

# Inspection report for Brierley Hill Children's Centre

Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	367759
Inspection dates	5–6 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Usha Devi HMI

Centre governance	Dudley Local Authority
Centre leader	Calcyta Walters
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Brierley Hill Sure Start, EY288316

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 provision, Brierley Hill Sure Start 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff, the senior leadership team, representatives from the local authority, 'Action for Children' and partner agencies, including a representative from the health service. They also had discussions with users, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Brierley Hill Children's Centre was designated in 2005. It is a phase one children's centre, providing the full core offer of services. The Nursery provision was opened in October 2006. It is situated in a residential area to the north of Dudley town centre. The centre also uses a number of local venues to deliver some of its services. Three quarters of the local population are of White British heritage. The remainder are from a range of minority ethnic groups including, Pakistani. The centre serves a community which is one of the 10% to 20% most deprived in the country. Around 33% of children are from households where no one is working. Unemployment rates are above the national average.

Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and abilities that are below those expected for their age.

The centre is managed by 'Action for Children' on behalf of the local authority. A programme management group is responsible for reviewing the quality of services offered by the 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

The overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory. There are some good elements. Strong safeguarding arrangements ensure that the centre is a safe and secure environment for all who attend. Staff are committed to inclusion. Parents and users appreciate the warm welcome they receive and describe the centre staff as 'caring' and 'good listeners.'

The centre has some useful information about participation rates, but does not have rigorous systems in place for evaluating or demonstrating the impact of its services or activities on users' outcomes. Case studies and feedback from users shows that the impact of the centre on children, young people and their families, including those who are most vulnerable are satisfactory overall. There is evidence that some aspects of the centre's provision are having a particularly positive impact on users. For example, effective partnership working with the Citizens Advice Bureau has led to a marked increase in the number of users receiving the help they need to gain access to funding to which they are entitled. The one-to-one support sessions offered by members of the family support team are also popular, well attended and purposeful.

The local authority has completed an analysis which shows the proportion of users from the centre's target, including details of specific groups, who attended the centre during the last two years. This shows that participation rates are low. In order to improve this situation, centre leaders reviewed the centre's services and the needs of the target groups in the reach area by seeking the views of some partner agencies and some centre users. Following this consultation, they started to implement strategies to increase the engagement of target groups. Information provided by the centre shows that this action led to some improvement. For example, there has been a slight increase in the number of fathers and those from ethnic minority groups gaining from the centre's services. Equality is promoted adequately because there is more to do to ensure the number of families who would benefit from the centre's work, do so.

Since the centre was first established it has been through a number of changes. The

centre manager has overseen the establishment of day care provision on the centre's site and restructured staffing. Throughout this process, she has maintained high staff morale. Evaluation of the centre's work is broadly satisfactory but generous. The centre's self-evaluation and individual impact reports provide accurate information about the range of services but do not always evaluate the impact of these services on users, and especially those from the target groups. Likewise, not all partners make clear how their work impacts on users and contributes to the centre's priorities. The programme management group, which includes representatives from the local authority, partner agencies and users, meets regularly to check the work of the centre. However, this group does not always hold the centre to account fully for the impact it is having on children and their families. Improvement planning is satisfactory. Targets for improvement are not prioritised and success criteria are not sufficiently measurable.

Satisfactory outcomes, coupled with senior leaders' adequate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development demonstrate a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes by continuing to assess the needs of the target groups represented in the reach area and implementing strategies to increase the engagement of these groups in the centre's activities.
- Strengthen the local authority's, the programme management group and senior leaders ability to rigorously evaluate the impact of the centre's work by:
  - developing strategies to evaluate and demonstrate the impact of activities and services
  - establishing ways in which all key partners can measure and demonstrate the impact of their work
  - ensuring individual evaluations focus on the impact of the centre's work on improving outcomes for different users, and especially the centre's target groups.
- Ensure the centre improvement plan prioritises its targets for improvement and includes specific and measurable success criteria which focus on improving outcomes for different groups in the reach area.

### How good are outcomes for users?

<b>3</b>
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Children who attend the centre benefit from the healthy snacks on offer and the opportunity to use the indoor and outdoor equipment. Support from health visitors, midwives and family support workers ensure users receive suitable advice. This includes support for breastfeeding and weaning. Some activities have a good impact. 'I have changed the way I shop,' and 'I am more aware of the sugar content in food,' were just some of the comments made by parents during the 'Jumping Beans' session. During this session, the small number of parents spoke enthusiastically about the importance of eating healthily.

Parents and carers agree with the inspectors that the centre is a safe environment for their children. Children’s and adults’ understanding of how to stay safe is promoted satisfactorily. Feedback following the ‘stay safe’ activity day shows that some users gained a better understanding about home safety equipment, such as stair gates and fire guards. Children subject to the Common Assessment Framework, child protection plans or the centre’s own assessments are suitably supported by centre staff and partner agencies. Case study information shows that outcomes for some children and families whose circumstances make them vulnerable are steadily improving and are at least satisfactory. Family support workers are in the process of developing strategies that will enable them to better demonstrate the impact they are having on all children and families in crisis.

‘I can spend more quality time with my children doing an activity we all enjoy,’ wrote one parent in their evaluation of a ‘Stay and Play’ session. Children behave well and enjoy using and sharing equipment with others. Occasionally centre staff miss opportunities to extend children’s learning and do not always demonstrate ways in which parents and carers could learn together with their children. When this happens, the impact on users is satisfactory. The centre has introduced a suitable range of strategies to promote children’s communication and language skills. Consequently, children are helped effectively to develop their skills and knowledge in this aspect. This was the case during the ‘Busy Bees’ session when parents sang with their children and shared books.

Users’ views are sought through regular questionnaires, informal discussions and the parents’ forum. Their views are gradually leading to changes in the activities offered by the centre. The involvement of parents and carers in strategic decision-making is in the early stages. The centre successfully encourages some users, including volunteers in the centre, to engage in training or to find paid employment. Staff have ‘given me greater opportunities to develop my skills and experiences. Also helped me get a job in the area I wanted to work in,’ wrote one volunteer.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including</b>	<b>3</b>

<b>access to training</b>	
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### **How good is the provision?**

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Services provided in the centre and at the outreach sites adequately meet the needs of the wider community. The centre has had some success in increasing the proportion of users who access the services from a few of its target groups. For example, the centre set up a project specifically aimed at engaging women from the Asian community. 'Since last year I have been involved in a group aimed at Asian women called Kiran Project. This has helped me to meet new faces.' was just one of the comments written in response to the impact of this group.

Opportunities for purposeful learning are promoted satisfactorily. 'Learning journeys' have been introduced this year and staff are using these to track the progress of children who attend sessions such as 'Stay and Play.' The assessment information in the 'learning journey' is not always used to inform future planning. As a consequence, activities are sometimes too easy for children. The children's centre outdoor area is under development and therefore does not sufficiently promote children's development in all six areas of learning.

The warm welcome that users receive begins from their initial contact with the reception staff and continues throughout their involvement with the centre. Individual feedback from parents and carers about the centre's services often indicates the positive impact the centre has had on their confidence and their parenting skills. During some sessions, occasions are missed to adapt activities in order to provide all adults with the personalised guidance and support they need. On a similar note, a few evaluations from users indicate that the skills being taught were not new and therefore did not sufficiently build on previous knowledge.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>

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

<b>3</b>
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The centre's safeguarding arrangements are given high priority. Staff are suitably trained in child protection. Site security is good and displays around the centre let users know what to do if they have any concerns. Case studies show that staff work

well with partners to safeguard individual families at times of crisis.

Senior leaders have an improving knowledge of the different groups in the reach area. The centre manager and staff are keen to improve outcomes for all children, young people and families, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Take up rates, especially amongst the centre's target groups are variable and in a number of cases low. This results in equality and diversity being satisfactory.

Partnerships between the centre and external agencies are strengthening. Feedback from partner agencies and some users has led to a few changes in provision. For example, following feedback from parents, the centre will be introducing a 'get cooking' course.

While, governance and accountability arrangements are clearly understood, the impact of these is satisfactory. Individual evaluations completed by centre staff tend to identify what staff need to do to improve, they do not always indicate what the impact has been on users. The programme management group evaluates the work of the centre satisfactorily. The local authority and 'Action for Children' are in the process of strengthening performance management and development planning procedures in order to more effectively hold the centre to account for its performance. Value for money is satisfactory.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>3</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>3</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</b>	<b>3</b>

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

The children's centre inspection findings were informed by a parallel inspection of the Brierley Hill Sure Start early years provision on 1 July 2011.

The full inspection report for this event can be found on the Ofsted website.

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Brierley Hill Children's Centre on 5–6 July 2011. We spoke to a number of you about the centre's work. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for making us feel welcome. You were very helpful and your views were very beneficial to the inspection. We agree with you when you told us that the staff are welcoming, caring and helpful. Brierley Hill Children's Centre is a safe and secure place. This is a good aspect of the centre's work. Staff work well with a range of agencies to ensure that families in difficult circumstances receive the support they need.

A few of you told us how much you enjoy attending the 'Jumping Beans' group and how it has helped you to gain a better understanding of eating healthily. Children who use the centre make at least satisfactory progress. We could see how much some of you were enjoying singing and sharing books with your children during the 'Busy Bees' session. The centre works effectively with agencies, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau to help the adults who use the centre gain access to benefits or access to tax credits.

We read some of the centre's questionnaires and the feedback written by parents and carers and other adults who use your centre. These show that the centre is making a positive difference to families. Some of you made comments such as, 'I can spend more quality time with my children doing an activity we all enjoy.' The centre has helped some of you to gain paid employment. One adult who used to volunteer at the centre commented, staff have 'given me greater opportunities to develop my skills and experiences. Also helped me get a job in the area I wanted to work in.'



Staff are working hard to make the centre as good as it can be. They are encouraging different groups from the community to take part in the centre's activities. For example, women from the 'Kiran Project' commented enthusiastically about the difference this project had made to their confidence. We have asked the centre staff to encourage even more families, and especially those who would benefit from the things that that centre has to offer, to attend. Perhaps some of you might like to suggest ways in which the centre can encourage more families in the Brierley Hill area to participate in the activities.

Representatives from the leadership team, the local authority, some partner agencies and the parents' forum are members of a programme management group. This group meets regularly to check how well the centre's activities are meeting the needs of children, young people and families in your area. We have asked this group and senior leaders to keep an even closer check on the work of the centre and how well it is leading to improvement for all of you that come to the centre and also for the Brierley Hill community. We have also asked leaders to make sure the centre's improvement plan clearly shows how leaders and the local authority will know when their actions have been successful.

We would like to say a special thank you to those of you who found the time to come and speak with us. We wish you all the best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).