

# Sandwell - Oldbury Cluster

C/O Oldbury Sure Start Children's Centre, Greenwood Avenue, West Midlands, B68 8JE

<b>Inspection dates</b>	3–4 June 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected as a group

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b> Previous inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
		Not applicable	
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 group of centres requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Children's and families' access to services is increasing, but work is required to ensure that more eligible two year-olds take up their free education place and that more workless parents access and sustain engagement in appropriate services.
- The partnership with Jobcentre Plus and the provision of services to enhance parents' skills, education and employability are at an early stage of development.
- Key health outcomes and the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation stage are less positive than seen nationally; there is limited tracking to see what impact services are having on improving these outcomes.
- The advisory board is representative of the group's community, but it has yet to focus strongly enough on the group's performance, to inject challenge into its decision-making, and to link with the parent partnership.

### It has the following strengths:

- Leaders have set the group firmly on an improving course following a period of significant and on-going change. Aspirations are high and staff show a very strong commitment to moving the centre forward at a good pace.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Work with a range of partners is effective in meeting the needs of children subject to a child protection plan, those in need and those who are looked after.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Case files are maintained to a good standard and demonstrate the positive impact of family support work, particularly for the very high number of families experiencing domestic abuse.
- The volunteering programme is a major strength; some 13 volunteers are enhancing the group's resources through their good support at the same time as building their own personal confidence and work experience.
- Parenting, first aid and home safety awareness courses assist parents in building knowledge and understanding about their responsibilities for children's safety and well-being.
- Parents hold the centres and staff in high regard and value the services they receive.

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

- Increase the take up of free places by eligible two-year olds living in the reach area so that most receive a good start to their education.
- Increase the number of workless families with young children who are engaged in appropriate services to enhance their life choice and chances.
- Develop the partnership with Jobcentre Plus and enhance the opportunities for parents to extend their education, learning and skills, including English and mathematics.
- Build on the good partnership with health to reduce childhood obesity and increase sustained breastfeeding; and, with early years partners, increase the proportion of children achieving a good level of development.
- Strengthen governance by getting more parents involved in the work of the advisory board, and injecting challenge into its decision-making and its work to hold the centre to account.

## 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 three Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with: the centre group cluster manager and centre manager; the deputy director of Family Action, director of Health for Living; local authority officers; health and education professionals; partner agencies; family support workers; early years workers and representatives from the advisory board. They also spoke with parents, carers and grandparents.

The inspectors visited both children's centres and observed activities at Oldbury Health Centre and St John's church hall. The centre manager undertook a paired observation with inspectors and attended all team meetings together with the centre group cluster manager and the deputy director of Family Action.

Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a wide range of relevant documentation.

## Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Karen Cooper	Additional inspector
Peter Towner	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre group

In 2012, Health for Living, a consortium of organisations (Murray Hall Community Trust, Kaleidoscope, Black Country Housing Trust and the Accord Group), supported by the national charity Family Action, secured the contract to manage 11 of Sandwell's children's centres, including Oldbury and Greenacres which form the Oldbury Cluster. Both centres were designated in 2006 as phase one children's centres.

The group's governance is supported by an advisory board comprising partners and a parent. A parent partnership is established to put forward parents' views. The group's strategic management is overseen by a cluster manager who started in post in September 2013 and also has responsibility for another four children's centres. The day-to-day running of the group is the responsibility of the centre manager with support from early years and family support managers who look after frontline staff teams. The team of managers only became complete in January 2014, following significant staffing changes. Services are shared across both of the children's centres, which are open five days each week.

There are 2,417 children under five years of age living in the group's reach area. Children's skills, knowledge and ability on entry to school are below the levels expected for their age. The group's reach area is mixed socially and economically with a quarter of children assessed as living in poverty. The very large majority of families are White British with one in five from Asian Indian backgrounds and a growing number of Eastern European heritage.

The centre offers a range of services for families and children under five years, which are run from the centres and different community venues, including Brandhall Library, Moat Farm Infants School, St John's Church, Oldbury Health Centre, and Causeway Green Primary School.

The main target groups identified by the group include: disadvantaged two year olds, workless families and families affected by domestic abuse.

### Inspection judgements

#### Access to services by young children and families

#### Requires improvement

- This year has seen an upturn in families using Oldbury centre after a period of significant change. Leaders have successfully restored confidence in the community, and both centres are now vibrant, attractive hubs of activity. Community events are helping to publicise the group's services, raise its profile and take on board local views. However, more work is required to ensure that the large majority of children and families from target groups regularly take up services.
- Around two thirds of children are registered with the group and access services. Information is gathered about which activities they attend, and effective use is made of this by leaders when they review local needs and identify the best way to extend their reach into the community. However, not enough account is taken of the access by specific target groups. For example, too little is known about the take up of services by workless families and their impact.
- The information about the take up of free education by eligible two year-olds is not totally clear but is recorded as 60% by the local authority. The centre group has written letters to all the families it knows about to offer support for accessing places, but only 15% have responded and the rest have not yet been followed up. Around a quarter of children take up their entitlement in less than good quality settings but the local authority is providing very comprehensive support to improve the effectiveness of early years education.
- Live birth data is not routinely shared by health partners but the centre knows where these

children are as a result of its strong partnership with health visitors. The baby clinics at both centres are popular and well attended. Centre group staff regularly visit clinics in the area and get to know mothers expecting babies; this establishes early contact and also helps shape future services such as 'Baby massage'.

- The group is highly effective in working with families whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable and in helping them to access the specialist help they require. Family support work is prioritised and closely managed to ensure that parents and children, including those who would otherwise be unlikely to access anything the group has to offer, sustain engagement with services.

### The quality of practice and services

### Requires improvement

- Work is on-going to ensure that an appropriate range of good quality services is in place to meet children's and families' needs. A range of information is used effectively to identify local issues affecting young children; currently these focus on communication skills, boys' achievement, and the special needs of children. The centre group is working with early years partners to raise achievement, but is not looking closely enough to see what impact the actions being taken are having, particularly on vulnerable two year-olds.
- Parents benefit from a range of 'taster' courses such as cake decorating and fruit carving which help build their confidence and, for some, set them on the pathway to further learning. However, the promotion of adult education and skills training is not strong enough; especially given that one in five do not have a recognised qualification. A new partnership is being developed with Jobcentre Plus with potential to support the needs of workless families and those on low incomes to improve their life chances but it is too soon to see how effective this will be.
- The well-structured volunteering programme has led to 13 volunteers assisting with the group's activities. Training has been a strong feature of the programme and has included safeguarding matters and food hygiene. The employment prospects and personal confidence of volunteers have improved as a result of the programme, and their expertise is put to good use in support of staff.
- Around two thirds of mothers breastfeed their babies in the first few days but only a third keep on doing so for six to eight weeks. This is especially the case in Oldbury where a new breastfeeding network group has been set up with the support of volunteers. The group recognises that childhood obesity presents a mixed picture across the reach area, and puts on activities such as 'Fab tots' to encourage healthy lifestyles and personal well-being. There is greater scope for working with health partners to tackle this issue and to undertake shared evaluation to assess the effectiveness of actions in reducing obesity.
- Positive parenting programmes, first aid courses and the home visits undertaken by staff have a tangible impact on parents' ability to support their children's well-being. The Wellcomm screening checks are valued by parents who say that they better understand what level their child should be working at and can support their language development at home. The achievement of five children is currently being targeted at the 'Playgroup' held at Greenaces but this approach has not yet been rolled out across the group.
- The group helps a high number of those families who experience complex challenges in their lives to move forward. Good quality case studies clearly show the distance travelled as a result of well targeted interventions. Early help procedures are well understood and used effectively to respond to a range of needs and keep children well protected.
- Care, guidance and support are good. For example, the excellent partnership with Women's Aid

leads to the victims of domestic abuse feeling empowered to take control of their lives.

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

**Good**

- Things were slow to get going in the first year of the contract whilst staffing matters were sorted, buildings revitalised and relationships re-invigorated. Improvement picked up a pace once the leadership team together with managers for early years and family support were fully in place in January this year.
- A strong line has been taken on staff performance and a benchmark of 'good quality' is expected. Staff identify how well supported and valued they feel, and there is clearly a strong commitment to ensuring that the group's good or better effectiveness in all aspects is secured rapidly.
- A well-conceived up-to-date cluster development plan includes all the priorities flagged by this inspection and has clear timelines and targets that set out the journey of improvement required. Systems have been upgraded and structures established; robust supervision arrangements support the group's cycle of self-evaluation.
- Local authority officers keep the group's performance under close scrutiny. Meetings with the lead agency – Family Action are held on a quarterly basis to review progress of the very detailed delivery plan. Attention has been given to reach figures over recent months; improvements have been noted, but other targets set out such as the engagement of the long-term unemployed have not yet been met.
- Governance is well-established. The advisory board has been growing in effectiveness over the last twelve months and now comprises a wide range of partners with a parent as chair. The group meets regularly to share information and support the group's development but has yet to establish strong links with the parent partnership or hold the centre group fully to account for its performance.
- Safeguarding is central to all the group does and practice, policies and procedures demonstrate this. Staff are quick to spot any concerns such as substance misuse or domestic violence issues. All children who are subject to a child protection plan, in need or looked after are known about, and staff work closely with social care and health partners to give full support through their active use of Common Assessment Framework and 'Early help' procedures.
- The centres are described as 'welcoming and friendly' and staff practice is inclusive and non-judgemental. Celebrations for Black History month reached 400 children, and at Christmas 35 families that were in dire need were served lunch. The food bank and use of local charities funding helps a number of local families to improve their health and well-being and reduces inequalities.
- The responses from the most recent user survey show a high level of satisfaction in the quality of services being provided. Resources, including staff deployment, are used efficiently to meet an increasing number of young children's and families' needs.

## 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.

## Centre Group details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	80609
<b>Local authority</b>	Sandwell
<b>Inspection number</b>	442831
<b>Managed by</b>	Health for Living on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	2,417
<b>Centre leader</b>	Matthew Lee
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected as a group
<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 552 9248
<b>Email address</b>	Matthew.lee@healthforliving.org.uk

## This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 22256 Oldbury Sure Start Children's Centre
- 21301 Green Acres Sure Start Children's Centre

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