

Inspection report for Bidston & St James Children's Centre

Local authority	Wirral
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Reporting inspector	Tim Vaughan HMI

Centre leader	Mrs Teresa Lawton
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
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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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior leaders, front-line staff and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were also held with members of the advisory board, a range of partners, parents and carers, and service users. The inspectors observed the centre's work, accompanied staff on a home visit, visited a range of sites used by the centre and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Bidston & St James Children's Centre is located in the Birkenhead North district of Wirral. The centre has developed from a Sure Start Local Programme and was designated as a phase one children's centre in March 2006. Governance arrangements are through an advisory board reporting to the local authority.

There are nine super output areas served by the centre and each is economically and socially disadvantaged. Four are ranked in the top 1% of the most deprived in the country and the remaining five are ranked in the top 10% most deprived. The proportion of children aged under four who are living in households where no one is working is 60.45 %. The number of families benefiting from the childcare element of working tax credit is 19.71%. A high proportion of local families is from a White British background with 5.83% of families from a range of minority ethnic groups.

The centre provides the full core purpose across two linked sites, half a mile apart. The St James Centre is a purpose built community facility managed by North Birkenhead Development Trust. The premises includes Bidston & St James's children's centre, St James Library, Wirral Metropolitan Neighbourhood College, a community café, an infant mental health service for children's centres commissioned from Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Team (CAMHS) and the Bidston and St James Area Team. The building incorporates a 35-place nursery operated by the children's centre. The linked site is Brassey Gardens Children's Centre. This is a purpose built site providing outreach activities and services including clinics, parenting programmes and drop in.

Childcare is provided by three Early Years settings each operated by the children's centre. Bidston & St.James Children's Centre-Miriam Place Nursery was separately inspected in December 2011. Seedlings at Joseph Paxton was last inspected in February 2011. The third early years setting Bidston & St James Children's Centre operates periodically in support of a specific adult learning course and was last inspected in November 2005. Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with a much lower range of skills than that 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

This is a good children's centre. A key strength is that collaborative work with a wide range of partners enhances the opportunities on offer for local people. Leaders give careful attention to how the centre can add value to the work of statutory, private, voluntary and independent providers rather than compete or duplicate services. This has meant that centre services have become more effectively targeted, integrated and accessible. Good use is also made of a range of sites to deliver activities and reach local families, including those from target groups. For example, funding, information and staff time are very effectively deployed through a range of existing community houses and community centres. As a result, most outcomes for children and families are good.

The centre provides a broad range of services, a very safe environment and good levels of care, support and advice to children and families. One parent said: 'People have got their lives back on track because of this centre.' At times of crisis, families are well supported across a range of needs through family support and strong multi-agency links. The quality of support for women through the 'Freedom Programme' is exceptional because it is transforming individual lives.

The innovative co-location of a nursery, community college and public library within the Bidston St James Centre has meant that the promotion of learning, development and enjoyment is at the heart of the children's centre's work. This has led to increased participation by target groups of families, including greater use of library services and adult learning. Across the three Early Years settings operated by the children's centre and a range of group activities, provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage is very effective.

Quality assurance and risk assessment systems for safeguarding are well established. Staff have a good knowledge of child protection procedures; they are well trained and work effectively with other agencies to co-ordinate family support and to share relevant information.

Equality and diversity are strongly promoted, and children and parents with disabilities are supported particularly well. A range of festivals is celebrated throughout the year and imagery around both main sites used by the children's centre reflect a range of culture, ages, ethnicity and gender, which helps promote the environment as welcoming and inclusive.

The views of children and parents are regularly gathered and used to improve the services on offer. However, centre leaders are well aware that there is no parent's forum, nor opportunities for parents to undertake voluntary work. They are also aware that at present only some families are engaged in the centre advisory board. Nonetheless, overall outcomes and leadership are good and improving and senior leaders, staff and the advisory board are clear about priorities for further improvement. Along with the centre's other strengths, including good partnerships, the centre's capacity to improve further is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the extent to which parents engage in positive behaviour by increasing the number involved in the advisory board
- Increase user engagement by extending opportunities for parents to shape services through a parent forum and through voluntary work

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes for children and parents are good and improving. Families report that they are benefiting from the wide range of opportunities that the centre provides to promote their health and well-being. These include very effective support on breastfeeding, parent-child relationships, healthy eating, oral health and physical activity. As a result, the local rate of breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks has increased by 3.2% and the level of obesity for local Reception Year children has declined by 3%. Furthermore, the level of family engagement with health services has been increased through the provision of on-site clinics for physiotherapy, dietetic and paediatric support.

Families who previously had low confidence and a lack of self-belief told inspectors that the centre has helped them to be assertive and believe in themselves again. This is because there is carefully planned use of evidence-based parenting programmes and specialist staff as well as a broad understanding across centre workers of attachment and well-being. As one parent said, 'Staff get involved in the emotional side of your life and help you'. Another parent commented, 'They feel like an extension of your family.'

Families feel safe when using the centre and are confident to approach staff for support with needs ranging from parenting, social isolation and confidence to depression, substance misuse and personal safety. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework very effectively to assess and plan support for individuals. Outcomes for children on child protection plans are good because families are treated with respect, given high quality access visits and carefully planned help. Through good links to social care the centre knows about each local child on a child protection plan. The progress of children who are in care is effectively monitored and their carers are given tailored advice and guidance. Because of this work, child safety in local homes has increased and the number of hospital admissions has declined over the last two years, including in the most deprived local super output areas.

Early Years Foundation Stage data show that outcomes have improved by 24.9% over three years. Crucially, this increase has occurred at the same time as the gap between different groups of children has narrowed. In the nursery at the St James Centre children make good progress from their starting points and children with special needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress. This is because of outstanding provision and leadership of the setting as well as the support of the centre's Early Years consultant. Most families using the centre are developing their skills through adult learning at the on-site community college and through a range of centre-based group activities. Parents report that this has increased their parenting abilities and their own educational achievement.

Children and families using the centre behave well, have positive relationships and treat one another with respect. Most families say that they are happy with the centre and feel listened to when they suggest improvements. However, there has been a recent reduction in parent members of the advisory board and there is not a parent forum in place. Senior leaders are aware of the need to increase parent involvement in centre governance.

Support provided by the centre helps to promote economic stability. Children are encouraged to be active, inquisitive and independent learners in the range of activities provided. In addition, parents are supported with a good range of advice in securing benefits, budgeting, accessing local training courses and in seeking work. Several parents commented that the centre has helped them to gain new skills and subsequent employment. The number of local people in households dependent upon workless benefits has decreased by 5.4% over the last four years.

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	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.	2

How good is the provision?

2

Staff know the local area well. Through close links with other organisations, they have also developed a good understanding of the local barriers to engagement and achievement. As a result, staff use a range of locations to reach families which are aimed at adding to, rather than duplicating the work already being undertaken by others. This has enabled the centre to increase registrations to 70% and this includes most local children living in workless households. Registration and take-up of services by other target groups are good. For example, a majority of children from minority ethnic groups and all local disabled children are registered and accessing activities within the centre.

Through good partnerships with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies, assessments of child and family needs are comprehensive. Each family visited at home or attending on-site groups or clinics receives effective tailored support. The strong partnership links with health services means that health visitors feel comfortable to suggest to the centre which individual centre worker might be most appropriate to support a family. In addition child psychologists from the on-site CAMHS team offer staff advice about their work as well as support specific families, for example mothers with post-natal depression. At times of crisis, families feel strongly supported. Parents typically commented: 'when I struggled they helped me'. Furthermore, parents experiencing domestic violence feel empowered through the exceptional support provided to them by the centre.

Learning and development are at the heart of the work of the centre. This has been achieved through the accessibility of the on-site public library, community college, group activities and the Early Years settings. Child and parent activities, such as the 'Time to Talk' group are good because they are purposeful and engaging. The personal development and achievement of children, parents and staff are celebrated and a range of new skills and qualifications is being achieved. The children's centre directly provides childcare in three Early Years settings. The largest of these was inspected separately in December 2011 and judged outstanding. The other two settings were judged good when inspected.

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.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre is driven forward by the quiet determination of the centre manager to improve the lives of local children and their families. Staff actively seek partnerships with statutory, private, voluntary and independent sector groups in order to enhance opportunities for local families, particularly target groups. As a result, a range of partners contributes very effectively to centre priorities.

Inclusion is central to the centre's work. Consequently, gaps in attainment, such as that between girls and boys by the end of the Reception Year, are narrowing. Imagery used in displays throughout the centre reflects the commitment to equality and diversity and helps a wide range of people, for example fathers, to feel valued and respected. Community languages are also promoted. Polish families are increasingly engaging with the centre because staff take care to support their needs. Services for disabled children are well coordinated and the centre has a clear understanding of how to improve their life chances.

The centre has a clear safeguarding policy, as well as policies regarding a range of related issues such as home visiting and lone working. Clear information sharing protocols are strongly adhered to and links with social care are very effective. Appropriate vetting and criminal record bureau checks for staff are fully in place. All staff have undertaken appropriate safeguarding training and senior staff have undertaken further safer recruitment training. There is regular discussion about child protection within the staff team and at advisory board meetings. Support on domestic violence is well established and counselling and mental health support is offered to parents to promote their emotional health.

Members of the advisory board play an increasingly effective role in supporting the centre including discussing centre data. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood. As a group, the advisory board is committed to improving the quality of provision and take appropriate action when necessary to support improvements or to question proposals.

Senior leaders systematically monitor and evaluate practice. Data and a good knowledge of other local services are used well to inform development planning. However, there are not yet good opportunities for the engagement of users in shaping services and evaluating the effectiveness of provision. Even so, the care taken to complement and not undermine the work of partners, the use of a range of venues, the co-location with other services at the St

James Centre and the good outcomes achieved, indicate that the centre provides good 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	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures 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.	3

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

Inspection reports and RAISE online reports for local primary schools and inspection reports for three private nurseries were used to inform judgements.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Bidston & St James Children's Centre on 14-15 December 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We spoke to several of you about the centre's work. We really enjoyed chatting with you during your activities, around the centre and in the centre café. You expressed your opinions very clearly and they were very helpful to us – thank you. We were delighted to hear your positive views about how approachable and understanding you find the staff. We particularly liked the comment from a parent who said, 'People have got their lives back on track because of this centre'.

You told us how much you value the activities on offer and that coming to the centre has given you more confidence and helped you make new friends. We were pleased to hear that, as a result, many of you feel less isolated in the community and feel more confident as parents. We found that the centre is helping children to achieve as much as they can. We were pleased to find that parents are also benefiting from the groups being provided by the centre – learning about healthy eating, child development and much more.

The centre works effectively with a wide range of partners including voluntary sector groups. We were pleased to find that the way that the centre keeps children, families and staff safe is good.

We found that the advisory board that oversees the centre is effective. However, we have asked the centre to find ways to ensure that more parents and carers become board members.

We were encouraged to see how hard the centre is working to make sure that it is a place for the whole community. We know how much you appreciate the fact that staff go out of their way to get to know you and your families and visit you in your homes. We can see how the centre is making a positive difference to your lives and we found that the support given to some of you through the Freedom project is excellent.

The staff work really hard to make the centre as good as it can be. We know that they regularly ask for your views so that the centre can find ways to improve. We have suggested that they create opportunities for you to advise the centre through a parent forum and to contribute through volunteering opportunities.

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