

Inspection report for Bertram Children's Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Wyndcliffe Primary School 133730
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Bertram Road Children Day Nursery EY262312

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 representatives of Birmingham City Council, members of the locality advisory board, the leadership team, centre staff and partner agencies such as health professionals, and parents. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation.

Information about the centre

Bertram Children's Centre is situated in a housing estate in Small Heath a suburb of Birmingham, on the same site as Bertram Road Children Day Nursery. The centre was designated in 2007 and is a phase two centre. It is part of a locality focused cluster of four centres working closely together.

The centre serves families living in one of the top 10% most deprived areas in the country. Almost all families come from minority ethnic backgrounds. Some 51% are of Pakistani heritage, with smaller numbers of African and Bangladeshi heritage, and a very small number of White British and Black Caribbean heritage. For many of these families English is an additional language with many different home languages and dialects spoken in the community. Families face issues of poor housing, many living in overcrowded accommodation with their extended families. Many houses have been converted into flats rented out by private landlords.

Of the 463 children aged under five years living in the target area, 71% live in households dependent on benefits and 5% receive the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. There are 51 lone parents in receipt of benefits. On entry to early years provision, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are typically below those expected for their age.

The centre provides health and family support services and adult training. Crèche facilities are provided to support users' access to services and to ensure the centre meets its core purpose. A range of health, social care, family support and education services are provided at the centre and through home visiting, and other outreach accommodation across the area.

A locality manager oversees the work of the centre supported by senior members of the team from across the locality. The locality advisory board is made up of representatives of various professional partners, local community members and parents. Governance is provided by Birmingham City Council.

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

Bertram Children's Centre serves the needs of its community well. There is very effective team working and good partnerships with other services, particularly health, early years practitioners, and employment and learning providers. The centre is vibrant, warm and welcoming to all. One parent expressed the views of many saying that without the centre's help and support, she couldn't have coped with life.

Outcomes are good. Parents value the work the centre does and recognise the positive impact it has on their lives. Leaders are very aware of the ongoing issues and challenges for children and families in their area. They are responsive and adapt provision well to meet local needs. They set ambitious targets to improve the health, safety and economic well-being of the local community.

Families engage well through a variety of courses that increase their knowledge and understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles. Health programmes are proving successful; for example the provision of vitamin D supplements has begun to reduce the numbers of children presenting with Rickets. The centre is aware that the proportion of obese Reception-age children is slightly above average and therefore continues to promote better diet and exercise activities. Breastfeeding is well supported with 54% of mothers sustaining breastfeeding which is slightly above the Birmingham and national average. Hospital admissions for young children have

decreased following sustained delivery of home safety programmes and one-to-one family support, including help to purchase aids such as safety gates and cupboard locks. These measures have had a significant impact in ensuring children are now safer within their homes and the community.

For the majority of users the centre is their first place of contact when they face difficulties and all say how safe they feel. One parent commented that, 'They give so much more because they really care.' Safeguarding is good, supported through its work with partners, providing timely, sensitive and good support to families and children who are made vulnerable by their circumstances or facing significant difficulties in their lives. All children and parents, and carers of children who are subject to a child protection plan, are very well supported and attend activities that help children to remain safely within their families. However, information sharing between some agencies involved in family support is sometimes unwieldy, due to different systems used to store information.

Adults have access to English language development and progress onto other learning programmes through local providers and the City College. Users evaluate activities routinely, and the centre strives to respond. Programmes rotate across the four centres with 'Stay and Play' sessions being delivered in each of the centres to ensure parents have a choice about which one to attend.

Children enjoy centre-organised activities and make good progress in their learning and development. They behave well and form good relationships with their peers and adults. Staff are beginning to have a clearer understanding of the revised Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework, although planning for learning is not always individualised and tailored to meet the different needs of the children. Children achieve well from a very low baseline where English as a second language is a barrier to some children's learning. Outcomes are improving, especially in language and literacy and the gap between the 20% lowest achieving children and the rest is narrower than seen nationally.

Actions taken to ensure equality of opportunity and to address discrimination are effective. Any unacceptable behaviour is tackled swiftly and an inclusive approach is taken to engage with groups whose circumstances have made them particularly vulnerable. While fathers are very happy with the quality of programmes organised for them, they would like more varied activities every Saturday, particularly active play. Some staff speak a range of community languages and interpreters are used where required. Family support is provided in the home for those who feel unable to visit the centre or are experiencing crisis. Advice and financial management support is provided through 'Family Action' with many families being helped to access significant sums from benefits and other funding to which they are entitled.

Leadership and governance are good. The centre manager and the locality management team create a culture where centre staff work together as a team and are well motivated to continue improving the work of the centre. Effective leadership has contributed to ensuring outcomes and the quality of provision are good, as is the

value for money provided. The centre evaluates its activities robustly, including consultation with the users and non-users, and listens and responds positively to parents' views. Data provided by the local authority is well-focused and together with the information from the consultation process enable the centre to have good capacity and plan effectively for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Review the format of planning to ensure it clearly identifies the individual learning needs of each child who attends the centre.
- Extend centre managers' work with the local authority to explore how they can access information used by other professionals to further enhance capacity and improve efficiency in information sharing.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes for children and families are good. The centre is well focused on improving the health and well-being of families. One parent commented how she was able to provide a better diet for her family after attending the Health Exercise and Nutrition programme, and that she now 'felt like a proper mum.' Others have attended fitness classes and participate in healthy walks in the park. There is a large outdoor play area at the centre, which is used well by families and offers children good opportunities for physical play and activities in the fresh air to support their healthy development. The centre addresses effectively users' feelings of isolation and provides good support for families to engage in a range of services and to begin to develop friendships. Users report that their confidence and self-esteem have improved since attending the centre.

All services offered in the centre keep users safe. The centre's good quality relationships with families allow staff to identify any safety concerns and to intervene appropriately. All families are assessed using the pre-Common Assessment Framework (CAF) on registration which provides strong evidence that early interventions are improving lives. Data show that support is having a positive impact with some cases now being stepped down due to effective multi-agency working. Actions around this work, however, could be improved through revised information sharing protocols between agencies working with children and families. Children are well prepared for nursery and mainstream school due to the effective delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage through a wide range of activities such as 'Stay and Play' including story sessions, music and rhyme, speech and language, baby groups and other creative activities. Children's behaviour throughout the centre is good. Planning for some of these sessions, however, could be better tailored to meet the individual needs of children. For example, the plan for children with additional needs using the sensory room did not take full account of each child's individual learning needs. Support for transition arrangements is provided effectively through good contact with the on-site nursery and with local schools. Teachers visit the centre and

children visit the school during the summer term prior to starting school. For children with additional needs, visits are organised for four weeks in the summer closer to starting school in September which helps them settle into school more easily.

Adults experience educational courses that help them develop their English language skills from very low initial levels up to the National Vocational Qualification level three. The strong focus on language support helps parents develop relationships and improves their self-confidence. Parenting and other programmes, supported by local providers and Birmingham City College, provide significant support in developing parents' behaviour management approaches and this improves family relationships. Intensive behaviour management courses delivered over 15 weeks on a rolling basis across the locality have been particularly successful in enhancing relationships within the family and improving parents' skills in managing children's behaviour. The centre has links with the Jobcentre Plus service to provide job seeking advice and a notice board with current vacancies is usefully displayed in the centre's reception. Parents are now more confident in their communication skills and better prepared for seeking employment.

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	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

Staff thoroughly understand the needs of the centre users, as a result of sensitive personal contact, the work of the early years practitioner, and good partnerships with health professionals and local schools. The assessment of individual cases is robust and the CAF process is used successfully to ensure teams can be assembled quickly to support children and families when needs are identified. Provision is organised across the locality to offer better access for families in the wider reach area. Outreach support is provided for those who are unable to attend the centre, including 'Stay and Play' delivered in the home and in a local hostel. Family support is valued by those whose safety may be at risk as a result of domestic violence and others who, for a variety of reasons, are isolated including those who have experienced acute trauma in their lives.

Learning and development is promoted well. All interventions are child-centred and enable good progress as reflected in the Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes. Staff have a strong focus on supporting families in the best interests of children. The centre's outdoor play space enables children to play in the fresh air which is highly valued by families as there are few outdoor spaces where children can play safely in the local area. Sessions for fathers on Saturdays alternate between a focus on reading in the library and activity based at the centre. Fathers describe how relaxed and happy they are at the centre and value highly what the centre has done to help them form closer bonds with their children.

Care, guidance and support are good. Sensitive, individualised and tailored support is provided to all families and children who access the centre. There is evidence of effective multi-agency working which ensures that families access the right kind of support. Particularly effective is the support provided by 'Family Action' which provides practical solutions working with families where issues around tenancy agreements, debt and rent arrears, and access to benefits are provided.

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

Leaders set an ethos within the centre where safeguarding is good and given a high priority. Policies and procedures are effective and comply fully with the requirements of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. Criminal Records Bureau records are updated regularly and confirmation has been received from partners that checks for staff who work with the centre from other organisations have been made. Effective team working empowers staff ensuring that families achieve well. Within venues, rigorous safeguarding, risk assessments and health and safety procedures ensure the well-being of participants.

Leadership, management and governance are good. A locality advisory board consisting of stakeholders, including those with good knowledge of the local community history has been in place for some years and is currently re-thinking its focus. The centre is effectively supported by the local authority who works with the centre to agree ambitious targets. A core group of staff have worked in the reach area over a number of years providing good continuity which centre users highly value. Leaders are well focused on the needs of the immediate community. Their expertise and the skills of a highly qualified and united team combine to ensure that a good quality of service is provided. The number of families attending the centre is

consistently high, with 85% of families in the reach area being registered, and almost 90% of families being engaged. There is real buzz to the centre.

Self-evaluation is effective and informs planning and target setting. Consultation processes take place regularly and this year included non-user views. Information from the surveys has made the centre more aware of the areas that are effective and those requiring further development, such as doing more work in encouraging participation of those who do not currently access the centre. Performance management of staff is rigorous and arrangements for supervision meetings and appraisals are thorough.

The centre provides an inclusive setting, engaging with children with health, disability and learning difficulties, and families from a wide range of cultures. Activities are focused on children with additional needs, for example through specialised sessions timetabled into the sensory room. Particularly strong actions are taken to support many vulnerable families and children, as well as those who require support in times of acute need or crisis. The centre works well with its partners which enhance its capacity to meet the varied needs of its families. In particular, those subjected to domestic violence receive specialist support from a local organisation which includes, in some situations, development and training being provided to the perpetrator. A wide range of good quality play equipment, toys and books are used well to encourage learning and development. Sharing of resources across the locality impacts positively on the sustainability of this centre, ensuring it provides good value for money.

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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	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	2

reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The Bertram Road Children Day Nursery was inspected in February 2012 and judged to be good overall with some outstanding aspects. Wyndcliffe Primary School was inspected in November 2011 and was judged to be satisfactory.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Bertram Children's Centre on 7 and 8 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and held discussions with some you, the staff and other professionals who work with the centre to support you.

Thank you for making us feel so welcome and for taking the time to talk to us about your children's centre. Your views were very helpful to the inspection. Many of you told us that the staff are friendly, welcoming and very supportive and we agree.

Outcomes are good and the centre has plans in place to continue this good work. The centre management team is very well supported by Birmingham City Council and with senior members of your community to help the centre plan and deliver services for you. The number of families who take up the opportunities on offer in the centre and across the locality is high and this includes those whose circumstances might make them reluctant to access services. We know that you have different opportunities to tell the centre what you would like to do and that you take time to give feedback at the end of a session or course. This is a positive feature.

Provision to help your children learn and develop is good. You are developing your parenting skills and your understanding of how healthy lifestyles play a big part in your child's development. This is due to the high degree of support your centre provides to help you recognise and support your child's learning and development at home. While this work is good, we have asked the centre to develop better plans for more individualised learning in order to meet your children's specific interests and needs. You value the opportunities provided by your centre and schools to support your child's transfer to school which ensures they arrive ready to learn, are more confident and independent.

You have good access to opportunities to develop your English language skills and to take part in training that improves your confidence and communication. There are

many opportunities for you to engage in activities that help improve family health, including access to vitamins, dental care, cooking healthy and cheap meals and eating healthy snacks. The fathers we spoke to were very pleased with the sessions organised for them on Saturdays. Sessions are held at the centre on alternate weeks, with opportunities for fathers to go with their children to the library for other activities on alternative weeks.

Your centre provides families with effective care, guidance and support, particularly when you are facing times of crisis, with some very good outcomes. You express strongly that you receive a high-level of support. As part of this support, the centre also provides opportunities for you to access advice and counselling services and because of this many of you have been able to obtain additional benefits and other grants. However, some of the communications that the centre has with other partners in supporting you is currently slowed down as a result of a lack of opportunity to share some information. We have asked them to work with the local authority to find better ways of quickly sharing appropriate information.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your openness helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time in your centre and we wish you and your families the very best for the future.

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