

Birmingham - Sutton Group

c/o Arthur Terry School, Kittoe Road, Birmingham, B74 4RZ

Inspection date	15–17 January 2014		
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	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 children's centre group is good.

- Leadership, governance and management are effective in improving outcomes for children and families. Leaders and managers are driven by commitment and passion to succeed despite the challenges of the restructuring of children's centres and significant budget cuts.
- The centres provide good-quality outreach services and good signposting that enable families and their children to access a good range of services. Consequently, a large majority of families are registered with the children's centres.
- The large majority of children from target groups have made good progress from their starting points.
- Good safeguarding arrangements ensure early identification of any issues to do with children's safety. Swift, appropriate action is taken to ensure that children and families are protected from harm.
- Partnerships with most providers and agencies, particularly health, schools, police, social care, early years providers and HomeStart are strong. Consequently, families benefit from efficient use of the expertise available.
- Systems for tracking children and families who are known to the centres and those who have temporarily stopped using the centres' services are good. As a result, the large majority of families remain engaged with the centres.

It is not outstanding because:

- The quality, range and availability of data provided by the local authority and a few partners is not as good as it could be and hinders the centres' ability to identify those who are not accessing services.
- A small minority of families remain difficult to engage and are not benefiting from the services offered by the group.
- Partnership working with Job Centre Plus and providers of further education and adult skills are under-developed. Although there are low levels of worklessness and job outcome rates are high, the quality and range of information, advice and training available, and opportunities to volunteer, particularly for young parents, are not as good as they could be.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Bush Babies Nursery and Children's Centre, Holland House Children's Centre, Four Oaks Children's Centre, The Deanery Children's Centre and New Hall Primary and Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with: the locality strategic lead; the local authority locality lead and data officer; children's centre headteachers and managers; a children's centre teacher; health, education and safeguarding professionals; partner agencies; family support workers; early years practitioners; and representatives from the advisory and strategic boards. They also spoke with partner agencies, administrators and parents, and looked at outcomes of satisfaction surveys. They observed the centres' work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centres' self-evaluations, needs analyses, development plans, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures and children's development records.

The inspectors visited all five children's centres. Visits to activities were undertaken jointly with the centre headteachers. The locality strategic lead attended all team meetings.

Inspection team

Joy Law, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Maxine Mayer

Her Majesty's Inspector

Deborah Sanders

Additional Inspector

Judith Elderfield

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Sutton Group comprises five children's centres in Birmingham. The centres were established as a group in June 2012. The centres work collaboratively through formal agreement to share services and activities through integrated services within a defined geographical area of Sutton Coldfield. New Hall, a phase one children's centre is attached to New Hall Primary School. Four Oaks, a phase two children's centre, is a virtual centre attached to Arthur Terry Secondary School and is the strategic lead for the locality. Deanery, Holland House, and Bush Babies, are phase three children's centres. Deanery is attached to the Deanery Church of England Primary School, Holland House is attached to Holland House Infant School and Nursery, and Bush Babies is a private nursery. The times and days the centres operate vary; some open during term time only. The centres serve communities in which there are pockets of disadvantage interspersed with high levels of affluence.

Governance is undertaken by the governing body of The Arthur Terry Learning Partnership on behalf of the local authority and is supported by a locality strategic group, made up of five centre heads and governor representatives, and a locality advisory group, made up of key partners including health, education and parents.

The group offers a range of services to meet its core purpose, including family support, adult learning and health services. In addition to activities that take place at the centres, services are also delivered directly in the community, where parents are able to access them easily. Outreach work within families' homes is a key feature of the centres' work.

Within the cluster, there are 31 early years nurseries, eight pre-schools and 78 childminders. These providers are subject to different inspection arrangements. Reports can be found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>.

There are 4,931 children under five years of age living in the area served by the centres. Five per cent of children live in low-income households. There are 2,202 adults who are claiming unemployment benefit, of which 190 are lone parents with dependent children aged under five years. The locality has a growing proportion of teenage and young mothers. The large majority of families living in the area served by the centres are White British, with the remaining families being from a range of minority ethnic groups.

The levels at which children enter early years provision varies across the area, with communication and language being the weakest aspect. The centres' target groups are teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers, children living in the 10% to 20% most deprived areas and disabled children under five years.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority and partners to obtain access to good-quality, relevant and timely data and use these effectively to identify those who are not accessing services.
- Develop the strategies currently in place to reach out and engage with those who are not accessing the services, particularly target groups.
- Improve the effectiveness of partnership working with Jobcentre Plus and those providing opportunities for adults to develop their personal skills, educational attainment and employability by:
 - exploring opportunities and employability programmes provided by Jobcentre Plus and adult/further education providers to improve the effectiveness of information, advice and guidance
 - tracking and supporting referred parents to ensure that they progress
 - quality assuring services provided by partners within centres
 - improving the initial assessment to identify suitability for long duration parenting programmes

- developing the children’s centre group volunteering programme to provide opportunities for the development of parents’ personal skills as a possible stepping stone to employment, particularly for young parents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Leaders, managers and staff have a good understanding of the needs of the families living in the locality. The increased deployment of ‘new birth visitors’ has been effective in securing families’ engagement in the centres’ activities, as well as identifying at an early stage any difficulties they might be experiencing. Over 90% of families are visited and assessed within two months after the birth of a child. Where the need for support from other agencies is identified, families have confidence to engage with them due to the trust, reassurance and support they have received from the centres’ team prior to birth.
- The centres use outreach work well to identify those families that would otherwise be unlikely to access services, by using home visits and promoting their services at various venues in the locality. Families are able to access a good range of services within their local communities. For example, good use is made of the on-site swimming pool at New Hall Children’s Centre to engage families. This popular event has been extended to five sessions per week at different times and days to meet families’ needs. The Four Oaks toy library drop-in sessions are very popular and well attended. The centre ensures equality of access to this provision by waiving fees for those who cannot afford them. Consequently, a very large majority of target families are registered and accessing children’s centres’ services.
- The centres are providing or facilitating good-quality stay-and-play sessions across the area, which enables families with young children to access information about the Early Years Foundation Stage, and a variety of universal services within the area. Consequently, children are well prepared when they begin school.
- Staff monitor and evaluate attendance at individual sessions. They follow up those who fail to attend and record the reasons. As a result, the centres successfully maintain good levels of engagement with families.
- Excellent sharing of information between partners and professionals means that the proportion of parents taking up the entitlement for their children to access free early education for two- and three-year-olds is increasing. The recent access to accurate and up-to-date data has improved the centres’ ability to identify eligible families at an early stage and take appropriate action to support them.
- Crèche facilities increase parents’ ability to access the centres’ services.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Staff are good role models and have high aspirations and expectations for the families in the locality. The level of care, guidance and support offered to families at a time of crisis is good. Case studies and data show that high-quality and timely services and support make a huge difference to those families in need.
- The children’s centre group has particularly effective working partnerships with schools, health services, police, HomeStart, social care, and early years childcare providers. This work is enabling the group to identify and engage families who are experiencing difficulties quickly. For example, families who are experiencing domestic violence or drug and alcohol abuse are supported in accessing help and support which has a positive impact on improving children’s and parents’ lives.
- The group has not developed sufficiently effective partnership arrangements with providers of adult education and Jobcentre Plus. Consequently, the centres are not always able to signpost parents to the best possible advice and guidance to support their personal development needs. In addition, partners do not share what they know about parents’ success in moving on to training and employment. Therefore, the centres are not fully aware of the success of their work.
- Assessments of need and case files are maintained to a high standard in most cases. They are up to

date and reflect the target families' views and wishes and the involvement of other professionals.

- The Four Oaks toy library is an excellent resource and very much appreciated by parents and children. Parents report that staff are very knowledgeable and give good advice regarding how to use specific toys to enhance children's learning, such as how to use story sacks to help develop children's language skills.
- Parents have access to a good range of information about the Early Years Foundation Stage framework and children's development. Staff promote the Early Years Foundation Stage at every possible opportunity. Consequently, parents gain a good understanding about their children's learning needs.
- Planning, observation and assessment of progress and tracking are effective and demonstrate a clear focus on improving outcomes and reducing inequalities for young children and targeted families. For example, the 'Startwell' project has had a good impact on children's physical development.
- Effective partnership working with parents, agencies and staff support the early identification of needs, and access to early education and inclusion support for babies and young children with special educational needs and disabilities. Consequently, all children under five with disabilities within the locality are known to the centres and, of these, the large majority are accessing the centres' services.
- The centres use volunteer groups very well to signpost families. Volunteering is across a range of activities, such as breastfeeding support, counselling, job advice, HomeStart. However, the group is still developing its own programme for its families which wish to volunteer in the children's centre group work.
- The centres successfully engage with the large majority of teenage and young parents. A rolling programme of parenting courses is provided across the locality in addition to family support within the home. Parents attending the parenting programme at Four Oaks Children's Centre were very keen to talk to inspectors about how the course had empowered them to move forward and make friends, and improved their confidence and parenting skills. Portfolios were also completed to a high standard. Nevertheless, for a very small minority, the course lacked challenge as a result of their needs not being sufficiently assessed, and a few parents did not complete the course. Parents also access a range of programmes to improve their understanding of how to promote healthy lifestyles and ensure the safety of their children, for example 'Save a Child's Life'. Case studies show the significant impact this had on saving a child's life as a result of attending the course.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Leadership, governance and management are consistently strong at all levels. Leaders, managers and partners are driven by commitment and passion to succeed. The advisory board has excellent representation across professional agencies, parents and partners. Members make the best possible use of their local knowledge and the limited data available to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the locality's target groups and needs. Members are keen to share and work together for the benefit of families within the community.
- The local authority provides good support, advice and challenge. Quarterly challenge and support meetings make sure that the centres are delivering high-quality services that are matched to parents' and children's needs and are agreed in the delivery plan. It provides good support and challenge to leaders. Nevertheless, the range, quality and frequency of data provided by the local authority are insufficient to enable leaders and managers to analyse the centres' effectiveness as well as they would like.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Rigorous recruitment and selection procedures are in place across the locality. The group provides good early intervention and prevention work to protect the most vulnerable children. Fortnightly 'team around the family' and 'team around the child' meetings are well attended by partners including social care, health, HomeStart, adult services, headteachers, early years providers and family support workers. Effective sharing of information about children and families, particularly those subject to child protection plans or assessed under the Common

Assessment Framework (CAF) means that these families receive the most appropriate help and support as early as possible. As a result, the number of children subject to child protection plans is reducing quickly.

- Staff's performance is managed well. Staff receive regular supervision including reviews of the way they manage their caseloads. They receive feedback following observations of sessions, which helps them improve their practice. A comprehensive range of in-house training is available for all staff and partners. This is very well received and having a positive impact on raising confidence and improving the quality and effectiveness of their work. For example, training received regarding assessments, case file reviews, and identification of parents who are subject to domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse, means that staff and partners are well prepared to ensure families receive appropriate and timely support.
- The centres promote equality well to ensure that all children and parents within the area are able to access services, for example, by taking resources out into the community and waiving fees to allow those on low income to access activities. Staff have a good understanding of their most vulnerable families and work particularly well with other agencies to ensure families receive the help they need in a timely manner.

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 Group details

Unique reference number	80133
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	430087
Managed by	The Arthur Terry Secondary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	4931
Centre leader	Sue Bailey
Date of previous inspection	Not previous inspected
Telephone number	0121 3232221
Email address	sbailey@arthurterry.bham.sch.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20518, Bush Babies Nursery and Children's Centre
- 21205, Four Oaks Children's Centre
- 21524, Holland House Infant School and Children's Centre
- 22098, New Hall Primary School and Children's Centre
- 23178, The Deanery Church of England School and Children's Centre

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