

Inspection report for Birchfield Children's Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	385915
Inspection dates	26–27 October 2011
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	

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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 registered early years/childcare provision 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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with centre manager, centre staff, users and representatives from the local authority, the local advisory board, and services that use the centre.

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 July 2007 to a community ranked within the 70% most deprived in the country. The local authority has reduced the centres budget, causing the centre to re-structure its staffing. There are further changes that will be made in the future. The centre works as a cluster with Lime Tree Children's Centre and Cherry Tree Children's Centre. The centre is funded by Birmingham City Council. They are all within a mile of each other. This area is referred to as Lozells and East Handsworth. The advisory board and parent forum recently named the parent café is being re-established.

The centre has a 48-place nursery for children aged from birth to five years. The nursery is open each weekday from 07:30 to 18:00 for 52 weeks of the year. Children attend a variety of sessions. The level of skills and knowledge shown by children on entry to early years' provision is low in comparison to that typical for this age.

The centre provides health and family support services, adult training, and early years advice and guidance. Unemployment is high with 40% of households having a dependent child with no adult in the family working and living on benefits. Birchfield also has 50% of all dependent children living in single-parent households. Eighty per cent of the families within the centre's reach area are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest groups being of Pakistani, Indian, Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi heritage.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The centre offers satisfactory support to children and families. Parents and carers describe the centre staff as 'friendly.' They told inspectors that they appreciate the time staff take to get to know them as individuals and how much they feel valued. There are sound procedures to safeguard children and other users. Safeguarding is threaded through everything that the centre does. Parents and carers said that they were happy and secure about the welcome and care that they receive in the centre. One particularly strong feature of the centre is the outreach work undertaken by the resilience team and the joint working linked with the 'team around the child' procedures. They provide invaluable support to more vulnerable families. They are particularly effective in signposting parents and carers to additional services to promote their safety and well-being. There are satisfactory procedures for assessing the needs of users and matching these to the appropriate services.

Children behave well during sessions and make steady progress in developing skills. Evidence from case studies and discussions with users show that aspects of provision are having a satisfactory impact on some children, adults and families. The 'Community Advisory Worker' assists users back into employment by providing one-to-one help and short courses on topics such as writing curriculum vitae. One parent said that she now feels more confident and empowered to gain employment. There are learning activities provided by the local college and at the centre to increase users' knowledge and understanding which is having a positive impact on their lives. The centre seeks the views of users through questionnaires and ongoing discussions. As a result of feedback from users, the centre is increasingly adapting aspects of its

provision. For instance the timing of certain sessions, which has resulted in an increased number of users able to attend. Leaders acknowledge the need to increase the involvement of users and the opportunities they have to contribute to the centre's decision making process, strategic planning and evaluation.

Centre users who made their comments known are unanimous in their appreciation and praise for the improvements to their lives brought about by their contact with Birchfield. The centre has successfully identified some areas of need and shortfalls in provision because of the good-quality information that health and other professionals provide, as well as their own local knowledge of their reach area. This enables the centre to target some groups of people to ensure that their needs are met. However, the take-up of services remains low and the centre's engagement with families from the wider community is underdeveloped. This results in their needs not being identified or met. Consequently, the equality of opportunity for users in the reach area is satisfactory. The satisfactory provision is underpinned by sound procedures to assess children and other users' needs and successfully match them to appropriate services.

Governance and leadership are satisfactory and improving. The centre's development plan demonstrates an understanding of the target groups within the reach area and what needs to be achieved. Consequently, the centre demonstrates a satisfactory capacity for improvement. The advisory board has recently been re-established. Its membership includes representatives from partner agencies however attendance at meetings is not regular. There are plans to develop the parent forum which has recently been re-named the parent café. There are limited occasions for parents' and carers' views to be heard and opportunities for them to inform the shaping of the centre's services. Leaders and managers at all levels and all other staff demonstrate a passion and determination to improve the lives of users. There are appropriate and regular systems in place to evaluate users' satisfaction. However, the centre has limited methods in place to evaluate the improvement it has made to users' lives, or the success of its services in meeting local priorities.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the membership of the centre by:
 - reaching out to and engaging with members of the community who are not accessing services, particularly those in most need of intervention and support
 - taking steps to identify and meet their needs.
- Further develop the governance of the centre by developing the advisory board and parents forum to improve the extent to which parents and carers contribute to decision making and provide challenge.
- 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
- with the local authority, further develop systems to record participation rates, attendance levels and reach of services into target groups.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes for children, adults and families who access services are gradually improving. The centre has yet to develop systems to demonstrate how it is improving outcomes. Users benefit from services such as the ante-natal clinic and parent craft led by local health professionals. These sessions are having a positive impact in reducing the number of babies born prematurely or being classed as low birth weight. The number of children in the the Reception Year who are classed as obese has increased and is above the Birmingham average. This is an area of concern that the centre managers have identified in their development plan. The number of new mothers breastfeeding and continuing to breastfeed after six weeks is increasing and is above the national average. This is having a positive impact and is giving babies an excellent start to life. There is a good uptake of vitamins supplied by the centre which improves women's and children's nutrition. This has helped to reduce the amount of users with rickets.

Parents said that they appreciate the friendly, informal atmosphere that the centre provides. Membership of the centre is slowly increasing although it is not fully reflective of the wider community. The centre has very close links with 'Mayfield School' which supports parents whose children have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This provision is supported by additional Health Services such as portage, physiotherapy and speech and language service which also support the work of all three centres.

The centre is a safe and secure environment where users feel they can share their concerns. Effective systems are in place for coordinating support for vulnerable families, including looked after children. Regular meetings and effective communication between centre staff and partner agencies mean that some families who may be at risk of harm and children assessed under the 'team around the child' are closely monitored. As a result those who receive help have good support which has a positive impact on their outcomes. Parents' and carers' written evaluations show that the lives of these families are improved through the effective support from outreach workers. All statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding are met.

Parents and carers enjoy learning with their children at the centre. Children are developing in aspects of their personal, social and emotional development and communication language and literacy and are generally making satisfactory progress. Children are keen to participate in centre activities. Their physical well-being is promoted through the focused 'Stay and Play' sessions. The 'Early Years Outreach Team' with the local schools provide home visits to ensure effective transition arrangements support children as they move on to the next stage in their education.

Parental evaluations of courses such as 'English for speakers of other languages-Health', which helps users develop their written and verbal use of English and has a sharp focus on promoting healthy lifestyles, show that they make a sound contribution towards developing users' knowledge and ability to keep themselves healthy. Parents say that they like their teacher and enjoy speaking English. Parents and carers contribute their views through valuable feedback and evaluations of the services provided. However, there are limited opportunities for them to participate in decision making and the management of the centre. The parents' forum is not taking place.

Users benefit from an increasingly helpful range of courses. For instance, positive parenting programmes help parents and carers manage their children's behaviour. Some users have attained their 'National Vocational Qualification Levels I and II in Childcare' which has enabled them to go onto employment and other opportunities. Case studies show how centre staff assist parents and carers to access other services such as those available through the advice and advocacy support service which gives valuable advice about benefits and housing. The centre successfully recruits volunteers to support activities, including within the childcare provision and the administration of the centre.

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	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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	3
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	3

How good is the provision?

3

The range of services provided in the centre and at outreach sites meets the needs of some of the wider community adequately. Senior leaders recognise that not enough is done to increase the proportion of users from target groups. These include vulnerable children on child protection plans, families moving into the reach area, young mothers particular those from Eastern Europe and lone parents. Some success has been achieved with fathers and grandfathers through the weekly fathers group.

The centre has a system for assessing the needs of all children, including those with

special educational needs and/or disabilities. This assessment is completed at the point of registration and identifies any vulnerability, enabling the family support team to coordinate and provide support at an early stage. However not all users who attend some services are registered and therefore are not assessed.

Children's achievements are celebrated through informal discussions with parents and carers and through the targeted 'Stay and Play' sessions. Parents, carers and adults make satisfactory gains in their learning and development. Parents and carers who met with inspectors explained how their involvement in the centre had built their confidence. The 'Emotional Well Being Group' helps to build confidence levels which help users to engage better with their community. Staff consult with users prior to planning programmes, which successfully build on their prior learning.

Case studies clearly show that the centre is making a noticeable difference to some families in the reach area. Users particularly appreciate the support they receive at times of crisis. The quality of information and the guidance they receive is presented in a way that is accessible for all members of the community.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre's work in providing services is making a difference to the lives of those users who access the centre's activities. In this respect, the centre provides satisfactory value for money. There are appropriate performance monitoring systems in place to assure the work of the centre staff and partners. A strength of leaders and managers is in creating an environment in the centre that is productive for both partners and users. The centre staff have a 'can do' attitude and are focused on improving outcomes for all children and families.

The arrangements for safeguarding children and users are appropriate. Staff are suitably trained to support their role 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 crisis, including domestic violence, are particularly well supported within the centre. Staff ensure that families are provided with a place of safety and are instrumental in ensuring they access appropriate services swiftly.

The number of people registered at the centre has slowly increased from 36% to 40% since January 2011. There is a large proportion of the community who are not accessing services. Health workers work effectively with families who encounter severe difficulties and deprivation and regularly share information with the centre to ensure targeted services are prioritised. The new birth data provided by health partners are invaluable to the centre and have helped the centre to successfully identify some families who are most in need.

The inclusion of children and families is helping the centre to begin to engage with those from the wider community, including those from ethnic minority groups. 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. The centre's policies and procedures are used to promote the understanding of the importance of inclusion for staff, students and volunteers.

The centre is not fully aware of the impact its services are making because of the lack of detailed and informative evaluation. There is no systematic process to ensure participation rates, attendance levels and reach of services into target groups are recorded. This is hindering the leaders and managers from informing future planning. In addition, the members of the advisory board are not sufficiently informed to challenge the work of the centre and they do not currently play a major role in shaping and improving the centre overall. There are also some weaknesses in the centre's self-evaluation which only goes some way to outline the provision organised by the centre. Staff and partner agencies, and parents and carers contribute to the evaluation process. However, evaluation of the centre lacks consistent evidence of the impact on outcomes for 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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
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	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the	3

reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The Early Years inspection of Birchfield Nursery (24 October 2011) was used to help inform the outcomes of this inspection. The Early Years inspection found the quality of nursery provision to be satisfactory.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Birchfield Children's Centre on 26–27 October 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for making us welcome. We would like to thank you for contributing to the inspection by sharing your experience of the children's centre. Many of you told us that the staff at the centre are friendly and you feel safe there. We could see that your children and you, the parents and carers enjoy many of the activities on offer. The centre is effective at ensuring staff have an understanding of procedures for protecting children. Services also work together well to help families who come to the centre during particularly difficult times.

The centre works with a range of partners such as health and education to support children's development and help the adults who use the centre to learn new skills and gain confidence. Children make satisfactory progress in all areas of learning. Some of you told us that you really appreciate the services of the advice and advocacy workers because the support they give in relation to benefits and housing is good. One parent said, 'It made a big difference.'

Staff have produced a written plan which identifies targets for improving the centre's work. Centre staff know that there is still more to do if they are to fully meet the needs of the community by ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to access its services. We have asked them to develop ways in which they can ensure everyone who needs the centre's help receives it. We have also asked the local authority to help the centre understand how well it is doing in improving the lives of children and parents.

Currently there is no active parent forum to inform the advisory board and then to feed into the running of the centre. We have asked the centre to give parents and carers and other adults more opportunities to be involved in making decisions about the types of activities offered by the centre.

I would like to thank everyone who came to talk to us. I would like to wish you, your children and the families who live in the Birchfield area the very best for the future.

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