

Inspection report for Gornal Parent and Children's Centre

Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	406945
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Robert's Primary School:URN 103821
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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, staff, and representatives of the local authority, members of the governors' management committee from the partner primary school, a range of agencies and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The centre is located in Lower Gornal in Dudley and is a phase two centre serving areas that have a mixture of owner occupied, rented and local authority households. The centre's reach area includes some of the most disadvantaged super output areas in the borough with varying levels of social and economic deprivation and unemployment. Gornal consists of predominantly White British families and approximately one in ten is from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. The reach areas have high levels of households on welfare benefits and low adult educational attainment records. The large majority of children who attend the centre with their parents or carers start with skills, knowledge and abilities that are well below those expected for their age.

The centre is located on the site of Robert's Primary School and is physically linked to the school's nursery. It is directly governed by Dudley local authority which has commissioned a service level agreement with the governing body of the primary school to manage the centre's provision of integrated children and family services. The governing body delegates a management committee to oversee the effective operation of Gornal Parent and Children's Centre. In addition to having governors of the primary school, the management committee includes members that represent a range of groups, volunteers and agencies. The centre's core purpose is to provide a range of services that include health, family support, and early years activities for children under five with their parents or carers, advice and guidance to families as

well as adult learning provided by the local authority. This is the centre's first inspection since its formal designation in 2009.

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

'It (the centre) is like a lifeline for me and my child.' This is one of many heartfelt and accurate accounts that parents and carers shared with inspectors. Gornal Parent and Children's Centre successfully meets the needs of families and users. It is a good centre and has established warm and very positive relationships with the families it serves. The centre manager rightly summed up the centre's aims, 'This is like a one-stop shop for our families and we aim to welcome, reach out and provide as much as we can for all of them.'

The centre manager and senior management team provide high quality leadership. Centre staff work as an effective team to provide equality of access to all the centre's services. The centre is good at celebrating diversity in a stimulating and safe communal environment. It is outstanding at engaging with families at the centre and when undertaking home visits or drop-in family guidance sessions. In addition to coming to the centre, many users are increasingly attending other venues where the centre and its partners organise very effective workshops, training, guidance and support. The range of programmes provided enable families to overcome barriers, including improving access to support for the most vulnerable. The number of adults accessing training, support and learning has more than quadrupled since the centre's designation in 2009. The staff are now regularly engaging with the large majority of families registered with the centre, including those from minority ethnic groups.

Gornal has been successful in encouraging parents and carers to be involved in decisions about the centre's work through the 'Parent Voice' forum. The forum now provides a direct link with, and opportunities for, representation on the management committee. This is giving parents and carers increasing opportunities to contribute to the centre's development and combined with good governance and leadership, demonstrates that the centre has good capacity for sustained improvement.

The centre has very effective multi-agency partnerships including strong links with the Citizen's Advice Bureau and an excellent contribution from the voluntary sector. A midwife, nurse and health visitors work closely with staff to provide outstanding care, guidance and support. The centre's accurate evaluations and inspection findings show that it is successfully improving the health, safety and economic well-being of its users. Governors and senior leaders are ambitious and recognise that there is still more to do to reach out further to the most vulnerable or hard to reach families. One of the most significant barriers for families and children is their limited competence in communication, language and literacy. Assessments of children under five in the area show that there is a considerable gap between achievement levels in speech, language and communication and their attainment in other areas of learning. There is still scope for centre staff to focus more on raising achievement in children's speech and language development, as well as contributing more with other partners and local authority services to improve adult literacy levels.

The management committee, senior leadership team and local authority undertake systematic reviews of the centre's performance. Action plans and evaluations of the impact of the range of services provided are routinely checked. However, action plans do not always specify who is monitoring or evaluating each priority for improvement and this makes it difficult to ensure that assessments of performance are both accurate and objective. Some priorities do not have clear enough measures of success to enable governors or the local authority to gauge how well each action is improving or the impact it is having on users. Nevertheless, there is good practice in that centre staff undertake regular reviews of the impact of each activity or programme being offered and this generates a very good range of performance data about the value of each programme and its effect on users.

There are good arrangements in place to safeguard children. Staff are well trained and their skills are updated regularly. Home visits pick up any concerns and staff involved in outreach work are vigilant and attentive. The effective use of referral forms and appropriate reporting procedures enables staff to raise any causes of concern related to safeguarding or child protection.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Build on the good range of activities and services to improve their impact on raising children's achievement in communication, language and literacy, particularly speech and language skills. Also ensure that when working with other agencies and partners, the centre contributes more to raising adult literacy levels amongst families in all its reach areas.
- Sharpen the centre's action planning to improve self-evaluation by:
 - making sure that action plans set out more clearly who is monitoring and evaluating each priority for improvement
 - refining each priority to establish clear measures of success for leaders, staff and governors to gauge how well the centre is improving.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre provides a wide range of family services and activities that promote good outcomes for children and users. These include ante-natal clinics and workshops for lone parents and effective support for teenage carers when nurturing and meeting the needs of their babies from birth to six months. Family support programmes are very successful in providing 'new birth visits' that offer extended services and access to good quality health advice and guidance. Parents and carers are improving their knowledge of healthy eating well and make good progress learning to prepare a balanced diet through regular and well-attended 'Get Cooking' workshops and 'Tea Time Teddies' sessions with their children. Impact evaluations undertaken by staff show that these are making a good contribution to improving the health of children and families. Although adult obesity rates are above average in the Gornal area as a whole, these sessions are making a good contribution to reducing obesity rates of children under five.

Home visits undertaken by centre staff and health visitors provide good advice to families about dental services and issues such as smoking cessation and, for example, the most appropriate clinics for immunisation. Effective partnerships with a primary mental health worker, a midwife or nurse provide families with more accessible and specialised services. The centre is currently focusing on improving the percentage of mothers breastfeeding their children at six to eight weeks as it has recognised that, following their time in hospital after birth, there is a declining rate of mothers breastfeeding their babies. The centre is successful at improving parents' and carers' confidence through ante-natal classes such as 'Bumps to Bundles' and baby massage sessions. Outcome data related to these sessions, combined with 'New Birth' home visits and family support programmes, show that users in the centre's target area are improving their skills and staff are successful at helping families to improve their confidence and independence when caring for their children in the home.

The centre is successful at using the Common Assessment Framework to record and coordinate support programmes and to enable parents and carers to manage their family lives. This is offering emotional stability for the most vulnerable families, including those with child protection plans and interventions which ensure that children are safe and protected. Very well-trained administrative staff act as a good first point of contact for families. They receive users sensitively and make them feel welcomed in a safe and secure environment. As a result, parents and carers spoken to said they trusted the staff and feel safe.

Volunteers make a very good contribution to helping users and children feel safe alongside the early years and child care workers, especially when users attend parenting courses or relationship advice, as staff care for their children or organise a crèche so parents and carers can attend regularly. Safe and well-supervised off-site sessions at the Sycamore Centre provide families with disabilities further opportunities and access to engage with children that have additional or special educational needs. The partnership with this well-established off-site centre is of

enormous benefit to families who have children with disabilities. It also offers regular opportunities for young children to play outdoors and child development assessments show that this improves their physical development well.

The staff make good use of its partnerships with the Early Years Foundation Stage of the neighbouring primary school and other early years providers and nurseries. Children enjoy opportunities attending the centre with their parents or carers, such as the weekly 'Time for Twos', 'Crawling Caterpillars', 'Talking Tots' and 'Busy Butterfly' sessions. These are successful at improving early learning opportunities for families and preparing them for their children's readiness for nursery or school. They also provide good opportunities for parents and carers to learn to promote language and literacy in the home, including the specialised home visits run by the senior family support worker called 'Bookstart Corner'. The sessions provided by the centre are most successful at engaging children and developing positive behaviour. They also help children to socialise with others and this improves their personal and social development extremely well.

Early years profile assessment data for under-fives in the area and evidence from assessments kept by the centre setting out age-related stages of child development show that children's communication, language and literacy skills lag significantly behind those achieved in other areas of learning. Children achieve satisfactorily in speech and language but there is scope to do more by focusing each of these early learning and parenting sessions more on improving communication, language and literacy skills. Lower than average adult literacy levels remain significant barriers for parents and carers so it is difficult for them to help their children improve their speech and language. The activities provided by the centre promote positive behaviour well and have most impact on improving children's personal, social and emotional development. However, the evaluation of the impact of these sessions has not fully taken into account the individual language needs of families so that sessions do not always focus sufficiently on accelerating children's achievement in communication, language and literacy.

The staff are successful at encouraging users to make a positive contribution to the community. An outstanding aspect of this is the increasing numbers who are volunteering regularly in the centre. The 'Parent Voice' is increasingly being used as a forum for parents and carers and the local library service is being used well to enable access to their services when users are not at the centre. Volunteers and staff coordinate information sessions that make a good contribution to improving parents' home financing skills and encourage families to save and borrow money responsibly.

Outreach work and strong links with the local authority's adult education services provide good opportunities for users to improve their skills. There has been notable success from some parents or carers who have gone on to achieve accredited Level 1 or Level 2 qualifications. The centre recognises that the underlying levels of adult literacy across the reach areas are low and hinder access to further education for adults. Nevertheless, the centre continues to find more extensive and innovative ways of encouraging adults to go on to further education, employment or training.

The support for lone parents, home visiting and adult literacy sessions run by local authority providers are effectively promoting training and further job opportunities for users and volunteers.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	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 throughout the centre is good overall. Staff and volunteers are active in promoting the centre's services in the neighbourhood and are increasingly contributing to the development of the centre. Thorough assessments of the needs of families enable staff to tailor sessions and activities so they are relevant to users' needs, although more could still be done to focus on improving language and literacy levels for individual families. The range of programmes and services offered are interesting, stimulating and varied, and promote good outcomes for children and families.

Case studies from this inspection and the inspection of some home visits show that family support is very effective in giving parents and carers whose circumstances make them most vulnerable confidence and a safe haven to turn to when in most need. This 'lifeline', as one parent referred to, is one of the strongest features of the centre's services. Evidence from the take-up rates and repeated use of the centre show that the staff make every effort to work with families in most need. Well-devised and coordinated outreach work and home visits provide good support for families who feel isolated. This is particularly effective where a parent or carer is having mental, emotional or financial problems, or parents who need guidance after the birth of a child.

The local library service offers a range of activities and drop-in sessions to promote early literacy which encourages families to share books with their children. The early years worker and staff provide a good programme of sessions to promote literacy

and communication skills using books and other language resources. These are productive and well-attended by parents and carers who have said they improve their confidence when supporting their children at home. However, sessions do not always focus enough, or spend enough time on, specific reading and talking techniques and strategies that parents can use with their children at home. Parents and carers are pleased with the centre's literacy programmes, such as 'Every Child a Talker', as one commented, 'It helps me and my child and I have noticed that he can talk with others more confidently now.' The strong links with the primary school and other nurseries provide continuity when children reach the age of three. The centre coordinates transition from the centre to local nurseries very well ensuring that families feel confident when ready for the next stage of their children's education. All the parents and carers spoken to confirmed that continuity between the centre and other early years providers is very well managed by the staff, as one rightly said, 'This centre works closely with the school and I know that other mums have told me that the staff are great at putting them in touch with the staff there and with other nurseries.'

The quality of care, guidance and support provided for families is outstanding. Centre staff make an excellent contribution to providing emotional support to targeted families who are most in need of support and is of enormous benefit to them as it boosts their confidence and self-esteem. The 'Gornal Talk and Support Group' is a well-established forum for families with children who have additional or special educational needs or disabilities. Parents told inspectors that the centre is very good at supporting them and their children. Early years, child care and family support workers from the centre help those whose circumstances deem them most vulnerable to become more independent and confident when supporting their children at home, especially if families have additional physical, emotional or learning needs. For example, the staff use the 'scrap-book' programme to encourage targeted families to organise and keep a diary-style account of notable events and achievements collected when at home to share with centre staff during one-to-one or group sessions. 'The diary is great for me,' said one parent, 'because it helps me to remember things and I am now more organised when I meet the staff here at the centre.' In addition, the centre has a highly effective range of programmes and initiatives in place such as specialised support groups to promote the health and social well-being of its users like the 'Family Links Nurture Programme' that makes a significant contribution to the welfare and health of young families and the 'Triple P', which is a very effective partnership between the centre and a primary mental health worker.

Effective links with the Citizen's Advice Bureau provides vulnerable families with advice and guidance about seeking entitlements and benefits. The centre is successful at combining its integrated services and partnerships with the local authority's adult learning programmes and acts as an advocate for its users when seeking further education, training or employment, including a wider range of opportunities for users through the centre's outstanding volunteer induction programme.

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

There is strong leadership at all levels that ensures the centre provides good quality integrated family services and that these have a positive impact on children and adult users. The centre manager and senior family support worker continually set high expectations of staff to make sure that the centre continually improves the lives of all its users. There are clear roles and responsibilities for all staff, partners, agencies and volunteers and very well organised day-to-day management and administration of the centre. The staff and volunteers are highly committed and devoted to meeting the needs of the families and users they serve and in helping the centre to become a hub that contributes to improving the lives of its local and wider community. Centre staff and partner agencies are effective in ensuring that children, parents and carers, regardless of differences, backgrounds or disability achieve and have equal access to a range of services and experiences that will benefit them most.

Gornal has well-established and effective partnerships with health visitors, the mental health service, nursery nurses and officers in local early years providers, the midwifery service and with its partner primary school's nursery and Early Years Foundation Stage. Good partnerships also exist with the local library service and the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

The governance of the centre is good and the local service agreement between the governors and Dudley local authority ensure secure accountability, oversight and supervision of the centre. There are efficient arrangements in place to record minutes of management committee meetings. The centre manager provides a wealth of data, self-reviews and impact evaluations of the centre's programmes and services to the management committee that inform the centre's action plan. A current priority is to increase the percentage of hard-to-reach families that use the centre's services but does not always specify the extent to which the most important needs are identified. For example, the centre's action plan and supplementary focus plans do not always include specific or measurable measures of success to enable senior leaders and governors to gauge how much the centre is contributing to, say, raising adult literacy levels. Leaders and governors ensure that professional supervision of staff is strong. It is both systematic and effective in ensuring that the quality of delivery and feedback from those that manage services or lead sessions continually

improve what they offer. Supervision also informs the centre’s training, staffing and resource needs and sets ambitious targets for staff to strive for that helps to ensure that their work is effective enough. The centre provides good value for money.

Self-evaluation is satisfactory overall because centre staff ensure that users’ views and feedback from families through the ‘Parent Voice’ forum inform the centres’ priorities for improvement. Parents and carers have told inspectors that they feel involved, ‘The staff are great, they always ask you how things are or how they can help more,’ said one parent. All parents or carers spoken to by inspectors felt that the centre consults through regular surveys of their views and the outcome of these inform the centre’s action plans. The centre’s action plan identifies who is monitoring each priority for improvement and there is a systematic cycle of audit and review involving governors, centre staff and the local authority. However, the action plan and the centre’s monitoring do not necessarily specify who is evaluating each activity’s impact on users or that evaluations have been carried out by staff or agencies that have the necessary expertise. For example, the centre would need to establish expert and more well-informed evaluations about the impact of early learning sessions on children’s speech and language development to ensure that every programme is having the desired effect of accelerating children’s progress in communication, language and literacy. The centre manager has some convincing data about improved achievement of under-fives at the partner primary school in communication and literacy but the data does not explain the extent to which speech and language amongst children that use the centre is improving enough. This would require more precise and expert evaluations of achievement in speech and language. The staff have a very good understanding of the centre’s most effective and popular activities and where there are strengths or further improvements needed to the centre’s provision. The leadership team, governors and staff respond well to the changing circumstances of families served by the centre and the high expectations set by the local authority’s expectations and outcome targets.

The centre has good safeguarding arrangements in place with strong features related to child protection, health and safety, staff vetting and recruitment. The centre manager and senior family worker have an appropriate ‘empty pockets’ policy to ensure that staff do not use mobile phones or cameras in the centre. Although only a minor omission, it would be appropriate to extend this policy to parents, carers or families when they visit the centre. Child protection plans are kept meticulously and the staff are diligent in maintaining these and keeping in touch with the relevant services and agencies on a case-by-case basis. The centre ensures that all criminal record bureau checks have been carried out and that all staff, governors and volunteers have an enhanced version of these checks, which is very good practice. All staff have been fully trained in child protection and those that deal with young children and babies are trained in paediatric first aid.

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	2
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understood	
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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 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

None

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

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Gornal Children's Centre on 20 – 21 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

The staff provide all of you that use the centre with outstanding care, guidance and support. Those of you that were kind enough to give up some of your time while in the centre to speak to inspectors said that you feel very welcome and that the centre is an important part of your lives in the community. Some of you were clear to inspectors that the centre helps you when you most need support, especially for those that are facing some difficult challenges. The centre staff are both caring and committed and are passionate about continually striving to improve the centre for all of you. The administrative staff provide you with a friendly and warm welcome and they are very good at making you all feel at ease. Centre staff are good at listening to your views and inspectors agree with you that the centre provides excellent ways to engage with families in its communities. You told us that you enjoy using the centre's facilities and services and this is backed up by many of you that use the

centre regularly. The centre is increasing the number of families that use it and is now aiming to reach out further to those families that need support most.

The centre offers a good range of services and activities for all families in the areas it serves. These are provided by well-qualified and skilled professionals. The wide range of services offered make sure that they contribute to you improving your health and that of your children, as well as making sure that families are safe. Children who come to the centre with their parents or carers behave well and are kept safe. The staff are good at helping you to keep your children healthy by choosing healthy foods and through the cookery courses on offer. Specialist staff are on hand to provide good advice about breastfeeding and how best to look after young babies soon after birth.

The staff have a very good range of activities that encourage you to stay and play with your children and these provide you with advice and guidance about early learning, health and safety. Inspectors could see how much you and your children enjoy the activities you attend at the centre and those attended elsewhere, such as the nearby Sycamore Centre, which is particularly good for families who have children with disabilities or additional needs. Sessions and activities provided by the centre are helping parents and carers improve their children's speech and language. Inspectors have asked the centre to do more work and to focus their efforts more in this area by working with local early years providers and other experts to improve and develop children's speaking, listening and literacy skills still further. We have also asked that staff work to do more with local authority literacy services, early years providers and the partner primary school to help adults who use the centre to learn more literacy skills so they can also help their children at home in this important area of learning for children.

Inspectors have also asked the staff and management committee of the primary school's governing body to use more precise checks in all of the centre's action plans that will help them to measure how well the centre is doing. This means that they have to make sure that those who have been given the task of checking each of the centre's activities, particularly those related to improving children's language and literacy, are experts in this field so the centre can continue to move forward and make consistent progress improving children and families to improve their communication, language and literacy skills.

The inspectors would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you and we were most impressed with your honest and forthcoming discussions which really helped us during the inspection. Inspectors thoroughly enjoyed spending time at 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.