

Inspection report for West Bromwich Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	404510
Inspection dates	31 October – 1 November 2012
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
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.

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

The inspectors held meetings or discussions with managers and staff from the centre and the local authority, parents, the data collection officer, two members of the partnership advisory board, and representatives from a number of partner agencies and services including; health professionals commissioned early years staff, children's services, police, the fire service and teachers from local schools.

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

Information about the centre

West Bromwich Children's Centre was designated in December 2008 as a phase two children's centre. It fulfils its core purpose by providing health and family support services through outreach, providing opportunities for adult learning, and offering early years advice and guidance. It works in partnership with other local agencies. The children's centre serves a community which is in one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. This is not a naturally cohesive community, as the centre's catchment area wraps in an unwieldy formation around the town centre and is segregated by major busy roads. The centre is open five days a week and is located in the heart of West Bromwich. To serve the community, the centre also uses outreach venues strategically placed across the area.

Sandwell local authority restructured all children's centres in August 2012. It now contracts Action for Children to govern seven children's centres across two localities. West Bromwich Children's Centre is part of the West Bromwich Locality along with Greets Green and Bright Futures Children's Centres. These three centres work closely together and share staff roles and responsibilities for all children in the locality. Greets Green was inspected in October 2011 and was outstanding. The new children's services manager for the locality was previously the centre manager of Greets Green. The new West Bromwich centre manager was previously their deputy

manager. Governance of the centre lies with Action for Children and the centre's advisory partnership board, which comprises representatives from a number of partner agencies and some parents who use the centre.

There were 849 children under 5 years in the reach area. As a result of the restructuring this has increased to approximately 1,100 children aged under 5 years. Just under a third of the population are in workless families and dependent on benefits, which is in line with the Sandwell average, but above the national average. The proportion of teenage parents and obese children of reception age are in line with the Sandwell average. There are an increasing number of families from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are generally below those 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

1

Main findings

West Bromwich Children's Centre is a good centre. It has some outstanding features. There have been significant and rapid gains in the number of families registering and engaging with the centre, particularly from target groups; 80% of under-fives currently access services. Robust strategies to lay firm foundations for development and progress have been implemented extremely effectively and have laid a firm foundation for the centre's future development and progress. The centre knows its community well which has allowed it to target accurately those in most need. Staff show determination and tenacity to bring about further improvements. The locality arrangements have provided a wide range of opportunities for staff to share some excellent practice and expertise. The centre's managers set highly ambitious targets, and all staff across the locality have a shared vision for the future. All of these factors demonstrate the centre's excellent capacity to sustain improvement.

The centre leader and staff have successfully established good partnership working arrangements with a wide range of professionals, ensuring that services are well integrated and cohesive. Links with the health authorities are particularly strong and are a strength of the centre playing a key role in the centre's success in improving outcomes for families. This close working relationship has helped to maintain the

number of mothers sustaining breastfeeding. Overall, provision is accurately matched to the needs of families and enables them to achieve good and improving outcomes.

The centre is inclusive. There are excellent systems in place to ensure all children on child protection plans are identified and supported by the centre. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used well to support those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, and the centre promotes good outcomes for disabled users and those who have special educational needs. A very strong commitment to safeguarding by all staff and partners ensures children and their families are safe. Parents receive very good support, training and resources for keeping their families safe. Hospital admissions for unintentional injuries are below the Sandwell average.

Children and adults make good progress in developing their skills and enjoy their time at the centre. As a result, participation rates for most groups, including those identified by the centre as most in need of intervention and support, are good and reflect the diverse community the centre serves. The centre has evidence of how it is evaluating the services that it provides and recognises that this can be developed further to include the long-term impact of services on outcomes for children and families. Leaders coordinate resources well and avoid any duplication of provision. Parents and children have access to a crèche which provides specific targeted help to meet their needs and improve their outcomes. A good proportion of parents are engaged well in the work of the centre and provide constant feedback about their satisfaction. However, the centre recognises that not enough is done to encourage parents to contribute to decision making and the shaping of services.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen the centre's evaluation procedures by making more effective use of available information so that the centre is better able to demonstrate its achievements and to identify more specifically how it will judge the success of improvements made and any long-term impact
- Boost the effectiveness of decision-making processes by, for example, establishing a parents' forum, and provide support to parents who are on the advisory board to enable them to challenge the work of the centre and hold it to account.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

A very large majority of families in the area engage well with a wide range of appropriate services. The number of mothers who remain breastfeeding at six to eight weeks is higher than the Sandwell average. The success of this can be attributed to the health visitors and midwives who work closely with the maternity family support worker who carries out home visits. All new mothers are visited before and after the birth of their child. Advice and guidance are offered on a range of

topics such as general parenting issues, breastfeeding and weaning. Healthy eating is promoted throughout the centre, and obesity rates are below the national average. A range of activities with a focus on healthy eating, physical health and well-being is provided through programmes such as 'Fab Tots'. Immunisation rates are high and initiatives have been implemented to promote dental health, smoking cessation, healthy eating, and the importance of vitamins and physical activities. The centre is starting to measure the long-term impact of certain activities such as oral health programmes, but this is not yet systematic across all activities. Specialist speech and language support is a high priority within the area, and assessments show that in 2011 only 29% of children had the appropriate language development for their age. In 2012, this increased to 48%. The centre works closely with all schools and private nurseries in the reach area to provide training, resources and specialist activities, such as 'Talking Tots', to promote language development.

Families feel extremely safe at the centre and learn to keep themselves safe as they develop an understanding of dangers within the home. They take advantage of the home-safety equipment offered and visits from the fire service who have reported that there has been a significant decrease in house fires in the area. The police community support officer is a regular visitor, and families share any concerns regarding their safety within the community. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) team is based at the centre. Staff, and in particular family support workers, have direct access to this team which ensures the speedy referral of new families who may be experiencing difficulties. This early intervention has led to a positive impact on children and there has been a significant reduction in the number of children subject to a child protection plan.

Children make generally good progress from their starting points and are achieving well. The number of children achieving at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales, with six points in all areas of communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development, rose from 56% to 65% over a two-year period. This shows significant improvement and demonstrates how the attainment gap is narrowing for children in this area. Excellent links between the school, nursery school and day care ensure that children are well prepared for the transition to school.

Parents make a positive contribution to the centre through their behaviour and respect for one another. They feel valued and regularly complete feedback sheets after sessions that demonstrate a high level of satisfaction. The majority of families express their views and a few contribute to decision making. The centre actively seeks ways to consult more widely with parents. Volunteers work within the centre and support the delivery of services. One volunteer said, 'I feel valued in the centre; I am not treated like a volunteer but as a member of the team.' This shows that the staff put great value on individuals. Economic stability and independence are actively encouraged. A weekly surgery is now run by Citizens Advice Bureau which helps parents to gain any benefits to which they are entitled. Over a 10-month period, 93 referrals were made and £169,974 of benefits were gained. Parenting courses are generally well attended and parents comment on how they have grown in confidence

and established routines within the home as a result of the support given. A regular group known as 'Chin up' is run from the centre; this supports teenage parents from all over Sandwell and has helped some parents overcome emotional difficulties and, in some cases, return to education successfully.

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

Families feel well supported and say that the centre could not do any more for them and that they could not function without it. Early intervention is fundamental to the success of the centre, and good links with the health service provide an immediate opportunity to make contact with new parents. The large majority of children in the area are registered and the centre has been particularly successful in engaging with and improving outcomes for families from the most deprived areas. A good number of teenage parents, disabled children, fathers and children from minority ethnic groups participate in the services and activities provided by the centre and other agencies, either in the centre or at one of the community venues. The centre offers continued support and goes 'the extra mile' by accompanying users to services and providing invaluable support when completing lengthy and complex forms.

The importance of books and reading together is widely promoted throughout the centre, and a multi-cultural library is available. Parents value the opportunity to access groups such as the many different targeted 'Stay and Play' sessions, such as the Polish group, which help them stimulate their children's learning through play. The quality of activities to promote purposeful learning across the centre is good. The majority of parents gain in confidence as a result of a progression through courses offered. One mother reported that she is now employed at a local school as a direct result of the centre's interventions. The centre has evidence to demonstrate how it has helped to raise the aspirations of parents and enabled them to improve their personal and educational development. Achievement is celebrated through certificates achieved through courses such as first aid. There are regular celebrations

of different cultures throughout the year; during the month of October, 'Black History' was celebrated and activities were taken out into the community, including schools.

The centre provides good care, guidance and support for families because staff recognise the need within the local community and gain a good knowledge of the families. Families frequently face a raft of complex issues including those relating to housing, debt, domestic violence and isolation; they refer to the centre as their 'support centre' where they can go for everything and know that if the centre does not know, it will find out. Through outreach work and family support, staff are highly effective in supporting families, including those who have recently arrived in the area, through these times of crisis. Families report that they feel safe to share their problems with the centre staff. This includes those parents who may have a disability or learning difficulty as there are specialist services who can support and enable them.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management have many strengths. The centre manager has a clear vision and communicates high expectations to staff and families. All staff are committed to improving the life chances of families in the reach area and they understand how they contribute to this. Day-to-day management, accountability and strategic leadership arrangements are clear and effective. There are clear links between strategic planning and service delivery so that outcomes for the large majority of families are at least good. The wide range of good-quality provision and services are used well by the large majority of families in the reach area and meet most of the needs of all target groups effectively.

The re-structuring and de-commissioning of some services has presented some challenging times for the centre. By managing resources stringently, the centre has continued to provide good value for money through highly effective signposting to services, using the centre for community groups and partners, and using resources flexibly across the centre, nurseries and schools. The centre plays a significant role in the life of the community. The inclusion of all families is promoted effectively as the centre has a good understanding of the needs of the families it supports and knows who its most vulnerable groups are. Crèche facilities enable families to attend training such as 'English for speakers of other languages' (ESOL). The centre

monitors and promotes the inclusion of disabled children and children with special educational needs well.

Safeguarding arrangements are given the utmost priority at the centre. Staff are extremely confident in their knowledge and ability to safeguard children. Safer recruitment procedures are followed stringently, and all relevant checks are made to ensure that all staff receive high-quality child protection training and are suitable and safe to work with children. Parents are confident to share concerns with staff and are encouraged to do so in their home language. Because the staff across the locality have such a wide range of skills, there is always someone who is able to interpret.

Services are well integrated, and good partnership working enables information to be shared at an early stage. The centre works with other children's centres and a range of partners to ensure that services are not duplicated. The holistic approach used to assess the users' needs has been successful when supporting and identifying families' needs; the early years staff communicate effectively with family support workers to gain the best outcomes for the individual. There are varied systems in place for monitoring the impact of services and activities which record some impact; this information is not always interpreted or completed fully and does not consistently say what impact there has been for families over time. The views of users and their evaluations of services are sought regularly, and a large majority of families are satisfied with the service provided by the centre and refer to the centre as being fantastic and somewhere they can always go for help.

The partnership advisory board, which is representative of partners and the centre's community, provides a good range of support and guidance. As a result, governance and accountability arrangements are effective, although the parents who are on the board are not completely clear of their role and how to hold the centre to account. There is no parents' forum; however, parents' views are gathered through their attendance at groups and are fed into the partnership advisory board.

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	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	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	2

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

Greets Green Children's Centre (URN 21316) was inspected in October 2011 and was judged as outstanding. This centre is part of the West Bromwich locality. The centre manager at the time of the inspection is now the children's services manager for the locality. This has a positive impact on this centre's capacity to improve.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the West Bromwich Sure Start Children's Centre on 31 October and 1 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who helped us with our work through your enthusiastic involvement in the inspection. We particularly want to thank those of you who welcomed us into your homes.

Like you, we found your children's centre to be welcoming and friendly. Staff are enthusiastic and committed to improving the outcomes for you and your families. Your centre has successfully established good partnerships with a wide range of professionals and services which have had a significant impact on the well-being and outcomes for your families.

Staff regularly share information and make sure they work very well together to provide your families with all the support they need as quickly as possible. We have asked the centre to consider further how they check that what they provide for you is making the best possible difference in the short and longer term. You may be able to help with this.

You are accessing a good range of health services, and the health of your families is improving well as a result. Your centre provides a very safe environment, and staff are swift to intervene when there are any safeguarding concerns to ensure that children are safe and families are fully supported. Your centre has made your homes safer through providing safety equipment and you feel safe in the community.

The centre provides you with a wide range of activities which you told us you enjoy. You are developing your confidence and parenting skills and, as a result, are enabling your children to make the best progress they can.

Your centre has become well established in the community, and families feel confident to ask for help and advice. Your centre has been successful in engaging the large majority of families from your community, particularly those identified as the most vulnerable or in most need of support. The centre has used innovative ways to seek your views and taken them into account at events such as the annual family party where you were invited in to the 'Big Brother' diary room to tell the centre what you thought of them. This was recorded and then used to inform the partnership advisory board. We would like more of you to become involved with the work of the centre to help staff develop the best activities for you. Some of you already sit on the partnership advisory board which is great to see. We would like the centre to help you understand a little better what your role is so that you can ask the centre some really challenging questions about why it is doing certain activities.

Your centre strives to be better and is always looking for ways to improve. It is apparent that the centre is important to all of you who use it.

Thank you once again for your time, we wish you all the very best for the future.

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