

Inspection report for The Sure Start Children's Centre in Bentley

Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	383560
Inspection dates	18–19 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Rajinder Harrison

Centre leader	Andria Simms
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Bentley West Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Bentley West Neighbourhood 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.

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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 maintained primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, centre staff, members of the management group, and a range of providers, parents and carers, volunteers and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at sessions at the centre and other sites. They looked at relevant documentation including the centre's operational plans, self-evaluation, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

The Sure Start Children's Centre in Bentley is a Phase 1 centre designated in 2005 that serves an extensive urban population in the West Bentley area of Walsall. The centre serves communities that live in one of the 14% most deprived areas of the country. It offers most of its services from the main site but some healthcare provision is located in the area's health clinics. The centre offers provision in two nearby satellite centres, the local youth centre, and in local churches to maximise the services offered and a significant number of families also use the centre regularly from further afield. The area served by the centre is socially very mixed and highly populated. A relatively high number of properties are council-owned. An above average proportion of families claim benefits as the incidence of worklessness, at 24%, is above average and increasing. The vast majority of families, at 74%, are of White British heritage. Of the remaining 26%, around 12% represent a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds with no significant groups prevalent. A high proportion of children from the reach area enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities that are well below those expected for their age. Within the area the centre serves, there are significant levels of extreme poverty, unemployment, poor health and low levels of literacy and numeracy.

The children’s centre is part of a federation that comprises Bentley West and King Charles’ Primary Schools and the children’s centre. This federation shares a governing body that has oversight of the centre’s work. The centre offers a range of health and social care, family support services and registered childcare for up to 52 children aged up to three years. Crèche facilities are arranged to support activities on site.

Education for children aged between three and four years in the Early Years Foundation Stage is in Bentley West Primary School on the same site as the centre or through other schools in the area.

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 families

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

This is a highly effective children’s centre. It provides a very welcoming and safe environment for all its users. Leadership and management are outstanding. All staff ‘go the extra mile’ to help every child and adult, who achieve exceptionally well in their learning and their personal and social development. Staff listen very carefully to users and personalise provision to meet their needs. Highly effective teamwork ensures the centre achieves the challenging targets set to improve the health, safety and well-being of the community. Families are extremely appreciative of the centre’s work and its positive impact on their lives. A typical view expressed by one parent is, ‘Staff treat you with respect – no one judges you or looks down on you for how you live. This is the only place where they care about me; it has changed my life forever.’

Leaders model outstanding practice and set high standards for others. Expectations of all staff and families are very high; a strong belief that nothing is too much trouble inspires confidence and a sense of purpose in the community. The centre is making an extremely positive difference, particularly to the lives of those children and families most disadvantaged by economic and social circumstance. Leaders are accurate in their self-evaluation. The centre is highly self-evaluative regarding its performance and identifying areas for development. It sets itself high standards for

achievement, leads by example in its high aspirations for the community and as a result demonstrates an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement.

The outcomes for the vast majority of families are outstanding because provision is highly effective. Families learn to lead healthy lifestyles through the excellent advice they receive, for example, on healthy eating and regular exercise. Family workers support ante- and post-natal clinics and parenting courses so that productive links are established early and maintained sensitively, thus pre-empting any crisis where possible. The friendships forged through such regular contact encourage parents and carers to support each other, take on responsibilities and become more independent and self-reliant. Parents and carers engage positively in activities to strengthen emotional resilience and family well-being. Courses enhance their academic and vocational skills as they gain qualifications in literacy, mathematics and childcare. This contributes very well to future economic security of a large majority of families. In the last year over 30 adults moved closer to being independent of benefits. The outcomes for children who use the centre are very good. They have excellent opportunities to learn and develop their confidence and independence. The gap between children from poorer backgrounds and the rest is narrowing successfully. Award ceremonies, displays and newsletters celebrate achievements most effectively. Adult users feel this gives them a strong sense of purpose.

The centre's popularity is due to the highly effective promotion of its services and benefits, particularly through home visits and referrals from partner providers. As the centre's use increases, many sessions become oversubscribed. Centre staff organise additional provision by working creatively with volunteer organisations, to identify new venues where families can meet. Wherever parents and carers request services, the centre strives to respond, for example with more parenting sessions. Assessments of individuals' needs are conducted very sensitively, ensuring parents, carers and children receive the right help promptly. Equality of opportunity underpins the centre's work very effectively and discrimination is tackled exceptionally well. Families know that they will have the help and guidance they need, irrespective of their background; early contact with newcomers helps them feel welcome in the area. More confident users champion the centre's work well; many take up volunteer positions and progress towards qualifications that lead to paid positions. Users consider the centre a '...brilliant place to go for help and advice, to gain confidence and self-esteem and to make friends'. The centre has met many of its targets this year including increasing the engagement of families with the most needs. Its overall performance and the improving picture in many areas of its work reflect the centre's excellent capacity to improve further.

Parents and carers say they feel very safe at the centre and say it is their first point of contact when they face difficulties. Highly-skilled partners identify the needs of potentially vulnerable families at an early stage and intervene appropriately, safeguarding the users' health, safety and well-being. Procedures are robust and staff work hard to foster harmonious relationships within the local community. Adult users are very active in developing and supporting the centre's work. They have many good opportunities to voice their views, support as volunteers and have

representation on the governing body. The multi-agency professionals' group and governors lend their expertise and support and continually challenge the centre to secure better outcomes for users. Partnerships are of high quality and mutually beneficial to all who use or provide the services. While data are generally readily available, the centre does not always have the level of detail it needs at both a local and national level, for example the age profile of teenage pregnancies in the reach area, to target services even more effectively.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Draw up the data required to target services more effectively for all groups.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

The centre addresses users' feelings of isolation and low self-esteem very effectively. Parents and carers articulate very confidently how the centre enables them to take control of their lives; as a result, many feel they can tackle problems more easily. Typical comments are, 'I couldn't have managed without help from the centre when my baby was diagnosed as having special needs. Here I can discuss problems without fear – staff have helped me become a better parent', and, 'It's helped me relate better to my children and cope with family problems so my children have a better life'. Activities buzz with excitement and anticipation as adults and children learn to play together and have fun. For example, the 'Cradle Club' gave children the space to explore toys and books and experiment with glue and paints while mothers enjoy adult talk with their peers. As one mother said, 'It's great to just get out and meet other mums and learn from each other. It's something to look forward to each week.'

Families benefit from the centre's very good provision to promote healthy lifestyles. Health visitors, family workers and others help parents and carers learn, for example about the benefits of breastfeeding and regular exercise. Weaning and healthy-cooking sessions are well attended; these help children have a healthy start in life. Buggy walks and other outdoor play encourage parents and carers to adopt good habits. Children have healthy meal choices at the centre and childhood obesity rates, by the age of six, have fallen substantially in the area. In over 100 pregnancies last year where mothers smoked, over a quarter ceased smoking permanently. Through home visits and attendance at baby clinics, centre staff identify health and safety concerns promptly. Mothers experiencing depression are supported well by health services and other providers and centre staff provide additional support to help mothers gain confidence and access services most effectively.

The excellent services offered in the centre ensure families are safe. Child protection is given high priority. Children and their families feel very safe at the centre.

Incidents of accidents on site are rare because the centre follows the local authority's guidance and ensures that all agencies and volunteers act accordingly to safeguard children's safety and well-being. Families in crisis and seeking urgent assistance are protected quickly with multi-agency support where necessary. As all partnership providers use the Common Assessment Framework to monitor cases and share information, families and children, especially the looked-after children, benefit exceptionally well. The fire service is alerted to carry out home safety checks for any families identified as at risk and resources such as fire alarms, fire guards and stair gates aid safety at home. Parenting courses help parents and carers secure better relationships, behaviour and home safety for their children and help them manage their stress and distress if problems arise. Regular sessions on home and road safety remind parents and carers of everyday hazards and consequently emergency hospital admissions among children under five have fallen markedly in the last year.

Behaviour is very good. Mutual respect between staff and families ensures open, honest relationships. Children are at the heart of all that the centre does and every parent and carer is encouraged to raise issues and concerns, suggest ideas for future activities and promote the centre's work in the community. Key groups, including fathers, have successfully organised a number of activities to support the community. The centre belongs to the community and this engenders pride, confidence and ambition.

Children are very well prepared for school through high quality learning experiences and extensive interactions with staff. Children have fun socialising with others and play and explore independently inside and outdoors. They make very good progress in their personal development and adopt excellent hygiene and eating habits. Children's speaking and listening skills improve rapidly because parents and carers are shown how to talk and share books with them. The early identification of children's needs, for example any physical or emotional difficulty, enables professionals to act quickly in supporting families so more children start school at an advantage. Children who need extra support with their speech and language, for example, are picked up early by vigilant centre staff and health visitors and referred on to specialist support. Headteachers from partner schools report that children's attendance at centre activities has a very positive impact on the progress they make in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children who use the centre regularly settle into school more quickly than others, make faster progress and attain higher levels in almost all areas of learning.

High attendance at activities indicates the centre's popularity and usefulness. Parents and carers say they have a better understanding of parenting skills and early years education through the many family learning activities, such as 'Stay and Play'. Very good educational opportunities that include literacy and numeracy, childcare and degree courses have helped more than 50 parents and carers to develop relevant skills, work experience and qualifications and move successfully towards employment or training and thus improve their life chances. Parents and carers say that staff help them with, for example, advice on health or managing money. The credit union and the centre's 'savings' bank model good budgeting skills. Through such initiatives

parents and carers learn how to be more responsible in spending money and living within their means. The 'Pass it on' furniture initiative has been invaluable in supporting families to purchase good quality items, restoring self-esteem and promoting a move away from a welfare dependency culture.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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

How good is the provision?

1

Activities and courses provide high quality purposeful learning for both adults and children. For example, 'Stay and Play' groups provide excellent opportunities for parents, carers and their children to enjoy quality time together and demonstrate how the centre is working hard to raise aspirations in the community. Children play and explore in a safe, nurturing environment; parents and carers receive helpful advice and support from many professionals and have valuable time to share experiences with each other and make friends. High numbers regularly attend the many childcare and parenting courses and engage in activities that help them support their children's learning and development. For example, healthy eating and weaning sessions offer important guidance on how best to introduce babies to healthy food. Many adults start in sessions that they feel are non-threatening, for example the various music and play sessions or the Saturday group for fathers and, once confident, progress to more demanding courses that help them support their children's learning as well as equip them for work. The centre provides excellent opportunities for young apprentices and volunteers to become involved in the work of the centre and gain experiences that benefit not just the individuals but the wider community as a whole.

The centre assesses and reviews adults' needs very effectively and signposting to courses is swift and effective. Their progress is followed closely and celebration evenings recognise their efforts and success publicly. During play, assessments focus effectively on children's needs and ensure activities are interesting and relevant to their lives. For example, children engage enthusiastically in creative play and writing,

both aspects identified as relative weaknesses when children enter school. Headteachers from partner schools report that children who attend centre activities are well prepared for school and this has a positive impact on the progress they make in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents and carers are shown how they can follow their child's success through notes in children's daily diaries, and make observations at home. Plans are in hand to adopt common procedures for assessing children's progress in the partner schools and ensuring that provision is of consistently high quality for all children across the reach area.

Outreach services meet the diverse needs of the majority of families very effectively. From referrals through various service providers or self-referrals, home visits provide excellent support, particularly for families that have the greatest needs or those facing urgent crisis. Additional support from providers such as the child development services and high quality, on-site childcare ensure that children's individual needs are identified early and met effectively. Parents and carers are very appreciative of the way centre staff provide supportive guidance and alleviate some of the pressures families face. All groups are supported equally well with centre staff working closely with, for example, schools and youth services to support teenage parents. Outcomes following all home visits are monitored closely. Support for the few families of minority ethnic heritage takes account of any specific individual needs and staff signpost services, for example welfare benefits and other support services, as appropriate.

Strong partnerships with all providers ensure support is prompt and effective in safeguarding children and their families, particularly those in the target groups. Work with housing associations and welfare agencies keeps children safe, warm and well looked after, particularly where families face considerable financial hardship. Partnerships with health and social care are very good and family workers coordinate well with care workers to support families in crisis and tailor support to meet individual needs. This personalised support is a strength that parents and carers value highly.

The centre takes excellent care of children and their families. Care arrangements for children are very good. Parents and carers are informed promptly if centre staff have any concerns. Families from all groups but particularly those most in need report that their lives are better for having had the help they needed, particularly at low points in their lives.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The centre leader is very skilled and experienced. Her inspirational leadership motivates others to give of their best. A team of highly professional staff work together most effectively to safeguard the health, safety and well-being of children and their families in the local community. Leaders are fully focused on raising aspirations and improving users' lives. Leaders have an accurate view of where improvements need to be made. Parents, carers and partner providers are regularly encouraged to express their views regarding provision and this influences changes. Staff are extremely positive about the centre's work and morale is high. Staff are supervised well and supported effectively to improve their practice through robust performance management and professional development procedures. All staff have the necessary levels of training and expertise to carry out their roles responsibly.

The centre sets itself high targets to reach families who need the most urgent support and does this very successfully. Every consideration is given to include all groups in the reach area. Development planning is clearly aligned to local and national priorities. Information from most providers is readily forthcoming because partnership working is well embedded. Centre staff analyse the information they gather effectively to identify development priorities. The very careful assessments regarding the progress of children as they move through the Early Years Foundation Stage shows that children using the centre benefit immensely in their personal and academic development. Data confirm that many more adults are securing skills that lead to gainful employment. Plans accurately reflect the changing profile as the number of families using the centre increases significantly. Occasionally, the analysis of data is not detailed enough to meet every target successfully, for example regarding reducing teenage pregnancies. Robust policies support the centre's work in safeguarding and protecting children. Governors ensure that staff implement stringent checks to secure the safety of children and their families and that every precaution is taken where there are concerns, particularly regarding child protection.

Equality and diversity are promoted exceptionally well. The inclusive centre makes an excellent contribution to promoting community cohesion by providing activities in churches, youth centres, health clinics and schools across the area. Everyone who attends is integrated well. Children with disabilities are supported extremely well and specialist staff work with family support workers to ensure positive outcomes for parents and carers and their children. For example, respite support is available to allow parents and carers time for themselves. Families experiencing exceptional hardship, for example with respect to debt, receive support to cope with legal issues and to budget more effectively. New arrivals are welcomed into the area and any immediate needs identified quickly to help families settle and register with service providers.

Governance is outstanding because the professionals' group and the governing body have a very clear understanding of the issues facing the local community. They are unequivocal in their support of the centre and in holding the centre to account for

delivering the services children and their families need. Consequently, the centre offers outstanding value for money. Leaders review the centre's performance regularly with the local authority and continually look for new ways to reach into the community and to include all groups fully. For example, lone parents are effectively encouraged to attend the centre to improve their relationships with their children and families.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	1

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

The inspectors took into account the inspection findings for the linked provision at Bentley West Primary School and Nursery, which took place at the same time as the children's centre inspection. The inspection judged the school's overall effectiveness as satisfactory.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected The Sure Start Children's Centre in Bentley on 18 and 19 October 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding because it provides excellent support to you and your families.

We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you and the staff. Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak with us, particularly those of you who came on Tuesday to the parents' meeting. It was really good to see so many of you supporting your children's centre so enthusiastically. The centre provides an excellent range of services that are helping you to improve your lives. You appreciate the high quality support from all staff and were eager to explain how well the centre has transformed the lives of some families in the area. We were very impressed with how some of you help in leading activities in the community. It was particularly good to hear that you regard the centre as a very safe and welcoming place, and that you make good friends there. It is not surprising that every day more families are using the centre.

The centre works extremely well with a range of partners such as social care, early years' education, and health providers. It provides excellent support for your children, so that they have a very good start in life. 'Stay and Play', 'Cradle Club' and the breastfeeding groups are very popular and provide excellent opportunities for parents, carers and children to play and learn together. As a result, your families have enjoyed improved relationships and an excellent understanding of how to stay safe, fit and healthy. Many of you benefit from various parenting sessions and high quality education and training courses to increase your employment prospects. Providers work very closely with staff at the centre to offer you the best services possible.

The centre manager and all staff work very hard to support you. The governors and other professionals maintain an excellent overview of the centre's work. The staff are supported extremely well by leaders to ensure the best outcomes for you all. Staff involve you fully in evaluating the activities you attend and this has a positive impact on future developments.

We have asked the centre managers to look more closely at the data they gather to make sure the centre is doing everything possible to improve the services it provides for all groups in the community.

We wish you every success for the future.

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