

# Inspection report for Queen Street Children's Centre

Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	384058
Inspection dates	10–11 August 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Crawford HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Kate Sharratt
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 centre staff, users and representatives from the local authority and commissioned service providers.

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

## Information about the centre

This is a phase two children's centre providing the full core offer since January 2008 to a community ranked within the 30% most deprived in the country. The centre's reach area has pockets of deprivation. The centre has close links with East Staffordshire Children's Centre. Queen Street is part of a cluster of children's centres which work across the reach area, which includes Anglesey and Branston wards. The local authority manages the provision and works with the management advisory board which provides support to all children's centres across the East Staffordshire district. The governance arrangements are currently under review. The centre leaders are responsible for the coordination and commissioning of services. The centre does not directly employ any staff as the centre commissions local organisations to provide all of its services, including Home-Start, Harvey Girls and Burton Albion.

The centre provides health and family support services, adult training, and early years' advice and guidance. Within the centre's reach area, unemployment and the proportion of families dependent on state benefits are just below the national average. Half of the families are White British and a third are Asian. The majority of children enter the early years settings with skill development that is below what is expected for their age. There is no on-site nursery provision.

## 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

This satisfactory centre is making some positive strides to improve outcomes for users within the Queen Street reach area. The district team manager who manages Queen Street Childrens Centre was appointed in June 2011 and also leads another nearby children's centre. In the short time she has been in post, she has used her leadership and management experience to good effect. She has had significant input into the local authority's reorganisation of all children's services to help form 'Families First' and has used her local knowledge and expertise to assist with a local audit and development of services in partnership with the centre's District Children's Commissioner. The centre is currently in a transition phase and a clear long-term vision has been developed in conjunction with the rest of the local authority. The centre is currently in a holding position while other departments are reorganised. The strategic direction of the centre, and its role within the local authority, are explicit; however, the centre's current ability to deliver against the Every Child Matters outcomes has been limited by these changes.

Those who take advantage of the services and activities provided report that the centre is making a positive difference to them and their families, and they are unanimous in their appreciation and praise for the centre's staff. The centre's activities are mostly well attended. However, the take-up of services by the wider community remains quite low and the centre has not yet fully engaged with them. Consequently, the equality of opportunity for users in the reach area is satisfactory.

Satisfactory overall provision is underpinned by sound procedures to safeguard children and other users. Safeguarding is threaded through everything that the centre does. All the parents and carers who made their comments known said they were very happy and secure about the welcome and care that they receive in the centre. The centre is particularly effective in signposting parents and carers to additional services to promote their safety and well-being. There are appropriate procedures for assessing the needs of the users and matching these to the appropriate services.

Governance and leadership are satisfactory and improving. The local authority's procedures to hold the centre to account through its local priorities are strengthening through its annual conversation meetings. The centre's improvement plan demonstrates an understanding of what is needed within the reach area and what needs to be achieved. However, the use of data to assist them in planning for specific needs is at the early stages of development and currently does not provide sufficient detail to allow the centre to plan effectively. The management advisory board has clear plans in place to revise the governance structure as, currently, not all partners and children's centres are represented on it. There are limited opportunities for parents' and carers' views to be heard or to help shape the centre's services and to provide challenge. Leaders and managers at all levels and all other staff involved in delivering services demonstrate a passion and determination to improve the lives of users. Regular quality assurance of the centre's services and projects, such as 'Nature Tots', has resulted in improvements in the quality of services. There are appropriate systems in place to evaluate users' satisfaction regularly. However, the centre has limited methods in place to evaluate the improvement that partners have made to users' lives, or the success of the centre's services in meeting local priorities. Consequently, the centre demonstrates a satisfactory capacity for improvement.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the take-up of services offered by the centre by reaching out to and engaging with members of the community who are not accessing services.
- Improve the evaluation of the effectiveness of the centre by working with partners to gather information about outcomes for children and users, and the impact of services provided.
- Further develop the governance of the centre by:
  - revising the membership of the management advisory board to ensure all stakeholders are represented
  - improving the extent to which parents and carers contribute to decision making
  - working with the local authority to obtain accurate, relevant up-to-date data which are specific to the immediate reach area and which will help the centre to determine priorities for action within the reach area and the necessary information to provide challenge.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>3</b>
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The emotional well-being of users, particularly those who have suffered from postnatal depression, is improved by their engagement with the centre. Voluntary groups, such as 'Mothers 4 Others', offer peer support for mothers with maternal mental health issues. The centre is proactive in supporting new mothers, and services such as baby massage are proving popular. There is an adequate range of healthy activities, such as 'Family Cook & Eat' sessions, which are well attended.

Parents and carers who attend these sessions report that they have improved their understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet. One parent said, 'I have learnt new great healthy recipes which I can use at home.'

Vulnerable children, particularly those on child protection plans, and their families are supported effectively by the centre and local support workers who are based at the centre. Families are signposted to other services that are provided by partners. Parents' and carers' written evaluations show that the lives of these families are improved through the effective implementation of the Common Assessment Framework procedures. For instance, one parent had benefited greatly from the one-to-one support of the centre and has improved how she deals with family matters.

Services and activities are provided in a happy and secure environment. Those parents and carers who made their comments known report that they and their children feel safe within the centre. 'Stay and Play' sessions, 'Toddler Time' and the childminder group 'Tickle Tots' provide a variety of activities to involve adults and children. Parents are growing in confidence in managing their children's behaviour through groups such as 'Home-Start Family Time'. Groups such as 'Harvey Girls' provide good support to teenage mothers on a vast range of subjects, such as financial advice, parenting skills and recreational activities. The centre successfully encourages a steady stream of volunteers to support activities, such as helping with childcare provision and on the centre's reception desk.

Parents and carers contribute their views through their valuable feedback on and evaluations of the services that are provided. However, there are limited opportunities for them to participate in decision making and the management of the centre. There is currently no parents' forum.

Parents and carers report how much they enjoy the courses they have successfully completed and are proud of their achievements. Courses such as 'English for speakers of other languages' are well attended by the Asian community. However, the centre does not evaluate the impact of these courses. Parents and carers benefit from an increasingly varied range of courses. For instance, ten parents attained a level two child development qualification; of these ten, six parents went on to gain employment, two became volunteers, one became a childminder and one became a foster carer.

*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</b>	<b>3</b>

<b>positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>3</b>

### **How good is the provision?**

<b>3</b>
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Local support workers are using assessments increasingly skilfully to engage with families, particularly those who are made vulnerable by their circumstances. This is resulting in an improved understanding of the needs of parents and carers. Services on offer are having an improving impact on users' safety and well-being and are tailored to meet considered needs. The centre is also satisfactorily assessing and meeting the needs of users who come to the centre looking for support and guidance to help them raise their children. The centre successfully nurtures and fosters confidence in parents and carers so that they are well prepared to develop their skills and learning. The centre is becoming increasingly instrumental in helping parents access further education and employment.

The centre, in partnership with other agencies, has accurately identified services which are targeted at parents and carers who are potentially at risk of social isolation and exclusion. However, services within the centre are not systematically recording their impact on users, and the lack of data from the local authority does not enable the centre to plan effectively. In addition, the centre's work to engage with the wider community and those families who are considered 'hard to reach' is at an early stage of development. The current centre membership is quite low and there are many families living in the community who are not accessing the centre's services. The local support workers based at the centre are responsible for processing all referrals which is helping the centre connect with families who are not currently using the centre's services. Working in partnership with parents and carers, the teenage pregnancy support worker and Home-Start outreach worker are seeking to assess the families' specific needs and to use this information to shape the centre's provision.

All staff from commissioned services that were observed provide a warm, welcoming and secure environment in the sessions that they run. Strong and trusting relationships are being developed between parents and carers and the staff. Several parents commented that the centre provides a hub of information, care, guidance and support and is where they come for help on a range of issues.

The range of activities and services meets the needs of most users appropriately. For instance, the newly formed 'Mini Kickers' is proving to be increasingly popular and has excellent retention rates. It is supporting the important role of fathers in the care of their children and aims to encourage fathers to engage positively with their children. The centre works effectively with the childminder network coordinator who is supporting and encouraging local childminders to develop expertise and share resources and to provide improved consistency of care and learning.

*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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Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Leaders, managers and staff are motivated to seek further improvements and are increasing their effectiveness in focusing the centre's efforts on its priorities. The leaders have faced significant challenges while re-structuring takes place. The centre has further challenges ahead before it gets into a steady state. There are appropriate performance-monitoring systems in place to assure the work of the commissioned services. However, these are in their infancy and have yet to be embedded. The centre staff have a 'can do' attitude and are focused on improving outcomes for all children and families. In this respect, the centre provides satisfactory value for money. The members of the management advisory board are not sufficiently informed to challenge the work of the centre. There are plans in place to revise the arrangements as, currently, not all stakeholders, including parents and carers, are represented. Currently, the board does not play a major role in shaping, challenging and improving the centre overall.

The arrangements for safeguarding children and users are satisfactory. Staff are trained in ensuring users' safety, including child protection and the use of the Common Assessment Framework. Staff are alert to the needs of individual families who are encountering challenges and difficulties, and respond promptly and sensitively when referrals are made. Families experiencing crises are supported within the centre. Staff ensure that families access appropriate services swiftly through good links with other agencies.

The centre found it difficult to evidence whether the number of people registered at the centre is increasing because data collection has only just begun. However, the centre is aware that it is currently not engaging with a large proportion of the community, particularly the Asian community.

The local authority does not provide data for all of the national indicators. However, the centre has overcome this by linking in to health professionals who share their local knowledge with the centre to help to target services which are prioritised for the most vulnerable. Staff, partner agencies, and parents and carers make some contributions to the evaluation process. However, evaluation of the centre lacks consistent and secure evidence, including information from commissioned services,

of the impact on outcomes for children and families. A new data collection system is in place which is assisting the centre to analyse its impact on users' outcomes.

Positive steps taken to include children and families are helping the centre to begin to engage with those from the wider community, including teenage parents. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those identified at risk of developmental delay receive appropriately targeted support in partnership with their parents and other professionals. The centre signposts to specific activities to address children's developmental needs. The centre's policies and procedures underpin the centre's focus to promote the understanding and the importance of inclusion for all.

*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>3</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 range of provision</b>	<b>3</b>

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

Not applicable

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Queen Street Children's Centre on 10 and 11 August 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us. Your views were very helpful to the inspection team. We agree with you when you told us how welcoming and helpful the staff are at the centre. We think that the range of services and activities on offer is helping you to improve your parenting skills and enabling some of you to train and gain confidence. We think that those of you who are experiencing difficulty in your lives are well supported to make your families and children safe and healthy. We also know that the centre has helped some of you who have experienced real difficulties in the past to be much more confident and able to look forward to a brighter future.

We watched you thoroughly enjoying the activities, such as 'Tummies to Tots', where you talked to each other and played with your children. A few of you have volunteered to help in the centre, which has been invaluable in developing your self-esteem and skills. Those of you who made your comments known spoke of the centre and its staff with high regard. However, we think it is a pity that not enough people in the area are taking advantage of the activities on offer.

You told us that one reason why you like coming to the centre is because of the well-trained, helpful and friendly staff who provide services from the centre. They try their best to help you to make improvements to your lives. They expertly help you to decide on the services and activities that you need in order to make improvements to family life. They then work well with other agencies like the health service and social services to make sure that the help is just right for you and your families. Some of you were keen to tell us that, if you had not received help from the centre, you would not have been able to train. Some of you said how grateful you were that the staff had helped you to access courses to help you gain employment. The local authority is improving the way it governs the children's centre so that the management advisory board can provide more challenge to the centre. At the moment there are not enough of you on the management advisory board and not all of the agencies that provide services in your community are represented. We would like to see more of you on the advisory board so that you can influence how the centre is run.

The centre leaders have been successful in safeguarding the families who use the centre. Leaders do not yet check well enough how the activities on offer are leading to improvements, both for you, your families and also for the community overall.

We have asked the centre to make some improvements. We have asked staff to make sure they are supporting the whole of the community and developing the membership of the centre. We would like more parents and carers to get involved in decision making and the management of the centre. We have asked the centre leaders to improve the range of information available to show how the centre is

meeting the needs of children and their families, and to look at ways to improve their evaluation of the centre's work and the difference it is making to families in the community.

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