatly value the staff at the centre and inspectors can see why; they are a committed and effective team. We were initially anxious about how well the centre's leaders and advisory board could give enough time to Bromborough centre when they also work across two other centres, with a satellite centre at New Ferry due to open in May. The local authority and advisory board reassured us that they share these concerns and that they have the situation in hand.

We found that the centre is good at helping you learn about healthy lifestyles, and how to keep your children safe and protected. Adults and children are being supported well to enjoy and achieve in their learning and development. The centre knows it needs to improve its profile and impact in the local community, and reach more people in the most vulnerable groups.

We were very impressed at how the family support workers help parents at the neonatal unit in Arrowe Park Hospital, one family from Birmingham received such extensive support from centre staff that they are now moving to Bromborough to live. The centre's input often reduces the amount of time the babies have to spend in the unit as parents are so well supported and prepared for the babies' return home.

The centre is very skilled at enabling you to develop ways to improve your parenting skills and enjoy spending time with your children. It is also helping you to obtain the advice and guidance you need to ensure that you receive the benefits to which you are entitled or to find work. The centre helps users to access courses such as mathematics, First Aid and parenting courses which raise confidence and self-esteem. Volunteering and support with applying for jobs is helping some of you become more confident to apply for work.

The manager is swift to adapt the provision to meet the needs of the current users, and to ensure that its services provide good value for money. You told us of the strong support and guidance you receive from the centre's staff, and how welcome and safe you always feel in the centre. This is such a safe environment that it is regularly used for supervised contact sessions.

The centre offers good support for families of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, such as the Wirral Autistic group. They are trying hard to make sure all children and adults achieve equally well. The family support workers are very well trained and have a wide range of expertise which means they can offer a raft of support for different needs, and many of you told us how they have greatly helped you. One parent told inspectors that from being almost housebound with many different problems, she is now able to attend book clubs and run a 5K 'race for life'.

One of the strengths of the leadership in the centre is that staff are honest about what it needs to improve. They know that they need to find out more about the people who live in the area, in order to know what proportion of the most vulnerable families is being helped. They know that they need to improve the numbers of users actively supported by the centre. The targets for improvement set by the local authority are often too vague, making it difficult for the centre's staff to evaluate how well they are doing. The systems to gather evidence of the impact of their work are just developing. This makes it difficult for the local authority and the advisory board to hold the leadership to account for the centre's progress towards improving outcomes in the area. We have asked the leaders and the local authority to improve the information the centre gets about its area and to set targets that can help to measure progress. We want them to improve the way they gather evidence of the impact of the centre's work. This will help the centre evaluate its work more accurately. We also asked for improvements to the way you are able to contribute to decision making. As yet, there are no parents on the advisory board, and the parents' forum is still being organised.

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