

Inspection report for Castle Vale Children's Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
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Centre leader	Fiona Jones
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Castle Vale Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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.

An inspection of the co-located nursery school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, the headteacher of the nursery school, members of staff and professionals from partner agencies. Discussions were held with members of the governing body and advisory board, parents and representatives from the local authority. Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Castle Vale Nursery School and Children's Centre is located to the north-east of Birmingham. Castle Vale estate is a former housing regeneration area, surrounded by major roads and industry. The majority of housing in the area is social housing, the estate has most services and local amenities and families often do not travel from the estate. The children's centre shares the same site as the nursery school. It is a phase two children's centre which began delivering the full core offer in June 2009. The centre's core purpose is provided through a range of integrated services that include health, family support and outreach work. The local authority has delegated responsibility for the running of the centre to the governing body of the school. The centre manager has responsibility for a small staff team and the day-to-day running of the centre. She is line managed by the headteacher and supported by an advisory board which is a subcommittee of the school's governing body.

In April 2012, the centre began operating as part of the Eastwards locality following a reorganisation of children's centres by the local authority. The area has significant levels of deprivation, with over 50% of children receiving free school meals. It spans a total of six super output areas, four of which are in the 10% most deprived

nationally. The Tyburn ward in which the centre is located has the highest percentage of people with limiting long-term illness in Birmingham, 10.3% of five year olds and 20.3% of 11 year olds are classified as obese. The number of adults claiming out-of-work benefits is higher than the Birmingham average and has increased significantly in the last year. A third of children under five are from households comprising lone parents with dependent children. Of the adults in the area, 59% have no qualifications and on entry to early years provision, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age. A large majority of families in the area are of White British heritage, there are a few families from a number of minority ethnic groups and from eastern European countries. Of the 775 children under five in the centre's reach area, 770 (99.3%) are registered with the centre.

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

Castle Vale Children's Centre is a good and improving centre. It has some outstanding features. Its work in keeping children and families safe, particularly those suffering domestic abuse, is exemplary. Excellent partnership working ensures that families benefit from early intervention providing support before they are in crisis. This very popular centre is a key part of the community and, together with partners, provides a wide range of cohesive and well-attended provision. Users speak enthusiastically about the support the centre has given them and the difference it has made to their lives. As one parent said, 'I can't praise the centre highly enough, they make things so much less frightening the first time around'.

The centre knows the local community well because it uses partner and local authority data to identify the different groups and uses assessment sensitively. As a result, it has a good understanding of individual and local need. Governors, members of the advisory board and the centre manager work closely to ensure that the centre continues to respond to local needs, while the local authority re-organises children's centres in the locality. Good performance management arrangements are in place and staff have a high level of expertise supported by good professional development. The centre has been proactive in seeking parents' views and has used them to adapt

services to more effectively meet the needs of families. However, there are insufficient numbers of parents engaged in the governance of the centre.

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 from the staff. The centre's inclusive approach means that families from different backgrounds feel welcome and are able to enjoy the wide range of provision on offer. Parents of disabled children and those who have special educational needs feel particularly well supported.

Good progress is being made in children's learning and development due to the focus given to the work by the centre and the encouragement given to parents to support their children's learning. Children engage in a variety of activities, they have fun, play together and learn new skills. Parents accessing learning provision have shown improvement, learnt new skills and had a good time in the process. However, opportunities for parents to engage in adult learning, leading to employment, are under-developed. A few parents gain employment and go on to further training through the support of the Job Club.

Safety is of paramount importance for the staff in all their dealings with children and families using the centre. Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. Families using the centre have an excellent understanding of how to ensure their children's safety. Risk assessments are of good quality and all staff and volunteers are subject to appropriate checks. Children are well behaved and confidently explore their environment and interact with one another. Health outcomes are improving for most. New and prospective mothers benefit from a full range of services which effectively promote their health and well-being. Promotion of healthy lifestyles for children is an integral part of all provision, although there is currently insufficient evidence of this having an impact on reducing obesity rates of children starting school.

The vast majority of parents surveyed expressed their satisfaction with the children's centre provision. Centre leaders have a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and where further improvement is required. As a result, the centre's overall effectiveness and capacity to improve are good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Together with partners, provide adults with accessible training opportunities to enable them to achieve their aspirations.
- Involve more parents in the decision-making and governance of the centre.
- Build on current health initiatives of healthy eating and exercise in order to support even better outcomes for children and families.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre works well to improve outcomes for its families. Highly effective partnership working ensures that those families in circumstances that make them vulnerable receive excellent, highly individualised support. Parents feel extremely safe and consider their children to be very safe when using the centre. For many families, the centre provides a safe haven, this is particularly true for those who have been subject to domestic abuse. As one parent said, 'I would walk from the other side of Birmingham to get here because they have been so supportive'. There is significant and sustained improvement in outcomes for children on child protection plans, and use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is an integral part of the centre's work with families. Parents demonstrate improved parenting skills which are making a difference to them and their families, as a result of the family and parenting support they have received.

Poor health is a major issue in the area, the priority given to this work by the centre is beginning to have an impact. Improving health outcomes in smoking cessation, breastfeeding and weaning and for mothers suffering from anxiety and post-natal depression are the result of good support from health professionals, midwifery services, children's centre staff and staff from Castle Vale Community Regeneration Service. The centre actively promotes healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating and exercise. While parents are now more knowledgeable about what healthy food is, this has not yet had an impact on children's obesity levels on entry to school, which are above the national average.

Parents are supported to take an active role in their child's learning and are involved in producing the learning journeys which are used to record a child's progress in sessions at the centre. Children learn new skills and gain confidence through the range of learning opportunities and experiences they are involved in. 'Tiny New Tots' for babies up to six weeks, 'Baby Group' for children up to 15 months, 'Little Wrigglers' for children from 15 months to two years and 'Stay and Play' for the over two's provide good opportunities for children's development and learning. These result in children making good progress in all areas of development. Adults involved in programmes provided by the centre show improvement in their educational and personal development, they gain in confidence and are better able to access information. However, the range of learning opportunities to which adults can progress is limited.

The centre is seen as central to the life of the community. Children develop positive relationships and behave well towards one another. Parents have plenty of opportunities to express their views, they feel they are listened to and their opinions are valued. Parents' comments include, 'They (the staff) ask our opinions about the centre and what goes on' and 'Staff encourage discussion, listen to what we have to say and respond.' However, parents are under-represented on the advisory board and have a limited role in the overall governance of the centre. The centre and its partners have had some success in supporting parents into education and training leading to employment and a few families have benefitted from financial and benefit advice. However, opportunities for most parents to access training which will enable

them to improve their economic independence involves travel to providers out of the area. The number of workless households in the area has increased significantly in the last year (147 in May 2011 to 215 in April 2012) making opportunities to obtain employment more challenging.

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	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	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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The quality of care, guidance and support provided is outstanding. Provision is targeted at those families who need most help because of their life experiences. This effective personalised support has a significant impact on improving the lives of families, particularly those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. In times of crisis, families feel confident in seeking support from the centre; the excellent support they receive is sensitive, individualised and highly effective. One father described the staff as 'providing a lifeline'. Staff are highly skilled in the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) which is used effectively to ensure the best possible support for families. 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.

The centre provides an effective range of integrated services. Staff know the families, the community and service providers well. They use their own expertise and skills and those of their partners to make informed and accurate assessments of the individual needs of users. Outreach work is an integral part of provision and is highly effective, particularly for those families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Teenage and lone parents, disabled children and victims of domestic abuse are well catered for by a range of provision offered across the area by the centre and its partners.

Centre users access a good range of courses and this is having a positive impact on their self-confidence and improving their skills and knowledge. One participant of a

parenting class said how she used 'time out' with her son, and how he is much calmer and their relationship has improved. Good quality, age appropriate, 'Stay and Play' provision is making a difference to children's learning and the introduction of the learning journals to record children's development has meant parents now know more about their child's learning.

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

Leadership and management of the centre are good. The centre manager sets high expectations and demonstrates effective leadership. Staff at all levels share a common vision for success and are highly committed to the work of the centre. Supervision arrangements are embedded, and staff are full of enthusiasm for their work and praise for the centre. Clear structures for performance management and an emphasis on well-targeted professional development mean that staff feel confident about doing their jobs. Resources are managed very effectively between partner agencies to avoid duplication, ensure services are flexible and based on local need. Provision offered by the centre is very well used and outcomes for families are generally good. The centre offers excellent value for money.

Current local authority changes to the way the centre works to a locality model of operation for children's centres has delayed the completion of this year's action plan. However, centre managers have clear priorities for action to meet the needs of the families in the area. The views of partners and families using the centre have informed the self-evaluation and planning process. Evaluation of services is good and runs throughout all the provision. A range of methods is adopted, which include activity evaluation forms, surveys, and questionnaires. The views of children, parents and partners are gathered and used to shape services. Users express high levels of satisfaction and confidence in the centre. There are opportunities for users to be involved in the work of the centre, through volunteering, representation on the advisory board and the governing body. However, uptake of these opportunities is very low.

The promotion of equal opportunities and inclusion of all children and their families is central to the work of the centre. Staff are sensitive to the needs of those who use its services and respond accordingly. Parents of disabled children and those who have special educational needs are supported with a range of information, advice, and practical help, such as the Down's Syndrome Parent Support Group. Diversity is actively celebrated and provision is matched well to different needs. The centre itself

is a highly cohesive community where positive relationships flourish.

Safeguarding is outstanding. Full checks are made on any students or adults working or volunteering at the centre to ensure their suitability to work with children. Records are updated regularly. Staff are exceptionally well trained in child protection, ensuring highly effective actions are able to be taken to combat any identified risks. They have a sensitive approach to the variety of needs the centre's users present, which ensures that families feel comfortable with staff and are very well protected. The protection and safeguarding of children is underpinned by the excellent partnership work in the area. Very strong partnerships exist with a range of statutory and voluntary organisations. As a result cohesive partnership working provides a broad skills base which promotes opportunities for more targeted responses to need and the ability to offer a more diverse range of provision.

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	1
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	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

Findings from the concurrent inspection of the nursery school have contributed to the centre report and judgements.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Castle Vale Children's Centre on 29–30 May 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who met with us during the inspection, agreed to let us sit in on your groups, or spoke to us about the centre. We were pleased to hear how much you value the services the centre provides. You told us that the centre is a very important part of your community and plays an important role in helping you as parents. We found out that it is improving family life in many ways, particularly for those of you who face difficult challenges.

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 you that they care what happens to you and your children. We found that the centre is supporting you in many ways, including helping you to keep your children healthy. We have asked them to do even more to help you keep your children fit and healthy. Children who attend the centre's provision are prepared well for starting school. The centre and its partners are also providing some opportunities to help adults learn. We would like them to provide you with even more opportunities to learn and we have asked them to provide more training opportunities for you.

We judged that the centre keeps you and your children extremely safe. For some of you, it provides a safe haven and a place to go in times of crisis. We know that you are asked frequently for your views on the activities and that many of you have already made suggestions about what you would like. However, only one parent currently sits on the centre's advisory board and we have asked the centre to make sure that more of you can get involved in making decisions about how the centre works.

The centre does some things especially well. The care, guidance and support provided by the centre are outstanding. Many of you shared how well you had been supported by staff and everyone who spoke to us said how they enjoyed the different groups and activities they had been involved with.

The senior staff do a good job in the way they run the centre. They have created a bright, clean, well-resourced environment where all are welcome. They know what the priorities are for the work of the centre and staff work hard to make sure they are achieved.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness. We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you and sharing your stories. We wish you every success in the future.

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