

Inspection report for Queen Victoria Children's Centre

Local authority	Dudley
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Queen Victoria Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Queen Victoria Children's Centre (EY363949)

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

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

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

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

Information about the centre

Queen Victoria Children's Centre is a phase two centre which opened in January 2008 and is located on the site of Queen Victoria Primary School. The purpose built centre, which is attached to the school, incorporates registered childcare provision comprising of crèche facilities for children from birth to five years old and wrap around provision for children aged three to five years, all year round.

The local authority has delegated responsibility for governance of the children's centre and the registered childcare provision to the governing body of Queen Victoria Primary School but still maintains regular contact with and provides support for the centre. An advisory board, comprising representatives from various partner organisations, parents and school governors, oversees the work of the centre and reports to the governing body of the primary school. A centre manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of the centre under the overall leadership of the headteacher of the primary school.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a range of services for families, by working with other partner organisations and by referring parents and children to other specialist providers. The centre's services include full day-care provision for children up to the age of five, nursery education for two-year-olds, groups to support new parents and children under five, a range of courses and specialist programmes

for parents, and support for individual families through the centre’s family support workers.

The centre’s reach area encompasses Sedgely, Woodsetton and Upper Gornal. There are three other primary schools, two early years providers, two childminders in the area, in which an estimated 818 children under the age of five years live. Most families (90%) are of White British heritage. The remainder represent a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds.

The centre is located in the heart of an urban area of mixed housing. Within the reach area, there are pockets of deprivation and disadvantage among relatively more advantaged areas. Levels of unemployment and the proportion of families dependent on benefits in Dudley are above the national average.

Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are well below those expected nationally 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

Queen Victoria Children’s Centre is a good children’s centre. It is an inclusive, warm and welcoming place run by dedicated adults who aspire to serve their community well. Parents speak very highly of the centre as being ‘a wonderful place where they feel supported and surrounded by people who genuinely want to help’ and where they feel safe, secure, and listened to. Comments from users such as, ‘Staff are wonderful, they are always there, they don’t judge you, and nothing is too much trouble,’ are typical.

Outcomes for children and families are good overall. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Partnership working, outreach work and the high quality early years provision are all strengths of the centre. Leadership and management are good. There are clear links between strategic planning, development plans and service provision. Governance arrangements are satisfactory. The centre manager has a clear vision and commitment to develop the centre’s services. Her knowledge of the

reach area is excellent. She knows the centre's main strengths and areas for development. She provides effective day-to-day management and professional supervision arrangements for staff. The local authority undertakes routine quality assurance visits and provides an accurate appraisal of the centre's work to inform planning. The work of the advisory board is less effective. Members' attendance is sporadic and accountability arrangements are not consistently understood. Consequently, the centre manager is not fully supported, challenged or held to account. Despite these weaknesses, the centre manager's determination, combined with her very passionate, caring and dedicated team, ensures that the centre's provision and outcomes remain good.

The majority of partnership working, such as with the midwives, the local primary schools, social care, Citizen's Advice Bureau and the voluntary sector, is very effective. However, a few partnerships, for example, with adult learning are less well established. Safeguarding is the centre's highest priority and at the heart of what they do. Children who are subject to child protection plans are very well supported across the multi-agency partnerships and through the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes.

The strong partnership working with schools, results in good quality practice being shared and appropriate training being delivered. The effective monitoring of children's progress ensures that particular needs are identified and addressed as early as possible. In addition, excellent transition arrangements between home, childcare provision and school enable children to settle well, having a positive impact on their learning and development. Consequently, children make significant progress in their learning and development, closing the gap between the most disadvantaged children and their peers.

Parents participate enthusiastically in activities and courses which build their confidence and develop their parenting and life skills well. For example, sessions such as the family links nurturing programme are well attended and enjoyed. Parents report positively on how the sessions have improved their families' lives. Comments such as, 'we spend more time as a family, play games, talking, enjoying each other's company' and 'my home is a much happier place' are typical. The centre is particularly strong at supporting volunteers to gain qualifications in childcare. Some have successfully moved on to further education and employment. However, the range of opportunities to enable parents to volunteer and gain skills and qualifications which will improve their employability chances in a broader range of work is more limited. Parent volunteers talked confidently about how the centre had improved their confidence, skills and the quality of life for their families. Comments such as 'I have changed beyond recognition, they have put me on the right path', 'staff have inspired me' and 'I would not have been able to do what I have done without their support' are typical.

Inclusion is central to the vision of the centre and staff have a commitment to promoting equality and diversity. The centre has established itself at the heart of the

community and is promoting tolerance and understanding. The centre has successfully reached 98% of families within the reach area of which the majority are actively engaging. Consequently, some of the most vulnerable groups, particularly lone parents, those experiencing difficulties such as mental health or domestic violence, and parents who have children with disabilities or special educational needs, are engaging with services and have their individual needs met effectively.

The manager and her team are strongly focused on securing outcomes and promoting services that are well matched to the needs of families within the reach. The views of users, children and staff are regularly sought and contribute to developing the centre's services. Evaluations about the impact of its work are largely based upon case studies and staff's knowledge of the families they serve due to the inconsistency in the quality and availability of data the centre receives from outside sources. The manager has accurately identified this area for development and is currently taking action to address this.

The effective work of the centre manager and her staff team, the quality of the services provided and the positive impact on those families who attend indicate that the centre has good capacity to further improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the effectiveness of the advisory board so that it supports and contributes more effectively to the development of the centre's services through:
 - ensuring good attendance at meetings
 - improving members' knowledge regarding their roles and responsibilities
 - challenging leaders and managers robustly
 - holding the centre to account by evaluating the effectiveness of its improvement work against clearly measurable outcomes.

- Improve the rigour with which leaders and managers evaluate the impact of the centre's work through obtaining accurate and up-to-date information from all sources and use this information to ensure that development planning is as effective as possible in improving services for children and families.

- Improve parents' economic stability and independence by:
 - increasing the range of accredited learning, development and training opportunities that will help them move on to a wide range of employment
 - increasing the range of opportunities for adults to engage in volunteer work.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre offers a good range of opportunities for parents and children to increase their understanding of how to keep healthy, through targeted support groups such as 'Jumping Beans' and 'Sing and Groove' sessions. Staff lead by example and have successfully quit smoking and lost weight along with parents. Parents reported that they felt better able to support and enhance a healthy lifestyle for their families as a result of attending the sessions.

Staff work effectively in partnership with midwives and other health agencies to improve the physical and mental health outcomes for young children and their families to reduce health inequalities. Most families in the area are engaging with appropriate health services. The centre makes links with all new parents and 98% receive a home visit. Obesity in Reception-aged children is a Dudley-wide concern. Consequently, a strong child-weight management programme is being implemented. As a result, obesity levels of children within the reach are decreasing. Uptake of immunisation is high. The proportion of mothers breastfeeding their babies is below average and also a Dudley-wide issue. However, the centre has successfully trained five breastfeeding buddies, resulting in five parents currently sustaining breastfeeding at five months.

Parents and children say that they feel very safe at the centre and are confident to share information with staff. There are well-established lines of communication and highly effective integrated working between professionals enabling them to make a good contribution to improving the safety and well-being of children in the home. Parents are informed about safeguarding. They are helped to learn how to keep their children safe in the home and out in the community through the 'Family links nurturing programme', 'paediatric first aid' and national campaigns such as 'Child Safety Week' and 'Road Safety'. As a result, most families report improved outcomes around safety. Families with child protection plans are known to the centre and receive effective, integrated support to keep children safe.

Staff are very knowledgeable and have a secure understanding of how to raise children's achievement across all areas of learning. They make effective use of what they know about the children and plan sessions to meet their individual needs. Parents participate enthusiastically in activities and courses which build their confidence and develop their parenting skills. They are supported well in helping their children learn and play at home. For example, the '2 time 4 U' and 'Sing and Groove' sessions promote parents' understanding of how to promote children's communication and social skills through use of story sacks, singing and finger puppets. Comments such as, 'I feel more confident in helping my children' and 'As a family we have learnt to interact with each other whilst having fun' are typical.

Staff place strong emphasis on promoting positive behaviour. Consequently, children are well behaved. Parents have very positive and mutually respectful relationships with staff and with each other. The 'Parents' Forum', currently taking place in the form of outreach coffee mornings, encourages and supports parents to express their

views. Some parents make a good contribution to the centre’s work through governance and in decision making. For example, two parents are currently the chair and vice-chair of the advisory board. Where views and wishes are expressed, the centre is very responsive. Parents say that they feel listened to, respected and valued.

Effective partnerships with agencies such as Family Information Service and Citizens’ Advice Bureau, and the up-to-date Jobcentre Plus notice board displayed in the reception area, mean that families are provided with a range of information to help them improve their economic stability or independence.

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

The centre team knows and understands its community very well and uses this knowledge to plan good-quality provision. The centre always seeks to improve the life chances and personal development of both parents and children. Parents expressed great appreciation of the support they receive through the centre and of the positive changes that have resulted for their children and themselves. As one parent stated, ‘I couldn’t have coped without their help, they’ve been marvellous, my child loves it, they have given me hope...’

The centre is a constant hive of activity, very warm, welcoming, well maintained and safe. Parents comment on the friendliness of staff stating that ‘they always have a smile’, ‘nothing is too much trouble’ and ‘they go that extra mile’ to ensure children and families feel included and valued. Staff deploy and target resources well. If there is a need, the centre will endeavour to meet it. It makes good use of the local primary schools to deliver sessions, and seizes every opportunity to use the on-site early years provision to run activities during school holidays. The centre provides good value for money.

The quality of care, guidance and support is exceptionally high. Families who have

young children with disabilities, lone parents and fathers all receive outstanding support to overcome a wide range of personal and social problems, such as domestic violence, debt and potential homelessness. Advice, support and guidance are personalised to fully meet the needs of individual users with very effective signposting to other agencies as appropriate.

The centre works in close partnership with social services and other services to assess rigorously the needs of the most vulnerable children and families. Detailed assessments using the CAF are used to prepare an individual plan for the child and their family, avoiding duplication of services and minimising the risk of the most vulnerable families falling through the net. Plans are regularly reviewed to ensure that services continue to meet the needs of each family and also, where possible, to gradually withdraw services to reduce dependency. Parents are treated with sensitivity and respect and they very much appreciate this. The support is seamless, with centre staff and partners working collaboratively to ensure that needs are met in the most effective way.

Parents benefit from a varied range of adult learning opportunities which enable some parents to gain qualifications and access employment. Parents and children gain from the sessions run by the centre, including good speech and language support and the enjoyable 'coffee mornings', '2 time 4 U' and 'buggy walks' which are planned around the Early Years Foundation Stage to encourage exploration and enjoyment of learning. The centre celebrates all achievements, no matter how big or small, consequently raising aspirations, confidence and self-esteem for all.

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

The centre is led and managed well by the centre manager. Governance and accountability arrangements are satisfactory. Parents have representation on the advisory board and contribute towards decision making. Strategic planning is based on self-evaluation involving all staff and the local authority quality assurance process. Professional supervision of staff and regular one-to-one meetings with the manager promote the shared values of staff and their ability to meet organisational expectations. Teamwork among staff is strong and morale is good despite the local authority's imminent plans to restructure the management of children's centres.

Good partnership working means that families receive fully integrated services. Family support workers liaise effectively with social care, health services, and

voluntary partners to ensure that families at risk or facing challenging circumstances receive support tailored to their needs. This helps to ensure children are kept safe and adults at risk receive the support they need. Many parents reported positively about how the staff had helped them in times of crisis. For example, 'I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the staff, I would be in a mental hospital', and 'I felt immediately supported and surrounded by people who genuinely wanted to help'.

Safeguarding is of the highest priority and all policies and procedures are consistently implemented. Vetting and recruitment processes for staff and volunteers are robust. Training in safeguarding and child protection is of paramount importance and ensure that all staff are fully aware of safeguarding and child protection procedures. The centre plays a pivotal role in seeking to ensure that children are safe and, where necessary, child protection plans are implemented effectively.

Equality and diversity are actively promoted in all aspects of the centre's work. All groups are welcomed and included, and feel well supported. The centre is very aware of what the barriers to accessing services are and is taking effective steps to reach the most vulnerable groups. Home visits are invaluable in reaching families with the greatest need. Staff are constantly looking at ways in which to reach those families who are not regularly accessing services. Services and activities are well signposted and promoted. For example, seasonal newsletters are sent to families, leaflets are displayed at community venues and partners make verbal recommendations. Families speak highly of the centre's services and readily engage in them.

Data and feedback from headteachers confirm how much better prepared for school children who have accessed the centre's services are compared with those who have not. Children, including the most vulnerable two-year-olds, make significant progress in their learning and development, with an increasing percentage gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales. Consequently, the gap between the lowest-achieving and the rest is being reduced.

Staff and parents routinely evaluate activities and services, and use this information to shape new services. The manager has an accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas development. This is very much due to the fact that she is a 'hands-on' manager; she has a visible presence within the centre and is actively involved in delivering the centre's work. Consequently, she knows the families and the community's needs very well.

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	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target	2

groups	
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 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

The outcome judgements of the on-site early years provision inspection carried out prior to the inspection of the centre were taken into consideration for this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Queen Victoria Children's Centre on 7–8 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

Queen Victoria Children's Centre is a good children's centre. It is an inclusive, warm and welcoming place run by dedicated adults who aspire to serve your community well. You speak very highly of the centre as being 'a wonderful place where you feel supported and surrounded by people who genuinely want to help' and where you feel safe, secure, and listened to. You told us that 'Staff are wonderful, they are always there, they don't judge you, and nothing is too much trouble'.

Outcomes for you and your children are good. The quality of care, guidance and support you receive is outstanding. Partnership working, outreach work and the high quality early years provision are all strengths of the centre. The centre manager has a clear vision and commitment to develop the centre's services. She is a good manager. She has an excellent understanding of your needs and knows the centre's main strengths and areas for development. The work of the advisory board is less effective. Members' attendance is unreliable and accountability arrangements are not consistently understood. Consequently, the centre manager is not fully supported,

challenged or held to account. Therefore, we have asked the local authority to take action to improve the effectiveness of the advisory board so that it supports and contributes more effectively to the development of the centre's services.

The centre offers a good range of opportunities for you and your children to increase your understanding of how to keep healthy, through sessions such as 'Jumping Beans' and 'Sing and Groove' sessions. Staff lead by example and have successfully quit smoking and lost weight along with some of you. You told us that you felt better able to support and enhance a healthy lifestyle for your families as a result of attending the sessions.

You told us that you and your children feel safe at the centre and are confident to share information with staff. The staff ensure you are informed about safeguarding. You are helped to learn how to keep your children safe in the home and out in the community through the 'Family links nurturing programme', 'paediatric first aid' and national campaigns such as 'Child Safety Week' and 'Road Safety'. As a result, you report improved outcomes around safety. Families with child protection plans are known to the centre and receive effective, integrated support to keep children safe.

Staff are very knowledgeable and have a secure understanding of how to raise children's achievement across all areas of learning. They make effective use of what they know about the children and plan sessions to meet their individual needs. Consequently, children are making significant progress in their learning. You participate enthusiastically in activities and courses which build your confidence and develop your parenting and life skills well. You are also supported well in helping your children learn and play at home. For example, the '2 time 4 U' and 'Sing and Groove' sessions promote your understanding of how to promote children's communication and social skills through use of story sacks, singing and finger puppets. Comments such as, 'I feel more confident in helping my children' and 'As a family we have learnt to interact with each other whilst having fun' are typical of what you told us.

The staff have strong partnership working with schools which means they work closely together to ensure your children's transition arrangements between home, childcare provision and school enable your children to settle well, having a positive impact on their learning and development.

The centre is particularly strong at supporting volunteers to gain qualifications in childcare. Parent volunteers talked confidently about how the centre had improved their confidence, skills and the quality of life for their families. Comments such as 'I have changed beyond recognition, they have put me on the right path', 'staff have inspired me' and 'I would not have been able to do what I have done without their support' are typical. Some of you have successfully moved on to further education and employment. However, the range of opportunities to enable you to volunteer and gain skills and qualifications which will improve your employability chances in a broader range of work is more limited. Therefore, we have asked the centre

manager to increase the range of accredited learning, development and training and volunteer opportunities for you.

Inclusion is central to the vision of the centre. It is a constant hive of activity, very warm, welcoming, well maintained and safe. You comment on the friendliness of staff stating that 'they always have a smile', 'nothing is too much trouble' and 'they go that extra mile' to ensure you and your children feel included and valued. Staff deploy and target resources well. If there is a need, the centre will endeavour to meet it. You told us you are treated with sensitivity and respect and you very much appreciate this.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk to you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. 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.