

Inspection report for Burnt Tree Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Sandwell
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Tiny Toez Ltd (URN 285024)

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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the chief executive and operations director of the Murray Hall Community Trust which operates the centre on behalf of the local authority. They met the local authority's senior officer for children's centres and the centre's manager, senior leaders and staff. They also held a combined meeting with representatives from a wide range of partner agencies including health, education, the police, the library service and a range of early years providers and community groups.

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

Information about the centre

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council has commissioned the Murray Hall Community Trust to operate Burnt Tree Children's Centre and another nearby centre on its behalf. Administration is in the hands of a board of trustees and four boards which have responsibilities for the key areas of service delivery across both centres. The centres work together very closely, sharing key staff, including the centre manager, to achieve economies of scale and coverage of services. Burnt Tree Children's Centre developed from Sure Start provision. It is a phase one centre that has provided the full core offer of services since it was first established in 2003. It employs 20 members of staff covering the areas of early years, family support, community development, maternity support and administration. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age when they first start at the centre.

Burnt Tree is within the Tipton area of the borough. It is ethnically diverse and a recent survey found 23 languages being used in the reach area. Until recently, the predominantly spoken languages were Punjabi, Urdu and Bengali, but a recent influx

of migrants from Eastern Europe has seen a rapid rise in the numbers speaking Polish and Lithuanian. The centre is based in a community that falls within the top quarter of deprivation in England. The area has faced low levels of income and employment, health deprivation, low education and skills achievement, and high levels of crime. Predominant crime issues focus around anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, theft and drugs. The percentage of families receiving benefits is well above the national average, as are rates of unemployment.

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

Burnt Tree Children's Centre provides an outstanding service for young children and families, collaborating effectively with its partner children's centre in order to achieve economies of scale and maximise expertise. The centre is very successful in reaching users and providing services tailored to meet needs. Pockets of the reach area are quite isolated. Outreach here is very effective, but the centre is looking at radical ways in which it might develop a physical presence, such as a play-bus.

Highly effective leadership and committed staff, coupled with outstanding links with a wide range of other service providers, ensure that services are of the highest quality. The manager's clear vision is reflected in the centre's excellent self-evaluation. The commitment of Murray Hall to engage in community development at a grass-roots level gives the centre a radical focus in promoting the rights of its local population, intervening directly on their behalf when necessary. Effective leadership exists at all levels and the centre manager skilfully delegates responsibilities. Middle managers promote excellence in their areas and every member of staff demonstrates a clear commitment to providing excellent services. They have established the closest of working relationships with a range of professionals and community groups so that services are integrated very effectively.

The centre is often used to host a range of meetings and activities, and the sharing of information between agencies is outstanding. The trustees of the centre are local people with a thorough understanding of the area. The boards who oversee the service areas provide challenge and support, while centre users meet regularly so

their views are heard. However, the role of users in actual decision making at a resource and funding level has traditionally been rather limited.

Close professional links are well illustrated by the fact that 80% of family support referrals come from health visitors. Once a user has engaged with the centre, involvement is carefully monitored and, after no involvement for 12 months, personal contact is made to discover the reason. This has sometimes enabled it to address wider family difficulties, often related to isolation that exists for some women in their domestic situations. There is a strong and effective commitment to equality of opportunity and services are highly effective. They support outstanding outcomes for families and their children, promote healthy lifestyles, keep people safe and develop essential skills through maximising opportunities to access education, skills training and employment.

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. The safeguarding of children and vulnerable groups, such as women subject to domestic violence, is outstanding. The highly effective analysis of needs, supported by sophisticated data produced not only by the local authority but also from the centre's own full time data manager, enables it to prioritise very effectively. The pursuit of excellence, based on clear and measurable targets derived from excellent self-evaluation and coupled with highly effective leadership that brings the very best out of staff, gives outstanding capacity to sustain and extend the excellent provision.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen the involvement of centre users in financial and strategic decision making.
- Provide a physical presence for services in those areas of the reach area that are currently geographically isolated.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Children's health is a priority and there are a number of specific health-related activities. Staff work tirelessly for children and families with remarkable success. Specific language and communication deficits are identified through screening children at the age of two, in community languages when necessary. 'Stay and Play' sessions at venues throughout the reach area promote early years' outcomes very effectively. Activities engage all target groups exceptionally well, reflected in exceptional outcomes in personal achievement and progress. The headteacher of a local school said that baseline testing showed that those attending children's centre activities performed much better than those who had not. Some health outcomes, such as numbers of women breastfeeding, reflect rates well above the national average, reflecting the effectiveness of the centre. Outstanding professional links, such as those in mental health, special educational needs or antenatal support, enable families to benefit from very effective services. Maternity support workers provide outstanding services, including sexual health advice. Courses throughout the

year promote parenting skills. Healthy lifestyles are promoted very well through programmes that demonstrate healthy eating, while physical activity is promoted through 'Busy Feet' for children and the 'Young Parents With Prospects', or the 'Community Keep Fit' for older centre users. The centre has a major impact from the outset, with the family and maternity support team undertaking joint initial visits with health visitors. An example of excellent inter-agency working is that enrolment on a parenting course is often a specified part of child protection plans. Outcomes are positive because needs are being met effectively, based on the development of individual support plans.

Parents are unanimous in their praise for the dynamic impact of the centre. Home visits are an integral part of extremely effective services, often supporting child protection plans or the Common Assessment Framework, leading to sustained improvements for most children with plans. Counselling is actively promoted, while the safety of some women and children is supported through active engagement with Women's Aid. The support for women who have been subject to domestic abuse, or who are denied equality of opportunity for cultural reasons, is outstanding and tenacious in its implementation. Children and vulnerable adults are effectively safeguarded and show clear improvement in their confidence and skills. Children with special needs and/or disabilities are very well supported, and partnerships with specialist services allow for personalised support and advocacy.

There are very high levels of engagement. Children obviously enjoy 'Stay and Play' and similar sessions, and their active involvement promotes early learning skills and the development of social skills. The views of parents are sought constantly and some sessions are run specifically at times when fathers who work can take part. The centre employs a full-time worker with specific responsibility for working with men, and over 1000 are registered at the centre. Effective collaboration with schools supports those who start school with skills below those normally expected. Individual 'Learn Together Bags' meet individual needs, helping parents promote their children's learning at home. A centre-based teacher provides expertise there and at other nursery venues, helping workers develop skills of observation and assessment.

The centre runs effective courses aimed at supporting parents who wish to return to employment. Access to training and employment has suffered to an extent by the cut in support being offered by Jobcentre Plus as a consequence of their own budget reductions. A scheme to alleviate the impact of this is being developed, but is not yet fully in place.

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	1

target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	
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?

1

Staff demonstrate tremendous empathy for families and their children. They are totally committed to improving the quality of their lives and, because staff speak most of the local community languages, barriers of language and culture are broken down. Increasingly useful data provided by the local authority are supplemented by the sophisticated information gathered by the centre's full time data officer. This is already leading to targeted provision to address identified needs.

The excellent understanding of the community is supplemented by the outstanding relationships that exist with a wide range of professionals. A large group of service providers met the inspectors, emphasising the outstanding integration of services that has been facilitated by the centre. The high level of coordination in service provision, including home visits, enables needs to be matched to available expertise. It leads to swift and immediate intervention for vulnerable families. Information is shared freely between professionals and used to prioritise services to the most vulnerable. The centre welcomes feedback and uses this alongside its own effective analysis of services to ensure that provision is meeting needs. A priority is raising aspirations, particularly those of women, since the centre has identified that a powerful block to gaining employment is lack of self-confidence, particularly when linked to cultural and linguistic differences. Exceptional services meet the needs of users because the centre is so well informed about its demographics as a result of its data gathering and needs analysis and, as a consequence, all its services are consistently busy. Photographic evidence of events organised by the centre reflects the fun and enjoyment that is often engendered in the events that are organised. Outstanding gains in parenting skills are shown, such as those derived from attending the highly successful baby massage classes.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The centre facilitates a range of highly effective targeted services which include English as an additional language, family support, protective behaviours and screening for communications delay. Young parents are encouraged to access education and services, and supported in developing their parenting skills. The centre also has 109 registered lone parents and a flexible, needs-led approach underpins the effective support given to them. The centre offers a range of immediate support for families in crisis. This includes accessing the food bank, crisis loans, refuge places, emergency housing or clothing and reflects the commitment demonstrated every day to community support and, at

times, involves staff working long hours in order to gain successful outcomes.

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 manager is highly effective, respected by staff, other professionals and parents alike. The leadership team as a whole is focused on effective service delivery, demonstrating a high level of commitment and pride in its work. The centre is highly effective in implementing community development strategies that reflect the commitment of its trustees. Governance and accountability are highly effective and focused on outstanding outcomes for the majority of families. There are extremely strong links between strategic planning, development plans and service provision. However, while there are good opportunities for users to air their opinions, they are currently not fully engaged in strategic and financial planning. Strategic planning, based on data and needs analysis, maximises the effectiveness of provision within the resources available. This has enabled the centre to implement financial cuts imposed by the local authority while protecting staffing and services identified as being key. Targets are highlighted in the team action plan, and other professionals and centre users are involved as partners. The high uptake reflects care in ensuring that what is offered reflects needs, and is reinforced by clear targets that enable highly effective evaluation of all activities.

The inclusion of children and families is promoted very effectively and discrimination is tackled with vigour. Members of all the local communities are welcomed, supported and empowered with tenacity. The centre uses the resources of the local authority to ensure that all the necessary safeguarding checks are undertaken rigorously before any staff are employed. Training in safeguarding and child protection is a high priority and the centre plays a central role in seeking to ensure that children are safe and, where necessary, child protection plans are implemented effectively, as well as working to ensure that victims of domestic violence are protected. This often entails close working with professionals from other agencies and this is highly effective in securing positive outcomes. This collaborative approach is also seen to very good effect in the excellent quality of services for children with disabilities. The centre itself is bright and decorated with lots of examples of activities shown in photographs, posters and the like which present an extremely positive image. The wide diversity of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds is celebrated

and valued. Care is taken to ensure that all the activities undertaken are extremely well organised and supervised after thorough risk assessments have been carried out. Parents and children feel safe and protected and several were able to tell inspectors of how the centre has transformed their lives after they had found themselves in abusive relationships.

Self-evaluation is thorough and effective, while the pursuit of excellence is at the heart of all activities, leading to notable improvements in provision and outcomes. Opportunities for professional development, based on a clear understanding of the needs of the centre and of its staff, promote outstanding outcomes so that the centre provides outstanding value for money and makes a profound impact within its community.

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	1
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

Pre-school provision is provided within the same building as the children's centre by Tiny Toez Limited. There are strong working and personal relationships between staff of the two institutions, including the provision of respite places for the children's centre to support crisis intervention. Ofsted inspected this provision in 2009 and judged it to be good overall with several areas, including safeguarding and equality of opportunity, being outstanding. It is, therefore, making a valuable contribution to the development of pre-school provision within the reach area.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Burnt Tree Sure Start Children's Centre on 13 and 14 December 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We valued the opportunity to speak to a number of you, either in the centre or in your own homes. We would like to thank you for your contribution to the success of the inspection. During the whole of the two days we were at the centre, we did not hear a single negative word about the services provided or the support that it gives to its users.

We also looked at services that are provided at other places, which you again said you valued, and it is clear that a great deal of careful planning and thought has gone into the work that the centre does throughout its area. As a result, what is on offer is carefully matched to need and the evaluation of its work shows that it is very successful in meeting needs. The centre has identified pockets of the locality that are comparatively isolated and where a lack of public buildings has made it difficult to provide services other than those delivered in homes. Inspectors have asked the centre to explore ways in which it might establish some services in such areas, perhaps through the provision of a play bus, or something similar.

It is clear that the centre values the ideas of its users. It seeks positive dialogue with the many other professionals with whom it works closely and responds very well to identified needs. However, the inspectors did find that centre users were not as fully involved with decision making at a strategic and financial level as they might be.

Links with other professional agencies are extremely strong, and centre staff often work alongside people like health visitors or social workers. This is very effective in ensuring that people are safe and able to maximise their use of a range of services. Not only are there very popular events like 'Stay and Play' that operate around the area, there are also effective courses, such as those in developing parenting skills, that many of you told us had been very effective and helped you personally.

The leadership of the centre, under its extremely effective centre manager, is outstanding, and all of its staff are extremely committed to their work on your behalf. They are focused on providing high-quality services that meet identified needs and support the local community. The fact that the centre's activities are so popular and that such a high proportion of people in the area make use of them shows that the centre is successful in identifying and meeting your needs. In part, it is able to identify these needs by the extremely good use of data and through

carrying out careful research, but staff also listen carefully to you and seek to match services to needs at all times. As a result, the range of services is excellent and popular, reflected in the number of people who use them. Activities such as 'Stay and Play', 'Baby Massage' and 'Busy Feet' are popular with those of you with young children, while adults themselves benefit from a range of opportunities. Those which support and develop parenting skills are proving to be very popular, and quite rightly so since the outcomes show the benefits they bring for those who attend. Similarly, the centre works hard to support those of you who want to improve your qualifications or return to work.

From the many conversations we had with centre users, staff and other service providers, together with the evidence we examined on the impact of the centre, it is clear that it plays a major role in supporting you and your children. Equally, it has helped some of you to return to work, or feel safer and more fulfilled in your daily lives. When taking into account the full range of services and the impact they have, the only conclusion we could reach is that this is an exceptional children's centre that it is doing an excellent job in supporting you and your children.

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