

Inspection report for Brookside Children's Centre

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Linked school if applicable	Comberton Primary School 135047
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, members of staff and professionals from key partner agencies. Discussions were held with members of the advisory board, parents, and representatives from Barnardo's and the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Brookside Children's Centre is a phase two centre designated in June 2008 and fully operational in January 2009 following completion of building works, it is located on the outskirts of Kidderminster town centre, and an area comprising urban and rural communities. It is situated on a shared campus with Comberton Primary School, although governance arrangements are separate. Worcestershire County Council has a contract with Barnardo's to manage eight of the 34 children's centres in Worcestershire, of which Brookside is one. The children's centre's advisory board provides advice and support and there is also an active parent forum in place. The children's centre manager has responsibility for a very small staff team and the day-to-day running of the centre. The centre's core purpose is provided through a range of integrated services that include health, stay and play, and speech and language sessions, family learning and support.

The children's centre serves a diverse community. Its reach area covers fourteen super output areas, three of which are within the 20% most deprived localities nationally, while others are amongst the most affluent. A small minority of children aged under five years in the area live in workless households. Most families in the area are of White British heritage. There are a few families from a number of different minority ethnic groups and these make up less than 4% of the population.

Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision vary but are typically in line with the levels 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

Brookside Children’s Centre is a good centre that reaches the large majority of families living in its most disadvantaged communities. It is improving rapidly and has a number of outstanding features. This popular, well-led centre is an integral part of provision for children and families in the area. The centre has a small highly cohesive, enthusiastic and dedicated staff team who work well together to improve the lives of families within the reach area. Where groups or families are disadvantaged, staff work proactively to support their progress. The centre operates with a small budget, however, flexible staffing, good partnership working, and enthusiastic volunteers enable the centre to meet challenging targets and improve outcomes for users. Management support and staff training from Barnardo’s provides added value, and helps ensure the service is providing good value for money.

Sophisticated data capture and a good knowledge of the needs of children and families in the area are used to inform planning of activities and provision. Parents’ views are key in deciding the nature of the services and activities the centre offers. Programmes are of a high quality and are well attended; in addition, highly individualised support for families is extremely effective, particularly in times of crisis. Good quality provision and support enables individuals and families to improve their circumstances, achieve educationally and improve their personal development. These achievements are actively celebrated and used to help raise aspirations. Safety is of paramount importance for the staff in all their dealings with children and families using the centre. Children and parents report they feel very safe in the centre, a typical comment from one parent was, ‘The children’s centre has helped me with my confidence and I feel really safe to come here’. Parents have an excellent understanding of how to keep their families safe, for example, parents now recognise the potential danger of allowing children unsupervised access to the internet. They feel able to express concerns and know that staff are always prepared to listen. Safeguarding arrangements are exceptional. The common assessment framework is

used very effectively to ensure an integrated response to the safeguarding of children. Risk assessments are of good quality, and informed by the views of users and all staff and volunteers are subject to appropriate checks.

Health outcomes are improving for most centre users. 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 reception-age children.. Children that regularly attend the centre achieve a good level of development as reflected in the Early Years Foundation Stage profile. They participate in a range of activities, where they learn how to play together, make choices, learn new skills and have fun. Most adults accessing learning opportunities have made good progress, with a few achieving accredited qualifications. However, insufficient accredited training opportunities are currently being offered to meet local needs and enhance employability.

The centre makes a good contribution to the economic stability and independence of families. Citizens Advice Bureau workers and centre staff have supported a number of families to claim the appropriate benefits, thereby reducing inequality and making a real difference to their economic stability. The centre is at the heart of the community and children and families using the centre treat one another with respect. Parents are increasingly engaged in the running of the centre, as volunteers, and as members of the parent forum and advisory board.

Good leadership and management of the centre have led to improvements in outcomes in the time that the centre has been operating. Where outcomes are still improving, leaders have appropriate plans in place to further enhance provision. The centre manager provides effective leadership that puts high expectations for the community at the heart of the centre's work. Wall displays reflect positive role models and celebrate users' achievements. Regular monitoring ensures that staff understand the challenges faced by families living in the area, are aware of the centre's strengths and identify key areas where outcomes could be improved still further. Self-evaluation is accurate and informed by families and key partners. Parental satisfaction surveys show that the vast majority of parents are very satisfied with provision. The centre's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure a range of accredited training opportunities are provided so that users can progress their further learning and improve their employability skills.
- Build on existing health improvement programmes in order to impact positively on the healthy weights of children.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Staff work hard to ensure positive outcomes for families in the area. Parents feel extremely safe and consider their children to be very safe when using the centre. Excellent highly individualised support for families with circumstances that make them particularly vulnerable results in them being exceptionally well safeguarded. Families at risk of domestic violence become significantly more confident as a result of strategies they learn from partners and staff on the 'Freedom programme'. Parents are more aware of the potential risks to children through attendance on highly effective parenting programmes. Relationships between staff, children and families are very trusting and staff know them very well. Consequently, early identification and prevention of potential risks play a key role in reducing any harm to children. 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.

Health outcomes for children and parents attending the centre are good and improving. For example 58% of mothers living in the reach area sustained breastfeeding for at least six weeks, against 42% for the wider locality, and immunisation rates are high at 92%. Improving health outcomes are the result of good support from specialist health professionals, midwifery services, children's centre staff and volunteers. The centre actively promotes healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating and exercise, but this has not yet had sufficient impact on reception-age children's obesity levels. Support for families' emotional health is a strength of the centre. For example, parents with post-natal depression make significant progress in their mental well-being supported by health professionals and centre staff. The 'Walk in Talking' sessions are particularly valued by parents and teachers for the improvement they see in children's speech and language skills.

Children learn new skills and gain confidence through the range of learning opportunities and experiences they are involved in. There is an improving learning trend in children's achievement, with almost 88% reaching 78+ scale points at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2012, and a small improvement in narrowing the gap for the lowest achieving 20%. Most parents demonstrate good personal development as a result of taking part in activities in the centre.

As a result of their engagement with the centre, some families improve their economic and social well-being. Information on benefits and legal advice provided through the Citizens Advice Bureau has a positive impact on the finances of some families. Information provided by the centre helps parents to access appropriate childcare. Take up rates for family learning courses are good, with a few parents progressing to further training. However, there are insufficient opportunities for parents to gain accreditation and improve their employability skills.

Children using the centre engage in positive behaviour, they play well together and share toys and equipment. Parents are increasingly taking an active role in the life of the centre, through volunteering, and participation in the parent forum and advisory board. Recently they have begun to support the centre by helping to run activities,

such as 'Little Groovers' and 'Musical Movers', and encouraging other parents to access services. Parents were keen to explain how, at the centre, 'Parents help each other and learn from one another'.

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	2

How good is the provision?

2

Provision for centre users is good. Parents, carers and children who use the centre are enthusiastic about it. As one parent said, 'If they had rooms we would move in.' Staff use their own expertise and skills and those of their partners to make informed and accurate assessments of the individual needs of users. Family support workers ensure that families facing complex difficulties are assessed and supported effectively through good inter-agency working and communication. Services are diverse, of a high quality, and are reviewed with users on a regular basis. Good use of data means that the centre is able to target services precisely to meet a wide range of need.

Activities are of a good quality. They are designed around planned outcomes and, in sessions such as 'Stay and Play', 'Messy Play' and 'Little Groovers' children are happy, relaxed, engaged and learning, while parents improve their skills in group activities by being actively engaged in the sessions. The achievements of families that completed the 'Family Learning course' were celebrated and have encouraged other families to take part. The quality of care guidance and support offered by the centre is outstanding. There is a strong emphasis on providing effective emotional support to boost users' confidence and raise their self-esteem. This has a significant impact on improving the lives of families, particularly those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. Sensitive, individualised support is provided to help promote outcomes and, in times of crisis, families feel extremely well supported. One parent said, 'The children's centre has been my lifeline'.

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. Effective leadership ensures high-quality; integrated provision is targeted at those in most need of support. Day-to-day management and professional supervision are robust and ensure staff have relevant and up-to-date expertise. There is an excellent sense of teamwork and ambition to provide the best possible service for families. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and effective. There are strong links between strategic planning and operational planning. The advisory board, which is representative of the parents, partners and centre's community, provides good support and challenge.

Accurate self-evaluation is underpinned by precise and local data enabling the centre to make continual improvements. The centre staff work effectively with partners to provide a good range of services that users benefit from. Provision is very well used, outcomes for families, particularly those whose circumstances make them hard to reach, are good or outstanding. Resource planning is very effective, responsive to changing need and ensures services are sustainable. As a consequence the centre provides excellent value for money.

Safeguarding is excellent and staff undertake high quality regular training on a wide range of issues, including using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), and safe recruitment. Children's safety and well-being are significantly enhanced by the rigorous and highly consistent implementation of policies, procedures and practice. Safer recruitment, including Criminal Record Bureau checks and the recording of this information, meets all statutory requirements. This focus on prioritising safeguarding ensures that families receive support as early as possible, often preventing the escalation of issues. Parents are well informed about the centre's policy on protecting children and sharing information with other relevant agencies.

The 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. Support for disabled children and those with special educational needs is a particular strength. There are picture signs on all doors and displays celebrate different communities and praise children in many languages. Diversity is actively celebrated and provision is differentiated well to meet individual and group needs equally. The centre itself is a highly cohesive community where positive relationships flourish.

Users express very high levels of satisfaction with the service. Parents are very actively engaged in planning and delivery of services, for example parents planned and delivered activities through the summer holidays that were highly valued by centre users. Parental evaluation of each session is an integral part of shaping future provision. There is strong representation of parents on the advisory board and an increasingly active parents' forum. Parent volunteers canvas families in the area in their role as 'Parent Champions' with a view to encouraging even greater engagement with the children's centre. In consequence user engagement of the most vulnerable families is excellent.

The centre is proactive in seeking partnerships, and relationships between key partners are clear and understood. Effective partnership working is having a very positive impact on good and rapidly improving outcomes for families.

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	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	1

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

Not applicable

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Brookside Children's Centre on 26–27 September 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 very grateful for your help with the inspection and very interested to hear your views.

Many of you went out of your way to tell us how important the centre is to you, what a difference it has made to you, and how much you enjoy the activities provided. The children's centre was described to us as 'having a lovely atmosphere, where you never feel judged'. We found it to be very welcoming and we were impressed by the number of families who visit the centre and take part in a wide range of activities on a regular basis. You told us how friendly and approachable everyone is and how happy your children are, and we agree with you.

We judge that the extent to which the centre keeps you and your children safe is outstanding. Safety, security and your well-being are of the utmost importance for all centre staff and staff from partner organisations. We know that you are asked frequently for your views on activities and many of you are making suggestions to help improve services even more. We were impressed by the energy and enthusiasm of the volunteers and representatives on the advisory board and parent forum.

Children using the centre make good progress in their learning and development. Those of you that have taken part in activities were keen to tell us how much you have learnt and how much you learn from one another. We have asked the centre to provide more opportunities for accredited training, for those of you who would like to continue learning. You also told us that you know about healthy lifestyles and have improved your self-confidence so that you feel more able to join in activities with your children. We have asked the centre staff to do even more to help you keep your children fit and to ensure their healthy weights.

The centre does some things especially well. The care, guidance and support provided by the centre are outstanding. You told us that staff know you well and they are always able to give you support or point you in the right direction to get help if you need it. We were impressed with the range of services and activities the centre provides and how the staff work with parents, partners and volunteers to provide even more activities.

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 are skilled in monitoring the work of the centre to see how it can be improved further and in responding to local need.

Thank you very much for your welcome and willingness to speak to the inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and sampling the centre's work. We wish you every success in the future.

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