

Inspection report for Balsall Heath Children's Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	383623
Inspection dates	1–2 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Daniel Grant

Centre leader	Alison Moore
Date of previous inspection	N/A
Centre address	10 Malvern Street Balsall Heath West Midlands B12 8NJ
Telephone number	0121 464 6349
Fax number	0121 4646354
Email address	alison.moore@stpaulstrust.org.uk

Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	St Paul's Nursery EY216824
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	St Paul's Venture (out of school club) 591000

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.

Report published: December 2011



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre leader, other senior leaders and staff. Discussions were also held with members of the advisory board, representatives from the local authority, parents, and key partner professionals. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Balsall Heath Children's Centre is a phase one centre and was first designated in March 2005. The centre developed from a Sure Start local programme which commenced in 2001. It meets its core purpose and provides a wide range of supporting services, incorporating a crèche, drop-in health support, adult courses and workshops, legal advocacy, home visiting service, counselling services and language interpretation. The centre provides services from a single main site and several satellite venues to a population made up from a broad range of social circumstances who live in areas within the 10% most deprived in the country. The number of families attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is high, as is the proportion of children aged under four years who are living in households where no-one is working. The majority of families within the area served by the centre are Asian with about a quarter of White British heritage. Approximately 30 different languages are spoken within the community.

The centre is governed and managed by St Paul's Community Development Trust, a charity which has provided services to the community in Balsall Heath for almost 40 years. The centre has an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and parents and carers. The centre offers full childcare provision which is subject to a separate inspection. Most children enter early education with a range of skills well below those expected for their age.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Balsall Heath Children's Centre meets the needs of its users extremely well. A very large majority of families in the Balsall Heath area are registered with the centre. Attendance rates at the centre and its many other early years services in the community are high. The centre offers outstanding support to families and young children. The staff team understand thoroughly the needs of each individual and make it their highest priority to use this information skilfully and sensitively to improve outcomes.

Families visiting the centre enter a warm and inviting atmosphere, where they are welcomed and made comfortable by the very focused team of staff. The centre is a hive of purposeful activity, which attracts families because of its long-established and very positive reputation in the community for making real differences to people's lives. Users are empowered to make important decisions and changes which have significant, lasting benefits for their whole family and the wider community.

The local authority provides the centre with very detailed and valuable data. The centre rigorously collects and analyses evaluation materials from users and partner organisations. Very careful attention is given to seeking the views of children and using this information creatively to shape new services. The centre's approach to quality improvement is dynamic and progressive, with very good use being made of independent consultants to analyse the impact of the centre's work. This analysis reveals that the quality of life for centre users and the community is improving significantly across almost all measures of success. The centre has exceeded the measurable targets set for it by the local authority.

The centre leader is a very effective manager, supported well by senior colleagues, the staff team and fellow professionals. The staff team are motivational, experienced and well trained. They have a very good understanding of the needs of the local community and are positive role models because of their outstanding work. A very high priority is given to the promotion of health, well-being and development of communication skills. Early intervention with additional support is provided effectively where the need is identified. Each activity is thoroughly well planned to include

elements relating to all aspects of the Every Child Matters outcomes.

The wider community support the work of the centre and benefit from attendance at annual carnivals, quarterly family open days, volunteering schemes and holiday clubs. The centre also has very close links with a local history society which provides centre users with imaginative experiences to illustrate what life was like in Balsall Heath in Victorian times. The centre successfully supports parents and carers to become mentors for new parents as part of its valuable long-term strategy to promote sustainable benefits, improved outcomes and greater social cohesion. Equality and diversity are promoted very effectively.

Partnership arrangements are very strong and very effective with almost all key partners. The local health partners use their expertise to ensure all services are thoroughly integrated and very well coordinated. Users benefit from a very broad range of courses and programmes to both stimulate further interest in child development and parenting and to increase their employability. A significant number of parents and carers who are new to the area value the help they receive to understand how to access the full range of health and education services available. Partnership arrangements with Jobcentre Plus are not fully developed. Parents seeking support to find paid employment receive good advice from centre staff and other key partners but Jobcentre Plus do not provide a direct service through the centre.

Safeguarding arrangements are particularly thorough and are used very well to ensure users and staff feel safe at the centre, at home and when out in the community. The centre provides a very good range of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses at a number of locations. These are very popular and many parents progress to advanced courses.

The centre has an outstanding capacity to improve because there is a very sharp focus on performance to ensure families with the highest needs receive high quality support. In addition, the whole staff and leadership team are self-critical and constantly search for ways to do things better.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- For Jobcentre Plus to provide better access to support for parents seeking help to find paid employment.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Families benefit from the centre's very effective work to offer an outstanding range of very well integrated services. Strong collaboration with health visitors enables users to receive immediate, professional advice on many issues including

breastfeeding and weaning. This has resulted in a 95% increase in the sustained breastfeeding rate since 2009. Very effective working with many partner organisations ensures the obesity rate in Balsall Heath is lower than the city average.

Children are very well prepared for school because they make outstanding progress from their starting points in developing skills that will help them in the future. Transition is supported well and Early Years Foundation Stage profiles show much improvement and the gap between the lowest 20% of children's scores and the rest is successfully being narrowed. The centre works very effectively with speech and language experts helping parents and carers to increase their awareness of the importance of listening and talking during critical periods of their children's development. One parent said, 'We sing happy songs at the centre and take books home to practice our reading'.

Services are accessible to all users and are very well attended. The centre uses interpreters very effectively to make sure that staff communicate accurately and sensitively with all parents and carers. Healthy lifestyles are promoted very well at the centre in sessions such as 'Walking Matters' and 'Cook and Taste'. Parents and carers benefit from highly effective encouragement and guidance from the centre staff which helps them make important decisions about immunisations, exercise and diet. The centre has successfully obtained several community grants to develop outside areas for activities such as growing vegetables.

The Common Assessment Framework is very well understood by the staff. Evidence shows there are sustained improvements in the engagement with young parents and fewer accidents in the home. This has resulted in significant improvements to the quality of life for all users and particularly so for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and for children with disabilities. Targeting of services for users who are particularly vulnerable or who have high and complex needs is precise and very effective. Fathers are targeted effectively and very thorough initiatives have been introduced to ensure the centre remains attractive to fathers, such as the 'Dads audit' which involved a group of fathers conducting a mystery-shopper visit to the centre and reporting on its appeal and appropriateness to deliver services for fathers.

Evidence from evaluation shows significant and sustained improvement of outcomes for children on child protection plans and those looked after by the local authority. Children learn to manage and take risks safely through play and exploration. The centre is a particularly safe place and users feel secure during their time there. Children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and each other. Many parents improve their parenting skills and have confidence to share any concerns with staff. The centre welcomes students on placements because their additional perspective adds further value for families.

Parents and carers make excellent progress in their personal development, well-being and self-confidence. Adult education and family learning sessions enable them to make positive and significant improvements to their lives. This learning has greatly increased their skills and encouraged many to volunteer at the centre where they

gain very useful accredited qualifications and work experience. Many continue with further learning and those seeking help to find employment receive useful support from the centre staff.

Parents who felt isolated within the community thrive at the centre and begin to demonstrate very positive behaviour and develop positive relationships. Users are very well supported to express their views about how the centre is managed and are very active in their work on the advisory board.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	1

How good is the provision?

1

The centre and its partners work very effectively to ensure assessments of the challenges faced by families or individuals are precise and well informed. Staff keep very detailed case records which helps them personalise support and measure the impact and value of the separate courses and programmes completed. The centre has very well-integrated services which are highly effective in ensuring arrangements to monitor and promote good health and help children learn and develop are outstanding. There are highly personalised approaches to targeting courses to ensure users become more successful.

Programmes and services are coordinated very well so that parents and carers can access them at a time that suits them best. The centre has very high expectations of all users and provides a comprehensive range of services which match the changing needs of the community. It is very successful in engaging users, particularly those whose needs are greatest. Staff ensure that programmes are available for users with additional needs or disabilities. One father said: 'This centre has helped me cope with my child's disability. It keeps me going when I get desperate and gives me hope'.

Robust assessment procedures enable the centre to meet users' welfare, health and social needs very well, using high quality and well-targeted services. Rigorous

monitoring and evaluation take account of users' comments about the services to ensure that they are tailored to meet requirements.

The centre and its staff have a significant impact on the improvement of early years services throughout the community. They share their expertise and provide very strong support to help other providers and childminders develop and improve. Participation rates are high and increasing and evaluations are very positive.

Outreach work is very well organised and there is valuable work undertaken to support families in their own homes, particularly families with a new baby who are provided with fully comprehensive details of the services offered through the centre and its partnerships. The health promotion family support workers are very effective at identifying and engaging families in need of support. They are extremely well-regarded by those who use the centre because of their determination to recognise and understand users' needs.

Empowerment and a culture of respect are common themes across all of the services offered by the centre. One parent said: 'As a lone parent with no friends or family, the support workers reached out to me and helped me gain confidence. I now have a network of friends and volunteer as an interpreter'.

Staff are trusted and users have confidence in their professionalism and the outstanding support they give. Families using the centre receive high quality care and the staff team and their partners provide personalised support which is very effective. All users at the centre are recognised for their individuality. They are made to feel special and this promotes well-being and supports the development of individuals and families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The centre has highly effective governance and accountability arrangements, which are highly visible, very well established and understood. Operational management is very effective and fosters a 'can-do' spirit which underpins the centre's success. Strategic planning strongly reflects local and regional priorities and is heavily influenced by a determination to ensure everyone succeeds. The centre and its users work collectively to govern, manage and evaluate the services it delivers.

The centre manager is a determined and inspirational leader who pays very close attention to improving outcomes for users. She makes sure everyone knows how well they are doing and what is to be done to improve. Very close attention is given to analysing data and using it effectively to measure progress and performance.

All staff and volunteers receive very high quality training and support in their work. Appraisals are particularly effective and professional supervision is used to ensure child protection and counselling services are of the highest standards. The centre is performing exceptionally well and is making very good progress towards exceeding the majority of targets set for it by the local authority.

Use of data for target groups facing the greatest challenges is effective and highly developed. The centre leaders, partners and the whole staff team hold great ambition for users. There is rigorous evaluation, searching analysis and self-challenge. The centre fulfils all of its statutory duties, has full support of the community and provides excellent value for money.

The effectiveness of partnerships to integrate services and improve outcomes for families is strong. However, the centre recognises that direct access to support from Jobcentre Plus is not sufficiently developed. At the time of the inspection, centre staff had developed strategies to ensure users were not disadvantaged by this, by providing expert legal advice on welfare benefit entitlements and assisting with transport to help some families attend the nearest job centre for important appointments. The vast majority of partnerships have well established quality assurance and improvement initiatives which make sure they remain highly effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Comprehensive procedures and guidance for safe recruitment are followed closely. The centre works in partnership very effectively with a range of agencies to protect children and vulnerable adults. Strong partnership working with the local fire and rescue service has given many families practical help to make their homes safer. In addition, staff provide good advice and access to expert help for those experiencing domestic violence. All staff have been subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check, have very good levels of awareness and are trained well in child-protection procedures. A very effective community advocacy service provides expert advice and high quality legal representation on a vast range of matters including benefits, debt, housing, family law, immigration and human rights.

Everyone is made to feel very welcome at the centre. Equality and the inclusion of all children and their families are promoted very effectively and discrimination tackled rigorously. Users with high levels of need are targeted very effectively and become the focus of very well coordinated support.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	1
---	----------

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

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

The findings from the Ofsted report dated November 2009 for St Paul's Nursery were taken into account. The nursery was judged to be satisfactory overall.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Balsall Heath Children's Centre on 1-2 December 2011. We judged the centre to be outstanding.

The children's centre provides an excellent range of services that help children and families in the Balsall Heath area. Throughout the inspection, children, families and other users were very enthusiastic in telling us how the centre had helped them.

The centre holds many open days and community events where everyone is invited to visit and learn about the many different things you can do, including the city farm and all of the produce you grow and the wonderful art and crafts produced. The wider-community supports the centre because they can see that it works well.

We were particularly impressed by the case studies that showed the difference that the centre is making. We really enjoyed speaking to you about the ways that things you do at the centre have changed some of ways you do things at home.

We found the centre to have many strengths, including the opportunities for so many of you to get involved in helping your children read, and the actions taken to support you and your children's safety and well-being. The centre is working very closely with many organisations such as health, schools and social care professionals to improve the range of services that are available to you.

We also saw how effectively you are helping to run the centre, both as volunteers and through the advisory board. A very large number of you have benefited from support to improve your spoken English and are making very good progress.

The centre is very effective at helping you to encourage your children to develop their speech and language. It also helps many people to make better choices about diet and exercise which has had a major impact on improving lifestyles.

Children make very good progress because there is a wide range of activities. This helps them to be ready for their move to school. The centre staff make sure they check whether you have enjoyed any courses or sessions in the centre and they respond by making changes based on your comments.

We saw that many of you are able to take advantage of courses that are leading to increased knowledge, skills and qualifications. We saw good opportunities for those of you who want support to get a job and we have asked Jobcentre Plus to make it easier for you to use their services as well.

The centre offers an increasing range of programmes aimed at improving the health of people in your local communities. It is very good at helping new mothers who choose to breastfeed their babies. It tells them about the help available on breastfeeding from parents who have successfully breastfed their own children and know the good things and the concerns from experience.

Some parents explained just how important the centre is in their family's lives. They told us that staff listen to them and help them to get the right help and support. The support is provided quickly and professionals and others work closely together to support families and children. This includes teenage mothers and parents of children with disabilities.

The parents and carers we spoke to described the centre as providing a safe and welcoming environment; they are confident that their children will be secure and well cared for. We found that the care, guidance and support provided for families is outstanding. The centre leader has very strong procedures to make sure that staff and volunteers are well trained and suitable to work with you and your children.

The centre has shown that it is very successful and has made big improvements to the lives of many people. The staff at the centre do whatever they can to make sure that families enjoy themselves and benefit from the courses and groups.

Thank you once again for sharing your views with us. We wish you and your families all the best for the future.

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