

Sandwell - West Bromwich North Cluster

Connor Road, West Bromwich, B71 3DJ

Inspection dates	24–25 March 2015
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not applicable	
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.

- Passionate, skilled and highly-focused leaders and managers have established a well motivated and effective staff team.
- A large majority of children is actively engaged in the group's good quality activities. This is because the leaders and staff have very good knowledge of the area, work in close partnership with other professionals, and are persistent in encouraging families to maintain contact.
- The work to enhance children's readiness for school is focussed on communication and emotional maturity. It prepares children for entry to school well, by working with schools, private settings and childminders. This leads to children achieving just above their national peers.
- Safeguarding arrangements have a high priority. Good relationships and communication between staff and those working in health and social services provide a secure network of support for families, with a strong focus on reducing inequalities and celebrating diversity.
- Work to provide adults with a range of learning opportunities is good and helps them progress through training, volunteering and into employment.
- The effective use of resources, and a variety of venues across the locality, has enabled families particularly from priority groups, to access appropriate services and improve their well-being. The group has a good capacity to improve.

It is not outstanding because:

- More opportunities and better progression planning are needed for adults to access learning to support their future economic well-being.
- Greater consistency is needed in providing information to parents following observations and assessments of children's development, to help them support their children's learning at home.
- The group does not routinely receive information about new births from health partners. As a result they do not always know all of the families with new babies living in the local area.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Increase the range of opportunities and access to training to develop parents' economic and social well-being.
- Ensure parents are provided with details of their children's progress following observations and assessments to enable them to better support their children's learning at home.
- Work with the local authority and the health trust to ensure the group receives information on new births so that most families with babies access services.

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 Hillside Sure Start Children's Centre and Great Barr and Hamstead Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by three Additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, parents and volunteers. They also met or spoke on the telephone with members of the advisory board and the parent forum, representatives of the local authority, health, schools, nurseries, Citizen Advice Bureau and the neighbourhood police officer.

The inspectors visited Hillside, Great Barr and Hamstead, The Brambles satellite centre, Great Barr Library and a community setting in Sundial Church.

They observed the centres' work, including Music Magic, Flowerpots playgroup and adult learning sessions, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's evaluation of its effectiveness, its development planning and information relating to its safeguarding arrangements.

Inspection team

Lead inspector, Joan Cawdron

Additional inspector

Aileen King

Additional inspector

Karen Cooper

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

West Bromwich North is a cluster comprising Great Barr and Hamstead Sure Start Children's Centre and Hillside Sure Start Children's Centre which includes the Brambles satellite centre. The group is managed by Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority. The cluster includes families living within eleven local authority neighbourhoods across a ten mile radius.

There are approximately 2227 children aged under five years living within the locality, most of whom are from White British backgrounds. The centres serve areas where there are pockets of deprivation, including the estates and communities of Yew Tree and Tamebridge, Charlemont Farm and Bustleholme, Hamstead and Newton. Some of the areas are some distance from the centre where services are provided in a range of community venues. Most children enter early years provision with knowledge and skills that are below those typical for their age.

Households within the areas served by the group are noted to have average incomes higher than Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council as a whole; however there is also an increase across the group of those in debt. While levels of unemployment overall are low, children living in households in the Hillside area are in receipt of workless benefits.

The group provides a range of services including activities to enhance children's readiness for school, health-related services, and adult learning and volunteering opportunities. The centre has identified the following priority groups: new parents; families experiencing mental health issues and two-year-olds who are eligible for free early education.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Over the past two years the proportions of families who are known to the group and those who remain engaged have increased and are now good.
- A large majority of children are now registered, including most of those expecting children and target groups, with mental health needs and new births. They have access to quality early years provision for two-year-olds. Staff work relentlessly to provide access to services in the locality, where travelling for young families is difficult.
- Most children are actively engaged in the group's activities across a range of community venues. This is because the leaders and staff have very good knowledge of the area, work in close partnership with other professionals and are persistent in encouraging families to maintain contact. Strong partnerships and communication with local schools and health professionals have a very positive impact on children's learning and the welfare of their families, and on reducing inequalities.
- A very well attended baby clinic supported by health visitors takes place in the centres and staff are able to provide a good range of help and promote health and well-being for families. They do this despite a lack of sharing of new birth data from the health authority, although the local authority has worked hard to secure this, and now use locally sourced information.
- Strenuous efforts by the local authority to identify those two-year-olds who are eligible to attend early education have resulted in most children now accessing good or better provision.

- Proactive family support workers have good knowledge of the varied and different issues facing many families. They target support and advice effectively to meet the individual needs of families, particularly those suffering from physical and mental health issues, and those experiencing domestic violence and drug and alcohol misuse.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The group provides a wide range of services which make a significant impact on the personal, social, educational, health and economic well-being of a large majority of families.
- Group sessions, whether they are open to all, such as 'Stay and Play', or for specific children or those with special educational needs, such as 'Music Magic' and the 'Sensory Session', are all sharply focussed on promoting children's learning.
- Parents say that they gain knowledge on how to keep their children safe and good ideas about how to play with their children at home. However, greater consistency is needed in providing information to parents following observations and assessments of children's development, to help them support their children's learning at home.
- Children's skills on entry to Nursery are rising, as is their attainment at the end of Reception year. In 2014 the proportion of children achieving a good level of development was higher than the local average, and just above the national average. While the gap between children from poorer backgrounds and their better-off peers widened slightly last year, this is still narrower than local or national rates, with only marginal differences between boys and girls. Support from the centre through a qualified teacher is in place and all primary schools and early years' settings within the cluster benefit from this help.
- The group's work, in partnership with many professionals and volunteers, to promote families' well-being is successful. Very good support is provided by partners to help families address debt and rent arrears.
- Support from health visitors working within the centres supports those with new babies and young children. Due to the support they receive most mothers who start to breastfeed their babies continue to do so at-six-to eight weeks, so that the percentage is well above the national average.
- A vigilant and caring approach by group staff, working with children's social care and other professionals, leads to sustained and valuable support for those facing the most difficult circumstances. Regular meetings determine the correct level of support, with first contact made swiftly after initial referral. These partnerships develop a more coherent approach to supporting families in crisis and prevent cases being escalated unless absolutely necessary. Children subject to child protection plans or identified as in need are equally well supported.
- Parenting programmes foster positive behaviour to help children settle in school and to change parents' perceptions on what can be achieved. These programmes provide a route into further learning, volunteering and employment. However, more opportunities and better progression planning is needed for adults to access further learning to support their future economic well-being. The centre has fifteen volunteers who provide support in the children and parent workshops and baby clinics.
- Satisfaction rates are very high. Parents, including those experiencing physical and mental health, personal and financial difficulties speak highly of how the services, both centre based and in their homes, has dramatically improved their lives.

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

- The managers, senior leaders and staff of the group work closely with Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and have a strong drive to improve. A clear strategic approach to commissioning in 2014 was taken, through collaboration with other providers and the local authority, to agree which services were most important to families and where reductions in budgets could be more easily accommodated. This ensured that the budget reductions did not affect support for families.
- The strong, highly qualified, passionate and experienced leadership and staff team are extremely effective and efficient. They are successful in helping those families that need specialist support to develop the confidence, skills and resilience to improve their well-being. All staff benefit from a wide-ranging programme of appropriate professional development opportunities. The effective use of good quality resources, accommodation, staff and volunteers demonstrate good value for money and result in good outcomes for families.
- The quality assurance arrangements are robust and demonstrate well the centre's clear focus on maintaining and monitoring the high quality services. The group's monitoring cycle includes quarterly performance reviews, regular staff and management meetings, session observations, supervision, and monitoring of development plans.
- The practice of gaining families' views more formally, such as through consultations, representation on the advisory board, and a parent chairing the board, are now well embedded and key strengths of the group. As a result, self evaluation processes are effective, and group leaders accurately identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- Safeguarding, including e-safety, is a high priority within the centre, and its policies, procedures and displays reflect this strong focus. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used very effectively by family support staff to assess need and coordinate support for families, including those at risk of harm, children subject to child protection plans and children in care.
- Inclusivity and a strong commitment to reducing barriers for families underpin all the group's activities. Similarly the group celebrates diversity through its displays of positive images of children and its celebration of different faith festivals. It provides interpreters where they are needed, particularly in meetings with professionals and agencies.
- Family case files are maintained to a high standard by staff. They are securely audited by managers to ensure that children and families are appropriately protected. The records clearly show positive improvements in mental health, economic stability and the safety of families.

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	80614
Local authority	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Inspection number	454067
Managed by	Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2227
Centre leader	Tracey Demers
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
Telephone number	0121 5885431
Email address	tracey.demers@barnardos.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 21519 Hillside Sure Start Children's Centre
- 21295 Great Barr and Hamstead Sure Start Children's Centre

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