

Inspection report for Evergreen Children's Centre

Local authority	Worcestershire
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Reporting inspector	Joy Law HMI

Centre governance	Barnardo's Midlands
Centre leader	Claire D'Arcy
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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 local authority, centre staff, partner agencies, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

Information about the centre

Evergreen Children's Centre is based in the south of Worcestershire servicing the town of Malvern. It is a phase one children's centre and serves a community living in one of the 40% most disadvantaged areas in the country. The centre was initially registered in 2004 and managed by an independent childcare provider until December 2008. In January 2009, the management of the centre was taken over by Barnardo's and it later became known as Evergreen Children's Centre. As a result of difficult circumstances, the newly managed centre was placed in a position of operating in a start-up phase as opposed to an established service.

The centre is located in the heart of an urban area of mixed housing. Within the reach area, there are pockets of deprivation and disadvantage among relatively more advantaged areas. There are 884 children aged birth to five in the centre's reach area. Eighty four families within the local area are on workless benefits and 91 are lone-parent families. A small proportion of users speak English as an additional language.

The area is served by a number of local amenities such as shops, dentists, doctors and recreational areas. There are also seven primary schools and two secondary schools within the reach area. The children's centre serves a community that is

98.25% White British, with the remaining population being from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds.

The centre provides almost the entire full core offer of integrated services including health, family support and adult training. The centre does not provide early years childcare provision. It offers advice and guidance to parents and carers on the day-care and childminding facilities available within the local community. Most children enter the early years provision with skills that are much lower than those expected for their age.

The children's centre is governed by Barnardo's. The advisory group is made up of a cross-section of professionals, parents and carers. It is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development.

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

This children's centre serves the needs of its community well. Care, guidance and support, and the quality of provision are outstanding. Leadership and management are good and include very effective team-working and good partnerships with other services.

Leaders target and adapt the provision well to meet local needs despite the difficulty in obtaining some local data. They set ambitious targets to improve the health, safety and economic well-being of the local community. The high-quality provision, together with effective family support, ensures that families, whose circumstances may have made them vulnerable or who are disadvantaged by economic and social circumstances, benefit from an excellent range of services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs.

Inclusion is central to the vision of the centre and all staff have a commitment to promoting equality and diversity. The centre is successfully meeting the elements of the core offer it provides. Users feel welcomed and have a high level of confidence in the staff. The centre is particularly successful in its targeted work to support children

and families who are in most need of support. As a result, the centre is making a considerable improvement to the lives of children and families. It is raising the aspirations and increasing the confidence of adults in the community by providing practical help and support for parents, carers and children to help them achieve better futures. Although the centre responds very well to families who are referred to its services, and is successful in reaching all groups, it is aware of the need to continue to increase the number of families, such as those from minority ethnic groups and fathers who might benefit from its services. It is taking appropriate action to address this, and there are early signs of success.

The outcomes for children and adults within the centre's reach are good. Health is outstanding. Parents and carers participate enthusiastically in activities and courses which build their confidence and develop their parenting and life skills. Children who attend the centre's 'Stay and Play' sessions benefit particularly from focused support and a good range of play opportunities that help develop their communication and social skills.

Users say they feel safe when attending sessions and during home visits from staff. Many say it is their first port of call if they face difficulties. Adult users evaluate activities routinely. Where users make requests for services, the centre strives to provide them. Users say they feel listened to and respected.

Excellent inter-agency working by highly skilled professionals means that they identify the needs of potentially vulnerable families at an early stage and intervene appropriately. This prompt action and excellent use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) ensure efficient use of resources. Safeguarding the users' health, safety and well-being is a high priority. Recruitment and selection procedures are robust and all staff are well trained in safeguarding which equips them well in supporting vulnerable families.

Perceptive evaluations about the impact of its work are largely based upon attendance data, feedback from users and partner agencies, case studies and staff's knowledge of the families they serve. The improvement plans show that priorities are based on a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for further development. Parents and carers are signposted and well supported in accessing education, training and employment. As a result, some parents and carers continue with education and gain employment and are improving their economic well-being. However, the numbers doing so are not yet significant.

Since the centre's management changed in 2009, the leaders and managers have established a good understanding of the families in the reach area. They have planned services effectively to meet the specific needs of the users and delivered these extremely well within the community. As a result, the outcomes for users have improved. For example, the early intervention work with vulnerable families through the Common Assessment Framework has reduced the number of children subject to child protection plans, and the centre has been successful in addressing obesity issues. Outcomes are currently only good because of the relatively short period of

time the centre has been under the new management arrangements. There has not been sufficient time for the high-quality provision to have improved all of the outcomes to an outstanding level. Consequently, the centre currently demonstrates that it has good capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of families who engage with the services available to them, particularly fathers and those from ethnic minority groups.
- Ensure that adult learning opportunities support increased numbers of parents and carers into paid employment and improved economic stability

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The health and well-being of families are improving greatly. Parents, carers and children are developing an excellent awareness of healthy lifestyles. The healthy weight, walking and eating programmes are very well received by parents, carers and children. They engage in weekly sessions such as walking, and music and movement. Families have developed enthusiasm for cooking since attending courses on healthy eating. They talk positively about how these have helped them lose weight and increased their understanding of how to live healthier lifestyles.

The effective partnership working between health visitors, midwives, and family support workers results in positive outcomes for teenage mothers and those new mothers considered to be most vulnerable. The baby massage sessions have successfully contributed towards early attachment and positive relationships between mothers and their babies. Parents say they have an increased enthusiasm towards breastfeeding and value the support available.

The centre has developed links and is working closely with some of the local pre-school providers and childminders within its reach to support access to early years provision for children and families. Partnership with these providers and primary schools is effective in improving learning and development outcomes for children. Two local primary schools speak highly about the effective partnership working and the positive effect the children's centre has in contributing to good transition arrangements between home, childcare provision and school.

The good range of activities for parents and children to play, have fun and learn together enables them to develop skills that will help in the future. Evaluations of the success of courses and activities are positive. Parents and carers comment about how much they value the 'Stay and Play' and 'Bump2Baby' sessions. Case studies and other evaluations indicate that family learning is improving outcomes for parents and carers. As one parent reported: 'The staff are so helpful, supportive and friendly. The activities provided are very stimulating and help the children learn essential skills.' The centre manager reports that children are making good progress by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The gap between the outcomes for the

most vulnerable groups and others is narrowing, for example from 33.9% to 26.9% over the last two years.

Fathers are welcomed and included in the centre's activities, such as the 'Dads' group' which takes place one Saturday each month and is well attended. Staff are enthusiastic to develop the range of opportunities specifically for fathers to participate in and are taking action to address this. The setting supports parents and carers with disabilities very well to ensure they are included and involved in their children's lives. Comments from a partner agency confirmed how the effective partnership working results in, '...absolutely incredible outcomes for children with disabilities'. Volunteers and their contributions are highly valued by parents, carers and staff. Volunteers, many of whom are parents, help with the centre's activities and enjoy their involvement. Some gain qualifications and move onto further education and employment as a result.

Good procedures have been implemented to ensure that children are safeguarded well. Families with children on child protection plans are extremely well supported. Good partnership working has resulted in effective early intervention strategies and increased parents' and carers' confidence in their ability to care for their children. Parents and carers say that they feel very safe during sessions and that they trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties.

Partnership working with health visitors, local police community support officers and other partners is helping to raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities. For example, outreach support has provided parents and carers with information about how to create and maintain a safe environment for young children. Families are provided with home-safety equipment, contributing to a reduction in the number of accidents in the home. Some parents and carers have been subject to domestic violence and abuse. Family support workers provide excellent support in these circumstances and the centre works very well with agencies to resolve situations and to protect children as well as parents.

Parents and carers comment on improvement in their children's behaviour as a result of the help from family support workers and other professionals. Young mothers commented on how their confidence as parents has improved as a result of the support and activities offered by the centre. Parents and carers said they feel that they have a voice within the centre and that services meet their specific needs. Parents and carers, particularly the most vulnerable, have been very well supported in accessing education, training and employment. However, the numbers doing so are not yet significant. Some users said that their economic stability and independence had improved as a result of the opportunities the centre has provided.

Parents and carers say that they feel included and that the centre has helped them emotionally and socially and comment on the difference that the centre has made to their aspirations and achievements as well as their children's progress and development. Parents and carers talk about how the staff support them through difficult times and how, without help from the children's centre, their lives would be

very different.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
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	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

The centre team knows and understands its community very well. The centre works extremely well with many of its partners to improve the life chances and personal development of parents and children. Parents and carers expressed great appreciation of the support they receive through the centre and of the positive changes that have resulted for their children and themselves.

The centre's small staff team demonstrates a very good understanding of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and promotes children's learning and development well during sessions. It also effectively supports parents' understanding regarding the quality and range of age-appropriate activities they can provide for their children. Parents talked about their increasing confidence in playing with their children, developing their speech and managing their behaviour. Some young teenage parents are supported in their education and encouraged towards higher education. The centre has helped identify childcare funding to enable this. Case study evidence attests that other vulnerable adults are supported well towards accredited qualifications.

The assessment of needs and the tracking of progress are excellent. Interventions that are used and the progress of all vulnerable families are documented well and monitored, and provide a bank of case studies to help subsequent evaluations. The centre has good links with family and children's services: statutory, community and voluntary. Through these, it provides very effective support for all of the most vulnerable groups, such as teenage parents, lone parents, families in crisis and those experiencing domestic violence.

The centre is increasingly successful in meeting the needs of the wider community. The centre manager and staff are sensitive to the particular needs of its users and have placed great emphasis and effort on outreach work to meet the needs of those

families who are isolated and unable to easily access services. They are effective in reaching all groups but are not complacent. They are fully aware that there is scope to extend their work further to engage with more families, particularly minority ethnic groups.

There is good partnership working with two of the local primary schools. Work is already underway to extend this partnership to the remaining primary schools within the reach area. The centre works productively with a wide range of professionals, such as health visitors, midwives, speech and language therapists and social workers.

The centre does not have access to all local data, such as data on live births and the minority ethnic population, which has an impact on the centre having an accurate understanding of the population within its reach. However, the good links with partners enable needs to be identified on the ground, and services are developed to meet those needs. Health partners, especially health visitors and midwives, refer families to the centre. Local pre-school groups and schools contact the children's centre for advice and help with individual families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

2

The manager provides good leadership and management for the centre. She is supported by a very committed, dedicated team who deliver an excellent service to the families in their reach. Users and partner agencies expressed how highly valued they are. For example, one partner stated, 'Without the children's centre I don't know how we would cope, we are hugely reliant on the services provided by them,' and another user said, 'They go above and beyond their call of duty to help.'

Leaders are focused on the needs of the immediate community. Their expertise and the skills of a united staff team combine to ensure that an excellent quality of service is provided across the centre's operations. Regular and effective supervision supports the personal and professional development of staff well. Staff are well trained and fully understand their roles and responsibilities.

The centre has recently established an advisory board which is made up of an

excellent cross-section of members representing a range of interests, such as education providers, the local authority, the health service, and parents and carers. Members are highly supportive and have a strong commitment to the centre and to the ongoing development of its role in the community. Although not all members are actively involved in evaluating services and setting targets to drive improvement, the leadership and management have an accurate overall understanding of the areas for development and use this knowledge to plan effectively to ensure ongoing improvement.

Safeguarding is a high priority and at the heart of what the centre does. The safety of children and their families is embedded in the ethos of the centre. Staff are effective in ensuring children and families are safe. There is rigorous attention to child protection, vetting and recruitment procedures.

The children's centre is an integrated part of the community it serves. 'The centre manager has a deep commitment to creating links within the community, consistently looking for opportunities to engage,' said one key partner. Take-up of services is good and increasing. The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the centre's vision; equality is promoted and diversity celebrated. Users with disabilities are supported well. The effective integrated working with other professionals, such as health visitors and the social care disabilities team, enhances opportunities for all children and families and has made a considerable impact on children's and families' lives. Consequently, outcomes for children are good and improving. The centre makes a positive contribution to community cohesion and the breaking down of barriers between families of different backgrounds.

The staff operate exceptionally well from the centre and deploy resources extremely well given the restrictions placed on them by the premises and the limitations of some data such as live birth information. They make effective use of local facilities to deliver some of their sessions. The manager has been instrumental and highly successful in improving the quality of provision. The centre provides highly effective value-for-money services through working in partnership with other agencies. In a relatively short period of time, the centre has shown that it meets most of its community's needs very well, and is prioritising the need to engage more families from minority ethnic groups, and more fathers.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
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	2
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	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	2

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

Not applicable

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 Evergreen Children's Centre on 14 and 15 July 2011. We judged the centre as good.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

The centre manager and her dedicated team have provided families with an excellent range of services that are carefully tailored to meet your particular needs. Those of you who spoke to us said that you feel the centre is very supportive and staff are very kind and caring, and give you good advice. Most importantly, you said it helps improve your lives, particularly for those of you who are facing difficult challenges. Your children's centre staff team meets regularly to discuss the centre's work and to plan for improvement. All staff place importance on you and your families and provide a listening ear for you. They are keen to create a warm and welcoming

environment where you feel at home and are able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you very much value the centre and use the services regularly. Staff listen to what you have to say about the centre and what you need. The centre offers an excellent range of services and activities which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals.

Those of you who use the centre are now much more aware of how to stay safe and healthy and to provide for your families. Staff provide you with access to training and home visits and give advice on how you can prevent accidents in and around your homes to keep your children safe. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children very healthy by encouraging you to take regular exercise, eat healthy foods and support mothers to breastfeed their babies.

To develop further the work of the centre, we have asked the local authority and staff team to increase the number of families who engage with the services available to them, particularly the fathers and those from ethnic minority groups, so that more families can benefit from what the centre provides. We have also asked them to ensure that adult learning opportunities support increased numbers of parents and carers into paid employment and improved economic stability.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. It was a privilege to be able to talk to you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre, and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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