

Inspection report for Bloxwich Childrens' Centre

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| Local authority | Walsall |
| Inspection number | 383875 |
| Inspection dates | 14–15 June 2012 |
| Reporting inspector | Joy Law HMI |

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| Centre leader | Kim Ford |
| Date of previous inspection | Not applicable |
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| Linked school if applicable | Mossley Primary School and Busill Jones Primary School |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Bloxwich West Children's Centre Nursery (EY347418) |

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, partner agencies, and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

Information about the centre

Bloxwich Children's Centre is located in the west of Bloxwich and consists of two wards, Bloxwich West and Bloxwich East. The centre is a split site centre and operates from a purpose-built stand-alone building located next door to Mossley Primary School and a refurbished annexe within Busill Jones Primary School.

The centre was designated in March 2007 and serves a community that falls into the 30% most deprived areas nationally. The area is served by a number of local amenities such as the library, youth centre and church-based community facilities. Other than childminders, there is no early years provision provided by the private and voluntary sector within the reach area.

The Bloxwich Children's Centre serves 947 families with children aged under five years. Bloxwich West is an area of higher than average unemployment and lower than average academic achievement. Bloxwich East contains a more affluent community, with pockets of higher deprivation. There are approximately 253 lone parents within the reach. The children's centre serves a community in which the vast majority are White British, with the remaining population being from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds.

The centre provides sessional early years provision and provides crèche provision to support families identified in need in accessing services. The centre offers advice and

guidance to parents on the daycare and childminding facilities available within the local community. Typically, children enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities which are well below those expected for their age.

The centre is managed by Mossley and Busill Jones Primary Schools. The governance, strategic development and day-to-day running of the centre are the responsibility of a sub-committee of the board of governors from both of these schools and associate members. The centre does not have an advisory board. A family forum has recently been re-established.

The centre works in partnership with agencies, schools and a local childcare provider to deliver some services within the community. The centre's rooms and other venues are used to run group sessions. The centre is also used by other agencies for appointments with families. There are no health services provided at 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

4

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

4

Main findings

Bloxwich Children's Centre is inadequate overall in its effectiveness in meeting the needs of, and improving outcomes for, the wider community. There are significant weaknesses in leadership and management, specifically at the strategic level.

Arrangements for the governance and accountability of the centre are inadequate. Members of the governing sub-committee do not have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and associate members do not have any voting rights. There are no clear and systematic arrangements for the centre manager's performance management or quality assurance of the provision. The impact of the centre's work in the five years since designation has been evaluated twice by the local authority. There is no advisory board and therefore parents' contributions and those of the local community, delivery partners and statutory services are impeded. Although the local authority knows what needs to be done to improve the governance of the centre and there are plans to establish an advisory board, these will not take effect until September 2012. As a consequence, the centre's capacity to improve is inadequate.

Since designation, the centre manager's time has been subsumed in dealing with major concerns regarding the quality of practice, provision and staff suitability within the early years provision. This focus has impeded her capacity to effectively manage and deliver other aspects of the centre's work. The range and quality of data available are variable, and data are not used consistently or effectively to ensure planning is focused accurately and matched to local need. Consequently, evaluation, prioritisation, the range of services, activities and opportunities provided are also inadequate.

Despite this difficult period, the manager has successfully engaged a senior leadership team who are strongly focused on securing a solid foundation on which to build for improvement. Their passion and commitment have led to improved outcomes for children and families for example, a much improved early years provision; stronger partnership working; and more knowledgeable and committed staff.

For those families who engage with the centre, it provides an inclusive, warm and welcoming environment. Parents reported positively on the difference the centre has made to their lives. Comments such as 'Staff are wonderful', 'They have been absolutely brilliant' and 'It's been a lifeline' are typical. However, not enough families, particularly the most isolated and vulnerable, engage with the centre's services.

Families identified as requiring support undergo timely and appropriate assessments of their needs. However, the centre does not routinely assess and identify individual learning and development needs of other users. As a consequence, sessions for adults to gain skills to improve their economic stability are not regularly provided for all families. Where training is provided, it is not necessarily matched to predominant need or accessible to all. Although the centre has successfully engaged some parents as volunteers, there is currently only one volunteer working at the centre. However, the centre has rightly recognised this gap and is taking positive action to address the weakness.

The care, guidance and support provided to families who access centre services are a particular strength of the centre's work. Effective multi-agency working, such as with the speech and language therapist, health visitors, social care team and family information service, is a particular strength and contributes well to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable families. Collectively, these organisations ensure that the most vulnerable families are given good care and appropriate information and support tailored to their individual needs. However, partnership work with other services, such as Jobcentre Plus and local schools, is only adequate. This means that some vulnerable groups, such as lone parents and the unemployed, are not being reached or supported effectively. As a consequence, the centre improves the life chances and personal development of only a few of the targeted groups of families within its reach area.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve leadership and management to ensure that services meet local needs and contribute to improving outcomes for children and families by:
 - implementing clear and systematic arrangements for governance and accountability, at all levels of decision-making, and ensure these are understood by all parties
 - establishing an advisory board with membership which includes parents, the local community, delivery partners and statutory services
 - ensuring that all users are able to contribute to the decision-making of the centre
 - ensuring all partners take an active role in promoting the service through identifying priorities, agreeing objectives and development plans, monitoring progress, assuring quality and overseeing the finances
 - ensuring the centre manager is held to account for their work through robust performance management.
- Increase the number of families engaging with the centre's services, particularly those who are most isolated and vulnerable.
- Ensure provision is accurately targeted at narrowing the gap for those families in most need of intervention and support by:
 - implementing a robust and cohesive system of self-evaluation which includes systematic monitoring, tracking and the measuring of the effectiveness of activities and services
 - making better use of all of the available data about the impact of the centre's work, in order that improvement planning is accurately focused on the key priorities of the families in the reach area.
- Promote purposeful learning and development opportunities for parents to improve their skills and secure future economic stability and independence by:
 - accurately and routinely assessing the needs of the community
 - providing consistently high quality and purposeful learning activities, matched to the needs of parents, and ensure that these are easily accessible
 - improving users' and community involvement with the centre and promoting sustainability by increasing the number of volunteers who work at the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

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Although outcomes for being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving are satisfactory, the level of contribution by the centre including the development of skills are inadequate. Significant weaknesses include a lack of evidence to demonstrate improved outcomes for families; too few families engaging with the centre; insufficient family involvement in governance; and a lack of knowledge regarding adults' needs. In addition, there are limited opportunities for families to access good quality learning matched to their needs.

Parents have some opportunities to evaluate the sessions they attend and through recently re-established parents' forum. Those who use the centre say they feel listened to and are well supported by the staff. Families have regular access to advice relating to debt, housing and benefits and are guided to other relevant services. However, the centre does not monitor how many families have accessed, received or benefited from such services.

Parents and children develop a satisfactory awareness of leading healthy lifestyles. They enjoy physical activities as they take part in walks to the park and attend sessions such as 'Little movers' and 'Jo Jingles'. Children enjoy growing, cooking and eating the vegetables they produce in the centre's garden. Children eat varied well-balanced healthy snacks and meals and adults learn how to prepare nutritious meals. However, obesity in Reception-aged children is higher than the local authority average and the rate of mothers who breastfeed their babies is low.

Although the health services have been withdrawn from the centre, staff have maintained links and effectively work in partnership with health visitors and midwives. Such links ensure parents have access to a range of pre- and post-natal services and information, for example, breastfeeding support, baby massage, weaning and feeding routines. Parents value these sessions. The centre receives live birth information so that staff can offer early support to families in need of help.

Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are effective and given high priority. Common Assessment Framework procedures are implemented when appropriate and ensure that the vulnerable families known to the centre, such as those with looked after children and children with disabilities, are supported well.

Parents are helped in making their homes safe during home visits and provided with equipment such as fireguards and safety gates where required. Parents attend training in paediatric first aid to help them gain the necessary skills in the event of their children having an accident. The setting engages with the local fire prevention services and the road safety department to help raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities. Parents say they feel safe at the centre. Parents experiencing domestic violence, isolation, or depression report positively on how the centre has improved their confidence, self-esteem and social skills.

A good range of learning and development opportunities are provided for children, particularly for those attending the childcare provision and 'Stay and 'Play' sessions. However, there are fewer opportunities for adults to gain qualifications. Children's progress in their communication, language and literacy skills is particularly well supported by well-trained staff together with the speech and language team. Children develop their social skills, independence and curiosity as well as good attitudes to learning. Both parents and children enjoy participating in activities together. Children make steady progress in their learning and development given their low starting points. However, the numbers of children achieving 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2011 decreased. The achievement gap

widened between the most vulnerable groups and others. Parents and partners report positively on improved transition arrangements and how well children settle when moving on to school.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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| The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles | 3 |
| The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them | 3 |
| The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development | 3 |
| 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 | 4 |
| 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 | 4 |

How good is the provision?

4

Although provision is judged inadequate overall, the care, guidance and support families receive are good. The families known to the centre are very well supported, particularly those experiencing difficult periods in their lives.

Parents express appreciation for the support they receive and the positive changes they have experienced. Case studies show how staff support families through difficult times and intervene effectively. Comments from parents confirm that they value the opportunities to play and spend time with their children and that, for some, the centre has been their escape route. Others comment on how the centre has enabled them to work, knowing their children are safe and well cared for. 'I don't know where I would be if it had not been for the centre staff' and 'It's been life changing' are just a few of the positive comments shared with inspectors.

The centre supports very young children's learning well but the provision for parents' learning and development is inadequate. The centre provides opportunities for parents to engage in sessions such as first aid, sign language and positive parenting. Parents reported positively how these sessions helped improve relationships with their children and how to deal with their child's behaviour. However, the frequency of when these sessions are provided is patchy and is not necessarily based on need.

The centre does not effectively assess adult users' needs and does not effectively use all the information available to ensure resources are appropriately targeted to greatest need. Some adults have poor literacy and numeracy skills but these weaknesses have not been identified as areas for improvement. As a consequence,

the centre is improving the life chances and personal development of only some of the targeted groups of families.

The centre's services are promoted in the monthly newsletter, leaflets displayed at external venues and school sports days. However, parents and staff commented that there are many families, particularly the most isolated, who are unaware of what the centre offers and how it can help them. Parents believe the centre needs to do more to promote the available services so that more families engage.

A small proportion of parents have successfully moved into employment and voluntary work. Parents are guided to appropriate advice and support to enable them to access services. However, the centre is unable to confirm exactly how many have accessed these services because of weak tracking systems.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups | 4 |
| The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups | 4 |
| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups | 2 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

4

Although numbers of families engaging with the centre are low and the gap between the most vulnerable groups and others has slightly widened, equality and diversity are judged as satisfactory because there are some exceptional examples of how the centre promotes inclusion. Children and families from target groups, such as those who may be subject to discrimination, are warmly welcomed and exceptionally well supported. Parents choose to keep their children in the centre's childcare provision rather than move them on to school. Staff effectively meet the needs of children who have specific health needs. Parents appreciate the opportunity to attend sessions, knowing that their children are well cared for in the centre's crèche. Comments such as 'The centre is very inclusive', 'Staff are absolutely brilliant, my child has come on so much since she's been here', and, 'It has absolutely changed mine and my child's life' are typical of what parents and carers told inspectors.

With the exception of the manager, all staff receive an appropriate level of supervision, including clear and purposeful performance management arrangements. However, the lack of strategic direction has meant that most of the centre's work has been reactive. Although staff talk passionately about their aspirations for the families they serve, the centre staff have no shared vision. Regular meetings enable discussion about direction but action plans lack sufficient coherence between leaders and members of staff to bring about improvement where it is most needed.

Resources overall are not deployed effectively to meet families' needs. An insufficient number of families engage in the centre's services. The linked site is no longer used to provide services for families and the centre has not taken up the offer to use rooms within a local school. Effective one-to-one outreach support is provided for families most in need. However, staff struggle to meet demand given the constraints placed upon them. As a consequence, the centre provides inadequate value for money.

The centre is appropriately focused on safeguarding and takes all the necessary steps to keep children safe, including the robust recruitment of staff to ensure that those at risk of harm receive well-targeted support and guidance. The centre has a positive record of improving the safety of those children subject to a child protection plan.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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| The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood | 4 |
| The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes | 4 |
| The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups | 4 |
| The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |
| 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 | 4 |

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

The inspection report for the early years childcare provision, Bloxwich West Children's Centre Nursery EY347418.

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 Bloxwich Children's Centre on 14 and 15 June 2012. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents and concluded that there are significant weaknesses in leadership and management, specifically at strategic level.

Arrangements for the governance and accountability of the centre are inadequate. Members of the governing sub-committee do not have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and associate members do not have any voting rights. Procedures for the centre manager's performance management are insufficient. There is currently no advisory board, which limits your contributions to the decision-making of the centre. The range and quality of information available to the centre are variable. Information is not used as well as it could be to evaluate and plan for what the centre needs to do next to your needs. Consequently, the centre provides an inadequate range of services that are insufficiently tailored to meet your particular needs. We have asked the centre to improve leadership and management; establish an advisory board; and ensure that all users are able to contribute to the decision-making of the centre. We have also asked them to implement a robust system of self-evaluation so that improvement planning is accurately focused on the key priorities.

The centre is inclusive and welcoming and run by dedicated adults who want to serve you well. However, not enough families, particularly the most isolated and vulnerable, access the centre's services. Therefore, we have asked the centre to increase the number of families engaging with the centre's services.

Some aspects of the centre's work are stronger than others. Care, guidance and support are good because known families are very well supported. The effective multi-agency working is a particular strength. You expressed appreciation for the support you receive and the positive changes that have resulted for you and your children.

You and your children are developing a satisfactory awareness of how to lead healthy lifestyles. Children enjoy physical activities as they take part in sessions such as 'Little movers' and 'Jo Jingles'. They enjoy growing vegetables in the centre's garden and cooking and eating their produce. You learn how to prepare nutritious meals through the 'Dads can cook' sessions and the 'healthy lunch box' project. However, obesity in Reception-aged children remains a concern. You are supported in making your homes safe. The setting engages with the local fire prevention

services and the road safety department to help raise you and your children's awareness of safety in the home and your communities.

The centre supports children's learning well but the provision for parents to learn and develop is inadequate. The centre does not routinely assess and identify individual learning and development needs of other users. Consequently, sessions to promote opportunities for adults to gain skills to improve their economic stability are not regularly provided for all families. Where training is provided, this is not necessarily matched to need. Therefore, we have asked the centre leaders to improve the way in which they find out what you need, and use this information, where appropriate, to target resources more effectively to your needs.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre, and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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