

Inspection report for Sure Start Sparkbrook Children's Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	384142
Inspection dates	11 – 12 July 2012
Reporting inspector	Joy Law HMI

Centre leader	Karen Stait
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	6 Braithwaite Road Birmingham B11 1LA
Telephone number	0121 6751303
Fax number	0121 6750612
Email address	karenstait@surestartsparkbrook.bham.org.uk

Linked school if applicable	Montgomery Primary School (103234) Conway Primary School (103202) Ladypool Primary School (103265)
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Tumari Sure Start Sparkbrook Nursery (EY330142) Little Stars Playgroup (EY314664) Sure Start Playgroup (EY396899)

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

Report published: July 2012



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

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

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

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

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

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

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

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, representatives of the advisory board, partner agencies, parents and carers. 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

Sparkbrook Children's Centre is located in the heart of an inner city residential area of Birmingham. It operates from two converted houses close to local schools. Contained within the building is a 46-place nursery (Tumari) which is open each weekday from 8.00am to 6.00pm, 48 weeks of the year. The centre also has two other registered early years provisions nearby, Little Stars Playgroup and Sure Start (Graceland's) Playgroup. The centre is part of a cluster with Park Road Children's Centre.

The centre was designated in March 2006 and serves a community that falls into the highest most deprived areas nationally. The area is served by a number of local amenities such as the library, housing association, health centre and church-based community facilities. The centre supports local childminders and early years provision provided by the private and voluntary sector within the reach area.

Sparkbrook Children's Centre serves 1652 children aged under five years. It is an area of higher-than-average unemployment and lower-than-average academic achievement. Approximately 40% of families living within the reach are lone-parent families. The children's centre serves a community from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, the majority being of Pakistani heritage and the remainder being from

a range of backgrounds. The majority of service users are Muslim and speak English as an additional language.

The centre's early years and crèche provision support families identified in need in accessing services. The centre offers advice and guidance to parents, and signposts to other agencies available within the local community. Children enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities which are below those expected for their age.

The centre is governed directly by the local authority with an advisory board which also represents Park Road Children's Centre. The advisory board is made up of a cross-section of professionals, including representatives from the voluntary sector and parents. It contributes to the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development. The centre supports a women's group but does not have a parents' forum. The centre manager was appointed in 2010.

The centre works in partnership with voluntary and statutory organisations, including schools, to deliver new services, including a programme of universal and targeted services to meet the local community's needs. 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 some 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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Sparkbrook Children's Centre is satisfactory overall in its effectiveness in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for the wider community. The current re-organisational changes to the structure of the children's centre, and ongoing staffing issues, have had an impact on the centre's services. Despite this difficult period, the staff's passion and commitment to achieve excellence is beginning to have a positive impact on aspects of the centre's work resulting in some improving outcomes for children and families.

Some aspects of the centre's work are stronger than others. For example, much-

improved early years provision, stronger partnership working, a re-established advisory board and knowledgeable and committed staff are assisting better outcomes. However, improvement planning, to ensure that the work of the centre is as effective as possible in meeting the community's needs, is less strong. For example, the way in which the centre obtains and uses accurate and up-to-date information, the robustness of tracking, monitoring and evaluation of services, and the range of opportunities for adults to improve their economic stability and independence are not sufficiently embedded.

The centre has successfully registered most families within the reach. However, only about half of these families engage with the centre's services. The number of fathers who benefit from services is particularly low. For those families who engage with the centre, it provides an inclusive and welcoming environment. The dedication and commitment of staff ensure families feel supported and safe. Comments from users such as, 'the way they have changed our lives was incredible', 'staff are very patient and wonderful' and 'it's my second home', are typical. However, there are too many children entering school with limited or no experience of early play and learning experiences.

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. Consequently, opportunities for adults to gain skills to improve their economic stability are not regularly provided for all families. The centre has successfully engaged some families through sessions such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), health and numeracy courses, and reading and writing sessions. However, the number of parents attending these sessions and achieving qualifications is low. The centre successfully supports students in gaining work experience through the early years provisions and has successfully engaged a few parents as volunteers, although the number of volunteers working at the centre is low.

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 health visitors, the social care team, housing associations and the police, is also a strength and contributes well to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable families. Collectively, these organisations ensure that these families are given good care, and appropriate information and support tailored to their individual needs. Partnership working with some other services, such as the Jobcentre is only adequate. Consequently, some vulnerable groups, such as the unemployed, are not being reached or supported effectively.

Good multi-agency working ensures the arrangements for safeguarding and child protection are effective and are given high priority. Common Assessment Framework processes are implemented when appropriate and ensure that potentially vulnerable individuals known to the centre, such as disabled children and those with child protection plans, are supported well.

Parents have some opportunities to express their views through evaluation of sessions, the women's group and the recently re-established advisory board. However, the centre does not have a parents' forum in place to ensure all users, particularly fathers, are able to contribute effectively to developing the centre's services. Those who use the centre say that they feel listened to and are well supported by the staff.

Leaders and managers, in most cases, have a good understanding of what the centre's strengths and areas for development are. They are updating development plans in line with recent requirements. The current development plan does not contain sufficient detail from which to measure success and, therefore, it is difficult for staff to assess progress accurately. Although improving, the range of data available to accurately reflect the centre's work since designation is limited. The way in which data are analysed, to assess impact and monitor which groups are accessing services, lacks rigour. Recently introduced evaluation and monitoring processes are starting to provide evidence of the impact on outcomes for children and families. Staff routinely discuss these evaluations. However, they do not share, analyse and evaluate the centre's work sufficiently systematically to enable them to match provision accurately to users' needs. Governance and accountability arrangements are in place and are understood by all partners. The advisory board members feel they are now better placed to support and challenge the centre but acknowledge the need to have regular access to data and information to be able to do this effectively. Consequently, the centre demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of families who engage with the services available to them through the implementation of appropriate and innovative strategies to extend the centre's reach.
- Develop rigorous strategies for involving all leaders, managers and the advisory board in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the centre to ensure that improvement planning and the work of the centre are as effective as possible in order to meet the community's needs by:
 - increasing the robustness of tracking, monitoring and evaluation of services
 - obtaining thorough, accurate and up-to-date information about the reach
 - establishing a clear, systematic and coherent approach to ensuring efficient use of all of the data to plan and shape services effectively
 - implementing a rigorous approach to quality assurance across all of the centre's services.
- Improve parents' economic stability and independence by:
 - identifying parents' individual learning and development needs through routine assessments

- increasing provision for adults to engage in purposeful learning, development and training that will help them move on to employment
- increasing the number of parents who access training and employment
- 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?

3

The centre is focused on improving the health, safety and well-being of families, and outcomes overall are improving. Parents and children are developing a good understanding of healthy lifestyles through workshops such as 'Fruity Fridays'. Children enjoy making fruit kebabs and smoothies, and parents learn what constitutes a 'healthy lunchbox'. Consequently, obesity in young children is reducing and parents report a greater awareness about child health and feel more confident about making their home life healthier.

Effective partnership working with midwives and health visitors means that families have good access to ante- and post-natal care and advice. Sessions such as the ESOL for health course prepare mothers-to-be well. Mothers reported that they knew what to do when starting in labour and understood what vaccinations their children needed. Parents are becoming more aware of the importance of the benefits of breastfeeding during new birth visits from staff. Consequently, the number of babies being breastfed at six to eight weeks has increased.

Strong partnership working with agencies such as social workers, police and the health service, clear reporting procedures, weekly 'team around the child' meetings and well-trained and knowledgeable staff ensure that children are safeguarded well, particularly those on the child protection register. Parents subjected to domestic violence reported positively about how much the centre had changed their own and their children's lives for the better.

Despite the diverse backgrounds and the differing starting points, most children are making good progress by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, and the gap between the outcomes for the most vulnerable groups and their peers is narrowing steadily. Routine assessments of children's learning are used well to plan purposeful and challenging learning experiences in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage. Good transition arrangements are in place. The number of children with speech and language difficulties is high. However, the centre provides a range of activities, such as 'Chit Chat Stay and Play' and weekly 'Rhyme Time', to promote and encourage parents' involvement and understanding in their children's development and learning. Parents talked positively about how these sessions had enabled them to understand and support their children's learning, and also how their children had progressed better than expected, particularly with their interaction and social skills. Comments such as, 'It's amazing how my child interacts' and 'There's been a dramatic improvement in my child's behaviour', are typical of what parents reported.

Parents say that they feel 'included' and 'listened to' and comment on the difference

that the centre has made to their confidence and achievements. Although there is some involvement of parents through the women’s group and advisory board to ensure their views are put forward and their suggestions are considered, these opportunities are limited. Parents reported that not enough was done to promote the centre’s services out in the community.

Families have regular access to advice about debt, housing and benefits, and are signposted to other services. The centre receives information about how many families have been supported in accessing these services. There is no system in place to routinely track these families, though, so the centre does not know if outcomes for them have improved as a result.

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	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	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	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre is a welcomed and valued provision. The staff are clear about and sensitive to the particular needs of their community. They have successfully engaged families through a range of initiatives such as access to childcare provision via the nursery education funding for two-, three- and four-year olds, parents’ recommendations, and leaflets available at other community venues including schools and the health centre. In addition, the health visitor and other partners promote the centre’s services.

The care, guidance and support families receive are good features of the centre’s work. Parents expressed appreciation of the support they receive and the positive changes that have resulted for their children and themselves. Parents reported how staff support them through difficult times and how their lives would be very different without the centre’s help. Comments from parents confirm that they value the provision and that, for some, the centre is like their second home and the only safe place to be with their children. Parents’ comments were echoed by partners who also talked very positively about the strong partnership working and how the most

vulnerable groups, such as those experiencing domestic abuse, are very well supported.

The provision to support children’s learning is good. However, the opportunities to help adults develop skills and move onto training and employment are only adequate. Adults access courses, such as ESOL health and numeracy, and parenting programmes. However, the frequency of these sessions does not meet demand and the range of courses available is not consistently matched to users’ needs. For example, parents requested information and communication technology (ICT) sessions but the centre was unable to meet this request.

The overall assessment of users’ needs and the tracking of progress are of variable quality. Analysis of data and information is not used as effectively as it could be to ensure all services are appropriately matched to families’ needs. Family assessments following referrals from health and other services are effective and individual packages of support are tailored to need. The centre has good links with family and children’s services. Parents are signposted for advice and support to enable them to access services, such as housing, benefits, health services and childcare provision. It offers appropriate provision, such as stay and play sessions, at other venues. Some parents have successfully moved into learning, training and employment although the numbers are low. Consequently, the centre is improving the life chances and personal development of some of the targeted groups of families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The well-qualified, knowledgeable and experienced manager has successfully maintained satisfactory outcomes while facing a number of challenges, including long-term staff sickness. In addition, the current restructuring of children’s centres into clusters has brought uncertainty for staff and many changes. Consequently, leadership and management are satisfactory. The manager is supported by a very committed and enthusiastic team whose expertise and skills are being used well to ensure that services improve. Contractual arrangements with commissioned services are in place. However, accountability arrangements for the centre and services are currently under review.

Governance is satisfactory. The re-established advisory board is highly supportive and has a strong commitment to the centre and to the on-going development of its

role within the community. Links between strategic planning and provision are sufficient and overall outcomes are improving. Professional supervision and performance management are regularly undertaken. Quality assurance processes are satisfactory overall, but they are inconsistent across the different aspects of provision.

Staff take action to ensure that children and families are safe. All staff are well trained to their level of responsibility and there is rigorous attention to vetting and recruitment procedures. Effective risk assessment and inter-agency working with skilled professionals means that the needs of potentially vulnerable families are identified at an early stage and the professionals intervene quickly. This prompt action and the satisfactory use of the Common Assessment Framework ensure efficient use of resources and contribute to the declining number of children subject to child protection plans.

The environment is of good quality, warm, welcoming and safe. The centre is making effective use of resources in the majority of cases. For example, commissioned services are linked to need and managers and headteachers work closely together to integrate staff training and adult learning across all settings. Managers are aware that to improve sustainability and economic independence, more effort is required by all staff and partner agencies to encourage, support and recruit volunteers to run groups within the community. The inclusion of all children and their families, including those with disabilities, is central to the centre's vision, equality is promoted and diversity is celebrated. Consequently, the service provides satisfactory 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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
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	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	3

range of provision	
--------------------	--

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

The latest inspection judgements for the centre's early years provisions were taken into consideration for this inspection.

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

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Sparkbrook Children's Centre on 11 – 12 July 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide 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 the centre provides a satisfactory range of services that are tailored to meet your particular needs.

The centre is an inclusive and welcoming place which is run by dedicated adults who want to serve you well. You speak highly of the centre as being a place where you feel supported, safe and listened to. Comments from you such as, 'the way they have changed our lives was incredible', 'staff are very patient and wonderful' and 'it's my second home', are typical.

You are developing a good understanding of healthy lifestyles through workshops such as 'Fruity Fridays'. Children enjoy making fruit kebabs and smoothies, and you learn what constitutes a 'healthy lunchbox'. As a result, obesity in young children is reducing. You are also learning how to ensure your homes are a safe place for your children.

The centre is engaging with only about half of the families it needs to reach and the number of fathers who benefit from services is particularly low. Therefore, we have asked the centre to increase the numbers of families who are currently accessing its services.

The centre supports your children's learning and development well. However, it does not routinely assess and identify individual learning and development needs of other users. Consequently, sessions to promote opportunities for you to gain skills to help you move into training and employment are not regularly provided. The centre has successfully engaged some of you in sessions such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) health and numeracy courses, and reading and writing sessions. However, the number of you attending these sessions and achieving qualifications is

low. Therefore, we have asked the centre to improve the way it finds out what you need and to increase the range of opportunities for you to attend courses and gain qualifications.

The care, guidance and support provided to you and your families are particular strengths of the centre's work. Staff develop warm and trusting relationships with you. You say you are confident to approach staff and talk freely about any problems or issues you face. Good safeguarding procedures ensure your children's safety and well-being are protected. Effective multi-agency working, such as with health visitors, the social care team, housing associations and the police, ensure you are given good care, appropriate information and support tailored to your individual needs. Partnership working with some other services, such as Jobcentre Plus is only adequate. Consequently, some of you, such as the unemployed, are not being reached or supported effectively.

You have some opportunities to express your views through evaluation of sessions, the women's group and the recently re-established advisory board. However, the centre does not have a parents' forum in place to ensure all of you, particularly fathers, are able to contribute effectively to developing its services.

The centre has successfully supported a small number of volunteers, but opportunities for you to become volunteers are not well promoted. We have, therefore, asked the centre to increase the involvement of community volunteers in its work to develop a feeling of ownership and engagement.

The centre has focused on key areas to improve, such as improving the quality of early years provision so that your children develop skills and are well-prepared to move on to school, addressing the need to engage with minority ethnic groups, increase breastfeeding rates and reduce obesity in young children. The centre's self-evaluation is broadly accurate and based on what leaders consider are the centre's strengths and areas for development. However, they do not use all of the data that are available effectively to ensure that what they provide is accurately matched to what you need. In addition, the centre's systems for tracking, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of all the services it provides for you are not as good as they could be. Therefore, we have asked managers to make better use of all of the available data about the impact of the work of the children's centre in order to ensure that improvement planning and the work of the centre are as effective as possible in meeting 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.