

# The Star Children's Centre

Warstones Primary School, Warstones Road, Wolverhampton, WV4 4LU

**Inspection date** 26–27 June 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a good centre.

- The large majority of families, including a high proportion of those in greatest need of support, regularly access the centre's good-quality universal or bespoke services; the number of regular users has more than doubled in the last three years. Good communication with families, including those who speak English as an additional language, is the cornerstone of this rapid improvement.
- Well-targeted support, including home visits, ensures that particularly vulnerable families are helped to get back on their feet. Strong multi-agency partnerships and good use of Common Assessment Framework (CAF) procedures make sure that children at risk, such as those living with adult alcohol or substance abuse, are well protected.
- Well-planned sessions enable children to make good progress. Programmes such as 'Parent Puzzle' enhance young and lone parents' confidence and parenting skills. The monthly 'Dads Group' is very well attended, and involves fun activities for fathers and children such as 'Messy Play' that also deepen family relationships.
- Strong leadership and management coupled with effective governance are the driving forces behind the centre's good effectiveness. Accurate self-evaluation means that leaders know what is working best and where scope for improvement lies. Parents speak highly of the centre and describe it as 'welcoming', 'supportive and friendly' and 'a salve to your spirit'.

### It is not outstanding because:

- The proportion of parents from the centre's most disadvantaged community accessing further education or training is lower than from other groups.
- There is no consistent system in place to follow up how well those who are signposted to services meet their goals.
- Priorities are clear, but improvement targets lack precision and this hinders sharper evaluation.

**Information about this inspection**

The inspection of this children’s centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, family support workers, officers from the local authority and the health services, education and early years practitioners, parents, volunteers and representatives of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited families in their home with support workers and involved the centre leader in paired observations of activities and all team meetings.

They looked at the centre’s self-evaluation, action planning, delivery plan, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures, advisory board minutes, the annual user survey responses and a range of other relevant documentation.

**Inspection team**

Christine Field, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Megan Dauksta	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

This stand-alone centre opened in 2009 and delivers a range of services to meet its core purpose. It is one of 17 in the city. It merged with a neighbouring centre to become The Star Children's Centre in November 2012. The centre shares a site with Warstones Primary School, which is subject to a separate inspection, a multi-agency support team and the city's early years special needs team. The centre does not provide specific on-site childcare.

There are 2,046 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach area, which is mainly affluent with pockets of deprivation. One community falls within the 20% most disadvantaged areas nationally. At 36.6%, this community has one of the highest levels of worklessness in the city. The large majority of families living within the reach area are White British. Children's skills on entry to early education span a wide range but are typically below the levels expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.

The centre is managed by Warstones School's governing body on behalf of Wolverhampton local authority. There is an advisory board, comprising partners and parents, assisting its governance. The centre leader oversees this centre and another centre which is subject to a separate inspection.

A public consultation on the proposal to reduce the number of children's centres has recently been completed by the local authority. The findings will be published at the end of July.

The centre's key target groups are families living in the most disadvantaged community, lone, young and Asian parents, those living on low incomes or in workless homes and vulnerable children living with adult alcohol or substance misuse.

### What does the centre/group need to do to improve further?

- Widen the opportunities for more parents, particularly those from workless homes, to enhance their employability by:
  - carrying out thorough checks on individual education and training needs
  - extending the links with training providers and Jobcentre Plus advisers
  - establishing a system to follow up how well adults make progress when they access courses or programmes, and use the information gathered to inform the planning of future services.
- With the local authority, set precise and measurable improvement targets that are checked regularly by the advisory board and during the annual conversation process.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

**Good**

- The centre usefully promotes what is available locally for under fives in its regular newsletter and plans its programme to avoid duplication. Insightful checks on why some families are not yet attending activities have led to changes in communications, for example by texting parents to publicise what is on offer, alongside more traditional methods such as newsletters. This is leading to the number of registrations increasing over time.
- The centre provides a good balance of bespoke services that benefit families from target groups and universal services in which families from more affluent neighbourhoods also participate. The non-judgemental, warm and friendly welcome is highly valued by users who pinpoint the centre's inclusive approach as instrumental in fostering good community relationships. Families from Asian backgrounds appreciate the centre staff's ability to speak their home languages, with groups such as the 'APNA' (Our) group widening access to services for those who are at an early stage of

learning to speak English.

- The number of eligible two-year-olds taking up their free early years place doubled this year because of the centre's successful partnership with schools and early years' providers in the area. Children's school readiness is nurtured successfully at 'Preparing your Child for Nursery' sessions, and parents are kept in touch through the well-received 'transition booklet'.
- Staff go the extra mile to make sure that target families keep in regular contact, particularly in times of crisis. It is largely because of the trusting relationships they have built and their sensitive approach that the engagement of those in most need, including those with alcohol and substance dependencies, is so good. Close checks found that not enough fathers were in regular contact with the centre and so a monthly 'Dads Group' was set up. Participants have a good say in what goes on and, as a result, the group is very well attended.
- Home visits form part of the highly effective outreach support that assists families who are most in need and find accessing the centre difficult. Close links with specialist services such as the early years special needs team mean that children with particularly complex needs benefit from expert early help. Links with education and training providers through the revitalised 'Learning Forum' are resulting in more families taking up further learning opportunities, but the proportion from workless homes enhancing their employability is relatively low.

### The quality of practice and services

**Good**

- Good-quality services, based on a thorough assessment of needs and good local knowledge, are provided for the large majority of target groups. Leaders' timely reviews of the impact of services on improving families' lives leads to on-going adjustments, for example in weighting the programme in favour of targeted rather than universal services. Adults make a valuable contribution to shaping services, for example through the active parents' forum, as volunteers or as representatives of the advisory board.
- Children who attend the centre learn successfully during 'First Steps' activities, enjoy sharing stories at the 'Bookstart Bear Club', and play with the high-quality toys they can borrow from the toy library. There is effective partnership work to reduce inequalities, especially to support children's communication and personal development. The success of this is reflected well in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile which shows the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest closing much more rapidly than seen nationally.
- Well-planned sessions, such as 'Parent Puzzle' which includes a bespoke session for Punjabi speakers, help build the confidence of lone and young parents as well as more experienced parents. 'Golden rules' agreed by the groups result in open and honest discussions, for example about 'good and bad touches', and enable staff to move parents' knowledge, understanding and positive parenting skills forward.
- Good care and expert guidance result in a high number of families benefiting from tailor-made packages of support. Early intervention meetings involve a range of agencies coming together monthly to share information about target families and dovetail appropriate services. The number of target families requiring one-to-one support have risen significantly in the last year; close monitoring shows they work effectively to ensure the most vulnerable, including looked after children and those subject to a child protection plan, are safeguarded.
- Work with partners around keeping healthy and safe is effective in improving families' well-being. Immunisation rates are high and, at 8%, the rate of obesity in young children is below the city average. Over two thirds of mothers breastfeed their baby in the first 48 hours but this number drops off at six to eight weeks and the centre is usefully exploring why this should be.
- Parents are signposted to courses, including literacy, numeracy and English for speakers of other languages, but take-up is patchy because sometimes advertised courses do not run or the course content is not well enough matched to meeting needs. This is particularly the case for families from workless homes living in the most deprived neighbourhood.

**The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management****Good**

- The centre leader has high ambitions to make the centre the best it can be and has the full support of the extremely committed staff in meeting local families' needs. Everyone is involved in reviewing what is working best and readily changes tack when new developments are identified. The management and deployment of resources are effective and efficient and support the good level of effectiveness of this relatively immature centre.
- Staff feel valued and well supported in their roles and flag supervision arrangements as being a very positive feature of management. They keep abreast of best practice, undertake useful training to extend their expertise and are well qualified. They are passionate about helping vulnerable families to overcome personal challenges and are very responsive to needs.
- Families identify that they feel safe at the centre because safeguarding procedures are consistently upheld. For example, thorough vetting of staff, volunteers and partners' suitability to work with young children takes place, and there is regular update training about child protection and other matters. Case records for families at risk are kept carefully.
- Relationships among centre users and with staff are warm and friendly, and these underpin the good participation rates. Survey responses and regular feedback, such as that captured on 'First Impression' cards and evaluations following activities, show the high-level of satisfaction among centre users.
- The local authority checks the centre's performance through its contractual arrangements with the governing body that manages the centre and via the annual conversation meeting with centre staff and advisory board members. The local authority recognises that the absence of measurable targets in the centre's action planning hampers otherwise very effective governance and accountability.
- There are close ties between the governing body and the advisory board. The advisory board both challenges and supports the centre and keeps a close eye on registration rates and service delivery planning. It knows how good services are and how well staff are performing. Minutes show that priorities, such as engaging more workless households in appropriate services, are kept under review, but there are no specific timelines or targets being set, to help the board measure progress.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

**Children's Centre**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	23259
<b>Local authority</b>	Wolverhampton
<b>Inspection number</b>	421517
<b>Managed by</b>	The governing body of Warstones Primary School on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	2,046
<b>Centre leader</b>	Helen Farmer
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01902 556671
<b>Email address</b>	star.childrenscentre@wolverhampton.gov.uk

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