

Inspection report for Bluebell Wood Children's Centre

Local authority	Worcestershire
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Reporting inspector	Joy Law HMI

Centre governance	Worcestershire Local Authority
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Linked school if applicable	Perry Wood Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if 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 one additional 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 the advisory board meetings.

Information about the centre

Bluebell Wood Children's Centre is on the campus of Perry Wood Primary School. The purpose-built centre was designated as a Phase 2 children's centre in 2008. It has a main site and two outreach sites. The area is served by a number of local amenities such as two community centres, local shops and a sports centre. It also has one church, four primary schools and one convent. Two of the children's centre super output areas are classed as being in the top 10% most deprived wards in England. The ward is made up of a population of 15598 White British and 680 from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The centre provides the full core offer of a range of integrated services that include health, family support, adult training and early years advice and guidance. There is no on-site Early Years Foundation Stage provision. The day-care facilities are provided for children from the local community at local nurseries and there is also a pre-school group catering for children from a diverse range of backgrounds and needs. The skills and knowledge with which children enter the local Early Years Foundation Stage are below those expected nationally for their age.

The children's centre is governed by the local authority. The advisory board 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.

Within the community served by the children's centre, there are three super output areas. The children's centre serves a population of 1004 children aged under five years of which 23.9% are living in workless households and receiving benefits. There are 469 lone parents within the reach area.

Most centre services are delivered from the children's centre. There are designated rooms for family activities including a crèche and activity room.

The centre works closely with cluster children's centres on a number of joint initiatives delivering integrated work within the community. It has established working relationships with other professional services to deliver a universal and targeted programme to meet the local community's needs.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The leadership and management are satisfactory and are supported by a committed staff team that works effectively together and with their partners. The centre provides a safe and welcoming environment for its users, who value the work it does and recognise the positive impact it has on themselves and the lives of their families.

A particular strength of the centre is the partnership working with health professionals which ensure that children and families have access to a wide range of on-site health services. They are engaging well with the services and developing a greater understanding of how to live a healthy life-style. The centre promotes children's learning satisfactorily and activities and resources are of good quality. For example, 'Stay and Play' sessions are used to promote children's social, emotional and language skills which help to significantly reduce the risk of children having language delay on entry to school. Courses such as 'Skills for Life' contribute to building parents and carers' confidence which helps them move on to further learning and employment. As a result, outcomes for children and their families are improving.

The centre has satisfactory arrangements for safeguarding all users. Parents and carers say they feel safe and well supported in the centre and are confident that their children are safe and well cared for while attending the setting. Outreach support has provided parents and carers with information on how to create and maintain a safe environment for young children. Referral procedures and sharing of information between relevant agencies working within and outside the centre are satisfactory. The centre cooperates with key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. However, procedures such as reviewing risk assessments and accident records are not consistently undertaken, the centre's induction procedures are not consistently shared with all agency staff and the number of staff who hold current first aid certificates is limited.

The accuracy of the centre's self-evaluation is inconsistent. Although senior leaders have a relatively secure understanding of the areas for development, the evaluation and improvement planning for targeted support is not sufficiently robust. The evaluation of the centre is largely undertaken by the manager. Consequently, the systems currently in place do not fully enable staff, users and the advisory board to be effectively involved in providing their views, evaluating the effectiveness of the provision and influencing decisions to improve services.

Detailed improvement plans are in place although these lack measurable targets and are not systematically reviewed to monitor progress and impact. The evaluation of the effectiveness of children's centre and the areas to improve is largely based upon case studies, users' evaluation of sessions and staff's knowledge of the families they serve. Managers are fully aware of the need to reach more families, particularly fathers, lone parents and people living in workless households and are developing strategies to address this.

The children's centre demonstrates satisfactory capacity for improvement. Newly introduced systems are becoming embedded although it is too early to measure their impact. The centre manager and cluster manager demonstrate an understanding of the work of the centre and its priorities for improvement. However, the advisory board are less clear about these due to the lack of formal involvement in the evaluation and action planning process. The local authority is supporting the centre manager with implementing the 'Focused Improvement Plan' to ensure the identified areas for development such as targeting of vulnerable groups and target setting for engagement with these groups are being effectively addressed.

There is a commitment amongst the staff to improving the life chances of families in the local community and to promoting equality and diversity. The centre promotes inclusion of all families and this is evident through the attendance at sessions. Staff are effective in ensuring that all children, parents and carers, regardless of background, achieve well and have the same access to a range of experiences.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop the strategies currently in place to target those in need, particularly fathers, lone parents and those from workless households, and help them to access the services.
- Improve procedures and systems currently in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of children by:
 - regularly reviewing accident records and risk assessments
 - reviewing induction procedures for agency staff
 - increasing the number of staff who hold first aid qualifications to ensure at least one member of staff is on the premises at all times.
- Make centre improvement planning more effective by:
 - involving users, staff and the advisory board more effectively to provide their views and influence decision making to improve services
 - including measurable success criteria in the improvement plan against which actions can be evaluated
 - implementing a systematic programme, involving users, staff and the advisory board, to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of development work.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Children's healthy lifestyles are good because they are promoted well by staff. The centre is developing good strategies to promote healthy eating and highlight the importance of good food hygiene. For example, staff support parents and carers in learning about, and preparing, healthy and nutritious food during cooking sessions. The baby massage sessions are well received and well attended. As a result, attachment between parents and their baby are strengthening. Subsidised swimming for parents and their babies help them overcome the nervousness of taking their baby swimming and promotes the importance of safety and physical activity for their children.

Parents and carers talked about how their health and well-being have improved and how this has had a positive impact on their ability to become better parents and carers. For example, parents and carers have been supported through dealing with domestic violence as a result of the close partnership working with the centre's family support workers and the local police.

Children and users say that they feel safe at the centre. Participation in first aid training and a course on safety has provided parents and carers with information about how to create and maintain a safe environment for young children. The centre, in collaboration with partner agencies, is effective in identifying and responding to the safeguarding needs of children and their families. Case studies featuring family

support workers illustrate how effective their support is in helping parents and carers to become more confident and successful in managing their family lives. The use of the Common Assessment Framework for recording and coordinating support programmes is consistent. Children with child protection plans are satisfactorily supported. Staff are involved in 'team around the child' and child protection meetings, and work closely with most professionals to support the family in meeting their child's needs.

Partnerships with the adjacent early years settings and local primary schools are developing well and are effective in improving outcomes for those children reached by the centre. As a result, Early Years Foundation Stage profile data show a trend of improvement. This is a result of the local authority's intervention to narrow the gap between the lowest 20% of children and their peers, in the achievement of 78 points in personal, social and emotional development, and communication, language and literacy. Strategies such as 'Nursery Talk', 'Every Child a Talker' and 'Language for Learning' have been used effectively during sessions such as 'Stay and Play' where parents and carers are actively encouraged to contribute to their children's learning. Users benefit from the centre's book lending scheme which encourages parents and children to gain confidence in reading.

Users benefit from staff who provide strong role models that successfully support children's positive behaviour, and a culture of respect is evident throughout the centre. Parents and carers say they feel included and comment on the difference that the centre has made to their confidence, aspirations and achievements as well as their children's progress and development.

Volunteers, many of whom are parents or carers, regularly enjoy helping with the centre's activities, for example, they help facilitate children's 'Stay and Play' sessions. Evaluations of activities, discussions with parents and carers, and individual case studies provide positive feedback on the difference that activities and support have made to parents' and carers' own and their children's well-being. Through attending training they have learned new skills which have improved how they interact with their children. Parents and carers talked proudly about how the centre has helped build their confidence and how they have developed academic skills such as literacy and numeracy. As a result, some are gaining qualifications and moving on to further education.

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	2
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 users 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 users contribute to decision-making and	3

governance of the centre	
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The assessment of the needs of families within the reach is satisfactory. Family support workers work creatively and flexibly to meet the needs of children and their families and are successful in supporting them. They assess the complicated needs of families who may be vulnerable due to their circumstances. They work with families directly or engage the appropriate service to meet a specific need, acting as advocates for users. Parents and carers are satisfied with the services and support they receive.

Provision for learning and development is satisfactory for most children, but is stronger for those who attend the adjacent early years setting, and particularly effective for the small cohort of adult users who attend regularly. The centre supports parents and carers who wish to become volunteers. They attend induction training which covers aspects of health and safety and safeguarding. Support workers have successfully improved outcomes for teenage parents and their children. For example, they have helped them obtain benefits, acquire a home, move onto further education, and are now volunteers supporting and encouraging other teenage parents. Another user talked proudly about how they had achieved level 1 and 2 in English and how they were moving on to college to follow their ambition to become a health visitor.

A coordinated approach between parents, support workers, speech and language therapists to promote children's communication and language skills has resulted in a significant reduction of children being at risk of having delayed language skills on entry to school. Achievements are celebrated through photographs and children's artwork displayed on notice boards around the centre and outreach sites, and certificates of achievement and attendance are awarded to adults.

The use of the Common Assessment Framework is securely embedded. Partnerships with other agencies ensure that assessments of all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are accurate. The satisfactory range of services provided includes outreach work to families, such as lone parents, and sessions within the centre, such as those with speech and language therapists.

The children's centre has successfully engaged with some fathers as a result of the labour and birth sessions run at the centre. However, the centre has not implemented sufficient effective strategies to engage fathers in a wider range of opportunities to learn more about how to support their children's learning and development.

Transition arrangements for children moving on to early years provision and school

are developing well. The children's centre works closely with the adjacent nursery and local pre-school to ensure parents and children are supported well when moving from one setting to another. The headteacher described the links with the centre as 'invaluable' in helping the nursery to build on the work done by the family support workers, particularly those families in crisis. Case studies show that the early intervention and transition arrangements are making a difference to individual families.

Early intervention, together with care, guidance and good multi-agency working, ensure that families have personalised support. This includes one to-one guidance and advice in the centre or at home, family support and specialist health services. There are clear programmes in place to promote the health and social well-being of users, including a strong emphasis on providing emotional support to boost their confidence and raise their self-esteem. For example, the 'Family Links' nurturing programme which has a strong focus on understanding and promoting emotional development as well as behaviour management techniques. The centre works successfully with family support teams and other agencies to meet children's individual needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
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	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The senior leadership team are developing a stronger awareness of where to focus the centre's improvement activity. Parents and carers say that the centre is 'most welcoming, very helpful and supportive'. Professional supervision is in place and held every four to six weeks to review work being undertaken with families, working with colleagues, administrative duties and training to ensure that their work is effective. All staff have continuing opportunities for training and many are developing their skills and knowledge for the benefit of the centre.

All staff feel valued, and managers respect the contribution each makes to improving the life chances of users. Consequently, the effective work of the centre has created a safe, friendly environment where there are high expectations of its users. The centre offers satisfactory value for money. There is some sharing of resources across the clusters which enables the centre to have a wider choice of resources such as toys and books. Training is purchased for the whole cluster, therefore making the training more cost effective. The presence of health partners such as midwives and

health visitors, Jobcentre Plus, Relate, Citizen's Advice Bureau and adult learning within the centre, serve users well. However, the centre, which at times remains unused, and closes at 4.30pm each day, is not used to best effect to promote value and best serve the local community's needs.

The advisory board includes a cross-section of people representing a range of interests, such as educational providers, the local authority, the health service, and parents and carers. The governance and accountability arrangements are clear and mostly effective. Partners have an understanding of their roles in supporting and developing the provision and ably challenge the centre manager. There is good sharing of information across all stakeholders regarding the services provided and areas to improve. However, there are no formalised systems in place for members to express their views and to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the centre's work. There is a shared frustration between members regarding the lack of families currently accessing the services available.

Provision is of satisfactory quality and helps to improve outcomes for children, parents and carers who come to the centre. The centre is successful in breaking down the barriers for users whose circumstances make them vulnerable and ensuring equality of access to services. For example, users report how the work of the centre has helped them to feel less isolated. Staff successfully ensure that the Common Assessment Framework is used effectively so that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive the services to which they are entitled.

Diversity is valued satisfactorily within the centre. Welcome signs and leaflets in different languages are displayed within the setting and a translator is available when required. The centre provides dual language books for families and resources that represent the demographic of reach area. The centre is accessible for adults and children who may have a disability. Effort is made by centre staff to work with families in need, including those who are hard to reach.

Partnerships, in most cases, are of a high quality and a particular strength of the setting because collaborative working is at the heart of the centre's ethos. These services, together with the home-visiting outreach work have increased the attendance and take-up of services by members of the local community. The centre holds a weekly childminder drop-in session and these are well attended. The centre manager regularly attends this session to gain the views of the childminders and to ensure that the centre meets their needs. The childminders are part of an accredited network and are often used to provide respite care for families who are facing times of challenge.

Staff understand their duty to safeguard every child. Satisfactory procedures and protocols for sharing information, together with good partnership working, ensure that children and families at risk and in need are prioritised for support. All appropriate policies and procedures are in place. However, risk assessments and accident records are not routinely reviewed and evaluated, and the induction policy is inconsistently applied with agency staff.

The vetting of staff is secure, and they are well trained. The centre's staff are aware of key safeguarding policies and are vigilant in identifying and responding to any potential dangers that users may encounter. Staff are effective in promoting the on-going safety, emotional health and well-being of children and their families. However, the number of staff who hold current first aid certificates is limited. The well resourced provision provides a safe environment that is appreciated by users and partner agencies.

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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
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	3

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

The children's centre has links with an adjacent early years setting to which staff signpost children and families. Perry Wood Primary School (134922) was inspected in November 2010. The inspectors judged the quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision as good and meeting the locality's needs well. The inspection report for this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Bluebell Wood Children's Centre on 17–18 February 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. 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 a satisfactory range of services that are carefully tailored to meet your particular needs. Those of you who spoke with us said that you feel the centre is supportive and staff are 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 meet 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 value the centre and use the services regularly.

Staff listen to what you have to say about the centre and what you need. However, parents and users are not yet fully involved in making the important decisions about the provision of services. The centre offers a satisfactory range of services and activities which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals.

Those of you who use the centre are now much more able 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 an around your home to keep your children safe. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy by encouraging mothers to breastfeed and by giving advice on weaning babies onto solid food and preparing healthy and nutritious meals.

The parents and carers we spoke with are particularly proud of their achievements. These ranged from becoming better parents and carers, gaining qualifications and entering voluntary or paid work because of the skills they learnt at the centre.

The children who use the centre are also well catered for. This means they settle well into the local nurseries and make good progress because they have benefit from the centre's services. The staff at the centre encourage you to engage in play with your children from a very early age at sessions such as 'Stay and Play'. You told us how much you and your children enjoy the activities you access at the centre and the positive effect these are having on you and your families.

To develop further the work of the centre, we have asked the centre manager and local authority to devise ways to increase the uptake of users, particularly fathers, lone parents and those from workless households so that they can benefit from what

the centre provides. We have asked them to improve procedures and systems currently in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of children by regularly reviewing accident records and risk assessments. We have also asked them to review the induction procedures for agency staff to ensure clear and consistent child protection procedures are in place. In addition, we have also asked the centre leader to increase the number of staff who hold first aid qualifications to ensure at least one member of staff with a first aid qualification is on the premises at all times. We have also asked the senior managers to make the centre's improvement planning more effective by involving users, staff and the advisory board to provide their views, evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the setting and to influence decision making.

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.