

Inspection report for Wren's Nest Children's Centre

Local authority	Dudley
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Wren's Nest Primary School URN103823
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Child Support

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 met with senior managers and leaders, health professionals, representatives of the local authority, community partners, family support workers, early years professionals, and parents.

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

Information about the centre

Wren's Nest is one of 20 children's centres in the borough of Dudley. It is a phase one centre which was designated on 16 March 2007. Centre services are provided at Wren's Nest and a neighbouring community resource centre. The centre's core purpose is provided through a range of integrated services that include health, family support and outreach work, adult training and sessional day care provision. The head of centre reports to the local authority, which is responsible for the governance of the centre. A board of governors, the Community Committee, which includes parent representation, supports the governing body.

Statistical data indicates that families living in the reach area experience significant social and economical disadvantage. The percentage of workless households and those dependent on benefits is above the national average. Children start nursery with skills and knowledge that are well below the expected levels particularly in personal and social and speech and language development. The population is predominantly White British.

The centre is located on the site of Wren's Nest Primary School and the two settings work in partnership. Wren's Nest Primary School and Child Support sessional day care provision are inspected separately and their reports can be accessed via ofsted.gov.uk.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Wren's Nest is a good children's centre. Membership of the centre includes a large majority of families living in the area. Senior leaders are eager to engage with the minority of families who are not currently using centre services. All parents who made their views known stated they are 100% satisfied with their involvement in the centre. One parent said; 'I find the centre really useful and staff are always friendly and approachable'. Staff are enthusiastic and confident in their roles. They feel empowered through training and well supported in taking significant responsibility for key areas of the centre's work. Outcomes for families made vulnerable by their circumstances are good and improving.

The care, guidance and support offered to families are excellent. All families who made their comments known spoke with very high regard about the work of the centre and the wonderful support they receive at the hands of skilled and caring staff. This view is reinforced routinely in parent and child evaluations of services received. All leaders and staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures. They are well versed in safeguarding protocols and procedures and ensure that any concerns are promptly shared with relevant agencies. The centre provides many good quality activities and strategies to improve families' health and well-being, learning and development, and especially their economic stability. These all contribute to families improved health and help them enjoy and achieve. The centre knows the needs of its community and target groups well because partnership working with health professionals and those from the voluntary and private sectors is strong. The bulk of its work is with the most vulnerable families; target groups, such as lone parents, young parents, and survivors of domestic abuse, who are well represented in the membership of the centre. Families have made invaluable contributions to the development of services through their suggestions and in their roles as governors and volunteers.

Equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination is central to the work of the

centre, which is why increased access by hard to reach and potentially vulnerable groups are at the heart of their improvement plans. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, given their low starting points. This is as a result of the good quality care and learning within the centre and the systematic support and guidance provided to children by staff and speech and language therapists.

Leaders and managers at all levels and all other staff demonstrate a passion and determination to improve the lives of families. Regular monitoring is carried out by senior leaders within the organisation. Leaders understand all too well the challenges faced by families living in the area, and the centres strengths and areas for improvement. The centre's capacity for sustained improvement is good. There are regular opportunities provided to evaluate families' satisfaction with the good quality range of provision and strategies to capture user engagement are effective. Self-evaluation is accurate, but it does not include enough contributions from families or key partners. Leadership and management arrangements are effective but the role of health partners in the strategic governance of the centre is limited.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Widen stakeholder representation within the centre's governance arrangements.
- Further increase the involvement of families and partner agencies in the centre's self evaluation process.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The large majority of families living in the area regularly attend this warm, welcoming, safe and secure centre. For these families outcomes are good and improving. Powerful case study testimony shows that the centre is working effectively with many families who experience severe challenges, including mental health issues and domestic abuse. Trusting relationships are established and interactions between staff and families are respectful and considerate, because the ethos and values of the centre are well embedded. Family support is improving parenting skills and reducing incidents of harm or injury to children through links with child protection and child in need plans. The centre makes effective use of data to contribute to the evaluation of outcomes for the most vulnerable families in the reach area.

Obesity rates are higher than expected in the area. The centre has effective partnerships and joint initiatives with health professionals to tackle childhood obesity. For instance, the 'Food Dudes' programme is being piloted in the centres' partnership school. Engaging with families to promote healthy eating and nutrition, children receive rewards for their positive steps towards a healthier lifestyle. Many families benefit from free gym membership, keep fit classes, 'Get Cooking' workshops, and weight management classes. Children's health is actively promoted as they attend 'mini movers' and take part in daily physical exercise and healthy eating at the

centre. The uptake of breastfeeding at birth and beyond is increasing. Breastfeeding buddies are well used within the centre and provide valuable support with helping mothers initiate and sustain breastfeeding. One parent who attends the centre champions breastfeeding at a number of children's centres in the area. She is passionate about the benefits of breastfeeding and together with trained buddies is helping to improve the status of breastfeeding in the community.

Effective partnership working with the onsite speech and language therapy assistant and innovative and creative working ensures that children with identified communication, language and literacy delays have access to good quality onsite support to aid their development. The 'Time for Twos' sessions support children to develop their language, communication and social skills. One parent commented; 'the Time for Twos project is excellent as it gives the child an extra step towards nursery and getting them into a routine of learning.' All children make good and in some instances outstanding progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive high quality support and they too make good progress. There is secure evidence that the lowest performing children are increasingly closing the gap between them and their peers. However, children's attainment by the time they leave Reception remains below expected levels.

The Citizens Advice Bureau provides invaluable advice and support to families significantly increasing receipts of benefits and entitlements and helping to reduce debt. Several parents said that their economic stability and independence had improved greatly as a result of the opportunities the centre has provided.

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	2
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	2
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	2
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The quality of care, guidance and support provided is outstanding. Impressive provision is targeted at those residents in the most deprived areas or those who need most help because of their life experiences. The centre offers a good range of support for all groups, and the majority of members regularly use centre services.

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used effectively to support families in times of difficulty and crisis. They access exceptional care, guidance and support in good time to meet their needs. Regular meetings and effective communication between centre staff and partner agencies mean that families who may be at risk of harm and children assessed under the Common Assessment Framework are closely monitored. Parents' written evaluations show that the lives of these families are improved through the support from outreach workers. Families are made aware of how to keep themselves and their children safe through a range of visits, workshops, training opportunities and home safety initiatives. Provision is delivered in partnership with many community groups and private, voluntary and statutory organisations. Strong partnership working with health and social care professionals has ensured that the needs of families made vulnerable by their circumstances are quickly identified and are well met. Case studies and data show that high quality and timely services and support make a discernable difference to the most vulnerable families.

Families play a vital role influencing and developing services. For instance, the 'Dads and Lads' group promotes positive relationships between fathers and their children. They have benefitted from participation in well planned, exciting and challenging residential activities. The 'Drama' Group was established in response to families' suggestions and wishes. Parents are developing a wide range of skills and improving their confidence as they work on the production and filming of a drama highlighting the dangers associated with alcohol.

Levels of worklessness in the area are high as is the levels of debt experienced by some families. These aspects are well provided for through outreach services, debt and financial management support, adult learning and development opportunities and the centre's volunteering scheme. Parents report increasing levels of parenting skill and confidence and improved self-esteem as a result of their engagement with services.

The range of accessible learning and development opportunities provided is impressive. Many parents have achieved nationally recognised qualifications through the effective support and encouragement provided. Several parents have been inspired to go on to further education after completing courses at the centre. A few are undertaking university degrees or similar. Parents improve their literacy and numeracy skills and take up rates for these courses is good. Parents, carers and volunteers benefit from successfully attending paediatric first aid, and all volunteers complete relevant safeguarding training. The flower arranging classes, led by a community volunteer, are very popular and are providing parents with useful skills and knowledge which some participants are keen to use to gain paid employment. 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	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Families regularly refer to the centre as, 'the heart of the community'. Its success is as a result of the strong leadership shown at all levels of the organisation. Leaders have a shared understanding of the needs of the community and share aspirations and ambitions for all families. The governing board supports and challenges the work of the centre well and has a clear commitment to improving outcomes for children and families. Professional supervision of staff and regular one-to-one meetings with managers promotes the shared values of staff and their ability to meet organisational expectations. Teamwork amongst staff is excellent and morale is high. Parents are well represented on the governing board. They play a vital role in the governance of the centre in relation to decision-making. However, health partners are not represented on the board. Centre leaders are aware that securing health's contributions to the governance of the centre is an important area for development.

Safeguarding arrangements are cohesive and strong with examples of exemplary practice. Staff work successfully with the school to ensure children and families are safeguarded. The suitability of all staff and volunteers is closely scrutinised in accordance with the centres well-considered and thorough safer recruitment procedures and processes. All staff, leaders, governors and parent volunteers are trained in safeguarding matters. Many leaders including parent representatives have attended safer recruitment training, and most staff attend training on safeguarding and child protection related subjects each year. As a result, children and families receive prompt attention and support when concerns arise. Effective partnership working with social care partners including women's refuge services has helped to reduce the number of reported incidents of domestic violence.

Parents and carers play an active role in the life of the centre and user engagement is strong. Leaders and staff take their responsibilities to ensure that the centre is fully inclusive very seriously and staff do all they can to meet the individual needs of all children and families. The Parents Forum provides regular opportunities for the views of families to be heard. The centre's successful engagement with parents has been recognised with a 'Leading Parent Partnership Award'. Leaders and staff accurately evaluate the effectiveness of the work of the centre. However, families and key partner views are not yet embedded in the centre's self-evaluation process. The centre's Improvement Plan identifies key priorities and targets for the centre together with clear success criteria. Partner agencies share priorities and high expectations. Highly cohesive packages of integrated support are provided which

improve outcomes for children and families and these are supported by detailed case studies. Resources are managed effectively between the partner agencies to ensure services are flexible and are provided based on local need. The centre provides good value for money as outcomes for the large majority of families living in the reach area are good and improving.

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	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
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	2
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	2

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

Wren's Nest Primary School inspection report dated March 2010.

The school was judged to be satisfactory overall. Provision, leadership and management and the Early Years Foundation Stage provision were all judged to be good. Care, guidance and support were judged to be outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Wrens Nest Children's Centre on 9–10 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

The centre provides a hub of services for children and families who live in its area. The agencies supporting children and families work extremely well together and are committed to making sure that your children get the best possible start in life, by providing you with terrific support and showing that they care what happens to you and your children. You told us how the centre is making a positive difference to your lives and those of your children. We found that the centre is supporting you in many ways and helping you to keep your children safe from harm and to be healthy.

Your children who attend the centre's provision are prepared well for starting school. The centre and its partners are also providing good opportunities to help adults learn. Those of you who spoke to us told us how the centre has transformed your lives and has had an enormous impact on the well-being of your families.

The staff at the centre are extremely well qualified and experienced professionals. You explained how well staff support you, both in raising your self-esteem and confidence, but also in providing practical help and advice. The centre provides an interesting range of activities which are helping to improve your parenting skills. Several of you told us you believe your contact with the centre has been life changing.

The headteacher at Wren's Nest Primary School, the centre manager and governors are passionate about improving the outcomes for children and families in the locality and are constantly looking for ways to improve the service the centre provides. For example, establishing effective relationships with families has significantly improved children's attendance at school. Those of you who speak English as an additional language or are new to English receive effective support and can attend classes where you can learn English.

Those of you who access courses at the centre are able to use the crèche facilities, knowing your children will be very well cared for and will have fun! The leaders and managers know what needs to improve to make the centre better for you, and they have the skills to carry out their plans effectively. The governing body includes parent representatives. It has the capacity to support and challenge the leaders well. The centre supports groups who are potentially vulnerable very well, such as very young parents, parents of children with additional needs and families in great difficulty and crisis. It is successfully reaching those who are most in need.

We have asked the centre to do two things to improve it even further for you. The first is to improve the extent to which families and partner agencies can contribute to evaluation of the success of the centre. We have also asked senior leaders to involve health partners on the centre's board of governors.

Thank you to those of you who met with us to tell us your views and especially those who invited us to view your flower arrangements. Thank you for contributing to the inspection. Your comments proved invaluable to inspectors. It was great to see that fathers are contributing strongly to their children's care and activities in the centre.

Inspectors think that with the centre's encouragement many of you now make a positive contribution to the centre's services and the life of the community.

We wish you and your families every success for the future.

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