

Bloxwich Children's Centre

Mossley Lane, Bloxwich, Walsall, WS3 2SF

Inspection date 25–26 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Not enough eligible two-year-olds are taking up their free places to early education and, despite some good quality learning experiences and the strong links with early years partners, the gap between the lowest-achieving 20% of children and the rest is not closing rapidly enough.
- The centre has not successfully involved all priority groups. The engagement in centre services of families from minority ethnic groups, lone parents, workless families and fathers is not yet high enough.
- The centre's planning is specific and clearly established the intended outcomes of the various activities to meet local families' needs but there are insufficient checks to evaluate how well the centre's intentions are met.

This children's centre has the following strengths:

- Strong leadership is moving the centre forward. The staff team shows passion and determination in meeting local needs and is now playing a central role in the centre's growing effectiveness. Family registrations have more than doubled since the last inspection.
- The improvement and advisory boards provide good governance and, together with the local authority, are closely checking the centre's performance. Parents are very closely involved in the life and development of the centre.
- The needs of children and families living in the most disadvantaged area are well met because of the centre's early help. Family support work is a significant strength in helping many families to overcome major problems in their lives and get back on track.
- Safeguarding is given high priority and thorough checks ensure that children and families using the centre are well protected. Good care, guidance and support are provided by the centre and its partners.

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 manager, family support workers, other centre workers, officers from the local authority, and health and education professionals. They also met with parents, childminders, debt counsellors, parenting and family support programme managers and representatives of the improvement and advisory boards.

Inspectors undertook joint observations of activities with the centre manager, and made two home visits with family support workers.

Inspectors looked at the centre’s self-evaluation, action planning, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures, user feedback, improvement board and advisory board minutes and a wide range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Lead inspector, Christine Field	Additional inspector
Linda Kaye	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The centre opened in 2007 as a phase-two, stand-alone centre and serves an area that falls into the 30% most deprived nationally. It delivers or supports access to a range of services to meet its core purpose, mainly from the centre but also from the local library, Sandbanks Nursery, Busill Jones Primary School and other community-based venues, including a block of flats located in one of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It is open all year round, Monday to Friday from 9.00am to 6.00pm. Childcare is provided on site (EY347418) and is the subject of separate inspection arrangements.

There are 974 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach area, which consists of 11 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA). Just over a quarter of children under five years old live in one LSOA that is ranked as 0–10% most disadvantaged nationally. Children enter early years provision at levels well below those expected for their age. Around 18% of families are in receipt of out of work benefits and 12% are eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Most families are of White British heritage, with some from Black and other ethnic groups.

Immediately following the previous inspection 15 months ago, the governance arrangements were changed and an improvement board was put in place to provide challenge and support. Experienced staff were recruited and a new management team established. The centre manager of another children's centre was appointed as manager. She currently shares her time between the two centres.

The centre is one of 18 children's centres in the local authority. It is managed directly by the local authority, supported by the improvement board which consists of the local authority, health professionals, a local headteacher and the children's centre manager. An advisory board, established a year ago and chaired by a local parent, has been running alongside these arrangements. The advisory board is reviewing its terms of reference and membership as it will subsume the role of the improvement board in the very near future.

The centre has identified its main priority groups as pregnant teenagers and young mothers, children from Black and other minority ethnic families, children and families in workless households, children with disabilities, lone parents and fathers.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the engagement of workless families, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, lone parents and fathers to meet the challenging targets set by the local authority.
- Increase the proportion of eligible two-years-olds taking up their free places to early education, and strengthen the work with early years partners, to narrow the gap between the lowest-achieving 20% of children and the rest, and to meet or better the national average.
- Set up and implement regular and rigorous checks on how effectively activities enhance priority families' well-being against the objectives in the service plan, record the findings clearly and set next-step targets based on these to assist a rapid pace of future improvement.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Just over half of lone parents with young children and those who are workless access services regularly. Despite a number of tailor-made sessions being trialled, the centre's endeavours have only attracted one in five fathers. Families from minority ethnic backgrounds move in and out of the area and this mobility makes reaching them difficult; at 41%, only a minority of those estimated to live locally are in touch with the centre.

- The proportion of eligible two-year-olds taking up their entitlement to free education at 37% is much lower than the 85% of three- and four-year-olds. The centre staff visit the homes of those families who have not secured a place for their child.
- The increasingly effective partnership with health services means that the centre is made aware of all new births is able to make contact with the families within ten days. A survey commissioned earlier this year identified why some families are reluctant to use services. In response, the centre enhanced its marketing activities; set up a social network page; held events with local supermarkets; and changed the nature, location and timings of activities.
- The centre has worked successfully to register a large majority of families, and engaged 78% of those living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhood. Activities take place from 12 different locations to alleviate any problems some parents may have in getting to the centre. Most pregnant teenagers, young mothers and children with disabilities use the available services and benefit from their contact with the centre.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Six out of ten children living in the reach area achieved a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. This reflects good progress from their starting points. However, the gap between the lowest-achieving 20% and the rest widened considerably last year. There has been too little checking on the reasons for this increase and not enough close working with early years partners to target future improvement and reduce inequalities.
- Participants usually feed back on their experiences once they have completed a course or programme of activity. Their written evaluations record high satisfaction levels but lack suggestions to help the centre shape future services.
- Family support work is a strength of the centre's work. The considerable need in the area is being well addressed by early help and strong multi-agency partnerships. The centre's support reaches all children with disabilities living locally.
- Parents speak highly about the friendly, caring welcome they are given and how helpful they find the information, support and advice that staff provide to improve their well-being. A parent told inspectors that 'the centre has enabled me to find a job, get off benefits and be a family again'.
- The centre is working successfully with young parents to enhance their confidence and parenting skills, as well as promote their further learning and skills development, through the close links with Walsall College. Positive comments such as, 'It felt good to be part of a group where I fitted in' are typical. A recent celebration event involving 35 families saw the award of certificates for achievements in first aid, food hygiene, employability skills, and 'Brush Up Your English'.
- The growing partnership with Money Matters, a local charity, has helped a number of families to manage their debts, including rent arrears, or secure the benefits to which they are entitled. The centre runs a food bank to ensure children and families have enough to eat.
- Volunteers have grown from just one a year ago to seven. Four are currently supporting centre services as the others have moved confidently into employment. A modern apprentice is providing much-valued administrative support.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre manager has effectively focused her efforts to eradicate weaknesses and establish a well-bonded team who work in the best interests of local families. Partners report that working relationships have gone from strength to strength over the last twelve months. Parents say that the welcome they now get is second to none. The massive increase in families registering their interest in centre services is just one of the successes.
- The advisory board keeps a close eye on the centre's development and is not afraid to challenge the information presented about its performance. The board has a good understanding about the reach area which effectively informs their service planning. Close tracking of action plan priorities by the

improvement board has played a key role in supporting the centre's growing effectiveness.

- Another success is the increased involvement of parents in centre decision-making. Incentives for attending the Forum three times or more have engaged a regular number of parents in sharing their ideas and organising events. Volunteer numbers are very healthy as a result of the centre's approach, and their work adds to the efficiently managed resources available to the centre.
- Supervision arrangements are viewed very positively and link with staff training. The local authority provides both support and challenge to the centre manager. Specific targets relating to staff performance are currently being looked at as part of a wider local authority initiative.
- Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive. The Early Help framework procedures are used effectively by centre staff in cooperation with key partners to ensure that children, including those who are looked after or subject to a child protection plan, are kept free from harm.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
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

Unique reference number	20346
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	427440
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	974
Centre leader	Rami Harrison
Date of previous inspection	14–15 June 2012
Telephone number	01922 405037
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