

Inspection report for Oldbury Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Sandwell
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Lavender Farm Nursery EY339394

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.

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

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

Information about the centre

Oldbury Sure Start Children's Centre is situated in the centre of Oldbury. It is a phase one centre serving a community ranked within the 70% most deprived areas in the country. The centre was designated in November 2006 and provides the full core offer. It delivers a range of integrated services that include health, family support, adult training and early years advice and guidance. The local authority commissioned a local nursery to provide early years childcare on behalf of the centre.

Oldbury Children's Centre covers the wards of Langley, Bristnall, Rood End and Oldbury. The centre manager also has responsibility for West Bromwich and Tipton Sure Start Children's Centres. The local authority holds the centre to account through strategic management. The lead agency for the children's centre is Barnardos. The centre has an established advisory board.

The population of the reach area is 3,352, of which there are 1,249 children aged five years and under. The percentage of workless households and those dependent on workless benefits is below average. Children start nursery with skills, knowledge and abilities which are below those expected for their age. The population is predominantly White British and Asian, with an expanding and increasingly diverse population from minority ethnic backgrounds. Many families do not speak English.

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

Oldbury is an inclusive and welcoming children's centre run by a committed team which aspires to serve its community well. Parents speak highly of the centre as being a place where they feel safe, secure, supported and listened to. It is raising the aspirations and increasing the confidence of adults by providing practical help and support for parents and children to help them achieve better futures. As a result, outcomes for children and their families, although satisfactory, are improving.

The recently appointed manager is skilled and knowledgeable. She has a clear vision and commitment to build on the sound foundation shaped by the previous manager. Particular strengths of the centre are the partnership working with health professionals and the wider community. Families receive good care, guidance and support.

The centre is particularly successful in its targeted work to support children and families who are in most need of support. Children and families are safeguarded well as a result of the effective inter-agency working, and well-trained and knowledgeable staff. The one-to-one support and attendance at sessions such as 'The Family Links Nurturing Programme' help parents understand and manage their children's behaviour. Parents report increased confidence and a positive difference in their skills.

The centre promotes children's learning satisfactorily. 'Stay and Play' sessions are used to promote children's sound social, emotional and language skills. These reduce the risk of children having language delay on entry to school and enable them to settle and make friends quickly. English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes contribute to building parents' confidence as they develop their communication skills. This helps them in supporting their children's development and also enables some to move on to further learning and employment. However, the centre does not have a suitable system in place to assess routinely parents' individual development needs. Consequently, the number of parents known to be accessing

training opportunities is limited.

Users' engagement has continued to increase as the centre has become firmly embedded within the community. The centre is successfully reaching most of the isolated and potentially vulnerable families. Although a varied range of activities is available, the infrequency with which some of these take place reduces their impact.

Inclusion is central to the vision of the centre and staff have a commitment to promoting equality and diversity. Users feel welcomed and have confidence in the staff, with whom they develop warm relationships. Parents are confident to approach staff and talk freely about any problems or issues they face. They comment on the positive impact the centre has had on their lives. As a result, children's and families' lives are improving.

Community cohesion is a strong feature of this centre. For example, the centre has successfully engaged members of the community in supporting each other, such as through the 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' (ESOL) classes run by volunteers. Families are supported and signposted to services to help them improve their economic stability or independence, and a small proportion take up opportunities to progress to training and adult education programmes. However, the centre's tracking systems to monitor the uptake of these opportunities are under-developed.

The centre has had a turbulent year with no manager in post for seven months and is currently going through a tendering process for the management of the centre. In addition, staffing has been restructured. However, during this time, services have continued to run seamlessly. An advisory board is in place. It includes parents, but not all key partners are represented. Attendance at meetings is sporadic and not all members are fully clear of their roles and responsibilities.

The centre's self-evaluation was undertaken by the previous manager and is broadly accurate. Revised improvement plans are being prepared by the new manager with an appropriate focus on identified areas of weakness. Activities are monitored and evaluated. However, the systems are not sufficiently robust to ensure that staff, parents, partnership agencies and the advisory board share and use what they know to plan accurately and target resources. Leaders and staff are committed to bringing about sustainable improvement and demonstrate satisfactory capacity to do this given the achievement to date.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Identify parents' individual learning and development needs through routine assessments and increase the number of parents who access training and employment.
- Use tracking, monitoring and evaluation of services more effectively to plan and shape services to meet the community's needs.

- Improve the effectiveness of the advisory board so that it is able to support and contribute effectively to the development of the centre's services through:
 - increasing membership of key agencies and partners
 - ensuring good attendance at meetings
 - improving members' knowledge regarding their roles and responsibilities.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre is focused on improving the health and well-being of families. Outcomes overall are improving. Parents and children develop a sound understanding of healthy lifestyles through sessions such as 'Fab Tots' and 'Cook Well' sessions. The partnership working with the maternity support team, health visitor and midwife ensures that parents have access to a range of antenatal and postnatal services and information, such as breastfeeding, weaning and feeding routines. Parents value these sessions and report how they have enabled them to feel more confident in dealing with their children's needs.

Good procedures are in place to ensure that children are safeguarded. Staff have secure knowledge, are well trained and adopt very safe practices. They work effectively with key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. Those on child protection plans are very well supported. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is implemented effectively. Initial assessments are undertaken on each newly registered child at the centre and action plans are implemented to meet children's individual needs. First-aid courses, including one in Urdu, 'Safe at Home' sessions, and engagement with the local fire prevention services and police help raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities. Parents confirmed that they feel more able than they had been previously to keep their children safe from accidents.

The varied range of activities for parents and children to play, have fun and learn together enables them to develop skills that will help in the future. A good range of resources and activities to promote children's understanding of the wider world is available, such as dual-language books and celebrations of cultural events. Many sessions are run by multi-lingual staff. The use of interpreters ensures families are included and have their needs met. The setting supports children and families with disabilities suitably. Parents talked confidently about how supportive staff are and how their lives would be very different without the centre's help.

The centre provides a satisfactory range of early years activities and works closely with other early years settings to promote children's learning and development, particularly where specific needs have been identified. However, not all providers are consistently sharing what they know about children. 'Stay and Play' sessions provide parents and children with opportunities to socialise in a safe and secure environment and focus on developing children's personal, social and emotional skills, and language development. Children's profiles are in place. However, these are not used consistently and effectively to assess children's progress and to plan for their next steps in learning. Staff encourage parental involvement in their children's learning

both within sessions and at home. Consequently, they gain a greater understanding of how to support their children's learning. However, this practice is not consistent. Parents are given resources to extend their children's learning at home, although this varies across settings. Schools report an increase in parents' attendance at school events. The changing and transient population, including many families who speak no English, means that many children enter early years settings with skills, knowledge and abilities at levels well below those expected for their age. Consequently, children's learning and development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is frequently below average. The gap between the outcomes for the most vulnerable groups and others is only narrowing very slowly.

Fathers speak positively about how the centre has helped them care for their children. They attend sessions, such as 'Stay and Play', with their children and develop their understanding of how to promote children's learning. A few fathers, who became volunteers, have successfully moved on to employment.

Parents say they feel 'included' and 'listened to' and comment on the difference that the centre has made to their confidence and achievements as well as their children's progress, development and behaviour. Although there is no parents' forum, there are satisfactory levels of involvement of parents through the advisory board to ensure their views are put forward and their suggestions are considered.

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	2
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

Assessments when families first register with the centre are good. However, ongoing assessments of adults' needs, particularly related to their learning, development and aspirations, are less well developed. The changing demands placed on the centre, particularly as a result of the increasing population of families who do not speak English and those whose circumstances have made them most vulnerable, mean that resources are heavily, and appropriately, targeted to provide one-to-one support.

This limits the resources available for the wider range of families accessing the centre. Family assessments following referrals from health and other services are timely and thorough. For example, maternity and family support workers undertake assessments for all families they are visiting for the first time prior to developing individual support packages. An electronic system is used effectively with all two- and three-year-olds to identify speech and language delay.

The centre is a welcome and valued provision. Staff are sensitive to the particular needs of their community and are successfully increasing the number of families accessing the centre. They use a range of strategies to engage families, such as monthly newsletters sent to all registered families, and leaflets and posters at venues such as all pre-schools, clinics and schools. In addition, parents are given information during all home visits made by the health visitor, maternity and family support workers. Consequently, the centre is reaching all groups and engaging with the majority of families within the centre's reach. However, the infrequency of some sessions means that not all families' needs are sufficiently met.

Most staff demonstrate a good understanding of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and promote children's learning and development adequately during sessions. Children's profiles are not used effectively to record progress and do not systematically link to individual children's learning and development. Parents talked about their increasing confidence in playing with their children, developing their speech and managing their behaviour. Annual events take place to celebrate achievements.

Parents are signposted for advice and support to enable them to access services, such as housing benefits, health services and childcare provision. This has resulted in outcomes for a minority of families greatly improving because they have accessed benefits which have lifted them out of poverty. Some parents have successfully moved into learning, training and employment. However, the centre is unable to confirm how many have accessed these services due to the lack of robust tracking systems.

The centre's engagement with volunteers and the local community is a particular strength and has been a major contributory factor towards sustainability and improving outcomes for children and their families. Parents who became volunteers and were supported through training are now commissioned to work at the centre. Consequently, parents' economic stability and independence have improved as a result of the opportunities the centre has provided. However, the centre is fully aware that it is heavily dependent on volunteers to provide the current level of service.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leaders are well qualified and experienced. Their expertise and skills are being used efficiently to ensure that the satisfactory service improves across the centre's operations. Quality assurance, through quarterly reviews, is undertaken to ensure the services are operating in line with the local authority's requirements. The quality of practice is variable and, therefore, outcomes for users overall are satisfactory.

An advisory board is in place, although representation from a range of services has reduced. Partners are keen to share information and are engaged in supporting and developing the provision. The centre recognises that there is a lack of rigour in monitoring and evaluation to ensure the ongoing analysis of the reach area is accurate and resources are consistently targeted where they are most needed. They are also aware that systems to evidence the impact of the services they provide are underdeveloped.

Staff take appropriate action to ensure children and families are safe. For example, they undertake daily risk assessments and complete attendance registers. All staff are well trained to their level of responsibility and there is rigorous attention to vetting and recruitment procedures.

The children's centre is an integral part of the community it serves. Its central location means that the community is well aware of its presence and, therefore, has easy access to the services provided. Strong community involvement has contributed effectively to the high number of families within the reach accessing services. However, due to the lack of formal monitoring and tracking of families which the centre refers to other services, outcomes for these families are unclear.

Equality is promoted and diversity is celebrated. However, the range of services currently provided has a satisfactory impact on outcomes for users. Consequently, the service provides satisfactory value for money.

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	3

which secure improvement in outcomes	
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	2
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 reach area 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 Lavender Farm Nursery (EY339394) is commissioned by the local authority to deliver early years provision on behalf of the children's centre. The nursery is situated in Moat Farm Infant School and was inspected as part of the school's inspection in December 2009. The inspectors judged the quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision as good and effectively meeting the locality's needs. The inspection report for this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Oldbury Sure Start Children's Centre on 2 and 3 November 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 children's centre ensures that families are provided with a satisfactory range of services. Some aspects of the centre's work are stronger than others. For example, the partnership working with health professionals and the wider community means that you receive good care, guidance and support. The centre is particularly successful in its targeted work to support children and families who are in most need

of support. They ensure you are safeguarded well. Staff are well trained and work effectively with agencies to offer one-to-one support and provide 'The Family Links Nurturing Programme' to help you understand how to manage your children's behaviour. You told us how your confidence has grown and the positive difference it has made to the way you have developed your skills as parents.

The centre promotes children's learning satisfactorily. You told us that you enjoy the 'Stay and Play' sessions and that you are learning how to help your children learn. Those of you who attend the English for speakers of other languages classes say that these are helping to build your confidence as you develop your communication skills. This helps you in supporting your children's development and also helps some of you move on to further learning and employment.

Those of you who spoke to us said that you feel the centre is supportive and staff are kind and caring, and give you advice. Most importantly, you said it helps improve your lives, particularly for those of you who are feeling isolated. The centre supports and signposts you to services to help you improve your economic stability or independence, and a small proportion of you take up opportunities to progress to training and adult education programmes. However, the centre does not have robust tracking systems in place to monitor the uptake of these opportunities.

An established advisory board is in place and includes a cross-representation of members including parents. However, some key partners are not represented, some members do not regularly attend, and not all members are fully clear of their roles and responsibilities.

Your children's centre staff team meets regularly to discuss the centre's work and to plan for improvement. All staff place importance on you and your families and provide a listening ear for you. They are keen to create a warm and welcoming environment where you feel at home and are able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you value the centre and use the services regularly.

The centre uses a range of information to find out what your needs are. Staff listen to what you have to say about the centre and what you need and do their best to adapt the services to meet your needs. The centre offers a satisfactory range of services and activities which are led by a range of skilled and dedicated volunteers and professionals. The number of families engaging with the centre is increasing.

Those of you who use the centre are now much more able than you were previously, to keep you and your families safe. Staff provide you with access to training and home visits and give advice on how you can prevent accidents in and around your home to keep your children safe. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy by giving advice on preparing healthy and nutritious meals.

Those of you we spoke to are proud of your achievements. These ranged from becoming better parents, through gaining qualifications, such as first aid, and to

entering voluntary or paid work because of the skills you learnt. Children develop good relationships with their peers at the children's centre.

We have asked the local authority and staff team to identify adults' individual learning and development needs through routine assessments and increase the opportunities for parents to access training and employment. We have asked them to increase the robustness of tracking, monitoring and evaluation of services and use these effectively to plan and shape services to meet the community's needs. We have also asked them to improve the effectiveness of the advisory board so that it is able to support and contribute effectively to the development of the centre's services through increasing attendance of key agencies and partners and improving members' knowledge regarding their roles and responsibilities.

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.