

Severn Valley Area Children's Centre

c/o St Mary's Bluecoat CE Primary School, The Grove, Bridgnorth, WV15 5EQ

Inspection dates	16–17 April 2015
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

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 is a good centre.

- Most children under the age of five living in the area access the centre's or partners' services.
- The large majority of children living in the least advantaged areas regularly engage in services.
- Targeted support is successful in meeting the needs of children and families from priority groups.
- Health outcomes are positive because of the effective work of the centre and health partners.
- Children are helped to get ready for school through well-resourced and stimulating activities. From average starting points, a higher proportion of Reception-age children achieve a good level of development than is seen nationally.
- Parents build confident parenting skills, enhance their education and know more about how to keep their children free from harm and how to ensure e-safety, because of the centre's effective support.
- Good leadership, management and governance have led the centre positively through a period of significant change. Staffing and current resources provide secure capacity for the centre to build for even better effectiveness.

It is not outstanding because:

- Not enough workless and low income families sustain contact with appropriate services until their needs are met.
- The tracking of children's and parents' progress over time is adhoc, which limits the ability of leaders to review the impact of the centre's work to reduce inequalities.
- Action planning is very detailed but lacks the sharp focus on priority areas needed to move improvement forward at a rapid pace. The lack of precise targets impedes the ability of those responsible for governance to monitor the centre's performance rigorously.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve the sustained contact of workless and low income parents so that at least the large majority take up appropriate services to enhance their skills, employability and economic well-being.
- Strengthen the work with schools and early year's partners to establish a systematic way of tracking children's progress over time and identify what proportion of children who access centre services achieve a good level of development by the time they are five.
- Ensure that centre leaders have a clear picture of the impact on reducing inequalities when parents access services to improve their education and skills by:
 - setting out clear expectations with partners about the information to be shared about individual starting points and the progress made
 - reporting information about retention and success rates to the advisory board and using this information to plan future services.
- Bring the centre's key development priorities to the fore in the action plan and ensure that each one has specific, measurable and challenging targets set against clear deadlines. Ensure that the local authority and advisory board review progress towards meeting precise targets at regular intervals, and in so doing enhance the centre's capacity to drive improvement at a rapid pace.

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 area leader; the children's centre coordinator; officers from the local authority; a range of partners including health, education and social care professionals; volunteers; parents and centre users; and representatives of the advisory board. The early years coordinator was absent at the time of the inspection.

The inspectors visited a range of services offered at the centre and community venues including the maternity ward at the local hospital. They visited a 'Bumps to Babes' session at Bridgnorth and 'Family drop-ins' at Broseley and Much Wenlock. The 'Bumps to Babes' and Broseley drop-in were observed jointly with the centre leader and coordinator.

Inspectors took into account parents' views as expressed directly to them during the inspection, as well as through their recorded evaluations about activities and programmes they have accessed. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including case files.

Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead Inspector	Additional inspector
Karen Cooper	Additional inspector
Megan Dauksta	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Severn Valley Area Children's Centre opened in 2010 and is directly managed by Shropshire Council. It is one of three children's centres which now work together to serve the needs of families living in the south east of the county. River Rea and Pebble Brook have been inspected previously when they were stand alone children's centres. Their reports can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>. Collaborative working also takes place, including the sharing of some resources, with two other children's centres located in the south west of the county. An advisory board, comprising parents and partners, assists governance of all five children's centres.

The Children's Centre Co-ordinator who returned to work in March 2015 oversees the work of all five children's centres. The three children's centres in the south east are led by the Children's Centre Area Leader and the Children's Centre Early Years Co-ordinator. They manage a small team of support workers, crèche workers and business support staff. Services provided include activities to promote early learning, family support, child and family health, careers, adult learning and volunteering.

There are 1,387 children under the age of five years living in the area served by the centre. The area is mainly rural and widespread. The main towns are Broseley, Much Wenlock and Bridgnorth, where the centre is located. The area is mixed socially and economically: two out of the six distinct communities that comprise the area are amongst the 40% least advantaged seen nationally. Some 11% of children are living in homes where no one is in paid work. Most families are White British. Children generally start in early education with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age.

Priority target groups identified by the centre are: teenage parents; workless/low income households; two-year-old children eligible for free early education; and families experiencing mental ill health and/or domestic abuse.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Two thirds of children and families living in the least advantaged communities use the centre's services regularly. Teenage parents and families affected by mental ill health or domestic abuse benefit from effective family support until their needs are met. The good collaborative partnership with health practitioners enables timely contact with expectant families and pressing needs are assessed early on.
- 'Parentcraft' sessions held monthly at the local hospital enable centre staff to provide information about what is on offer to new parents and their babies. Sessions such as 'Baby Massage' are proving effective in helping parents to build stronger bonds with their baby and enjoy a relaxing time together.
- Good use is made of fifteen different community venues from which to deliver services. For example, well attended 'Family Drop-ins' are held in partnership with schools at Broseley and Much Wenlock. This approach is successfully breaking down the barriers to access that some families face due to rural isolation and poor transport links.
- Most three and four-year-olds and the very large majority of eligible two-year-olds take up their free early education place. The centre works closely with early year's partners to secure the well-being of these children, but is not yet checking their learning and development over time.

- Information available to managers shows that the large majority of workless and low income families use the centre, but there is not enough detail being captured about which services they are accessing or what impact these are having on improving their economic well-being. Leaders and those responsible for governance recognise that information sharing between some partners and the centre is not yet good enough, but are actively seeking improvement. For example, a new service level agreement with Jobcentre Plus is coming to fruition.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Children and families are encouraged to access an appropriate range of good quality community based services as well as those aimed at meeting specific needs.
- Case studies are maintained to a good standard and demonstrate the positive impact that the centre's work has on empowering families and improving their well-being. Records clearly show that the good support provided by centre staff and partners is helping families experiencing domestic violence or mental ill health issues to overcome the challenges they face.
- Sessions such as 'food for thought' raise awareness about healthy living, and the successful promotion of breastfeeding is leading to health outcomes that are more positive than seen nationally. Parents receive user-friendly, practical advice about e-safety, and access first aid courses and home safety training that helps raise their awareness about keeping their children safe.
- Activities to promote children's early learning in prime areas are resourced well. 'Learning Journeys' are being used successfully with some parents to chart the age and stage of development and key milestones. However, these are not being used consistently to track progress, to identify a child's next steps or to flag how parents might support their child's learning at home.
- Most early childhood provision in the area is of good or better quality. Reception-age children typically achieve well in the early stages and start school at the level typical for their age. However, information about how well children who access children's centre services achieve relative to others has not been shared readily by schools. Inspectors' discussions with headteachers, some of whom are new to their post, identified clearly the potential for the collaborative development of progress tracking systems.
- A good range of courses are available to enhance parents' education and skills through the centre's partnership with Telford College of Arts and Technology. For example, the 'Understanding your child' course helps parents to manage their child's behaviour positively. Several have just signed up to progress onto the level one psychology course. However, there is limited collation or analysis of data about parents' progress towards personal goals. This means that leaders have only partial information on which to measure the impact of services on reducing inequalities or to scope future provision.
- Volunteers, including those parents from priority groups, are very positive about the quality of opportunities provided by the centre and the impact they have on life choices and employability prospects.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre has continued to provide a good service to families during a period of significant change caused by reorganisation of children's centres and the re-shaping of staff responsibilities. The centre leader now has oversight of children's centre services for a third of the county. She has nevertheless

maintained her focus on moving forward the Severn Valley Children's Centre. Her work is respected and valued by partners and parents.

- Staff are well supervised and resources are carefully allocated to ensure that services are meeting local needs. The recent return to post of the coordinator brings additional capacity to help the centre look critically at its effectiveness, set challenging targets and drive forward improvement.
- Leaders together with the hardworking and dedicated staff team, have high aspirations to make the centre the best it can be. This has led to a very detailed action plan being devised to further improve the centre's effectiveness.
- Improvements are being made as reflected in the good and improving health and education outcomes. However, not all deadlines are being met, for example in increasing the level of contact of all priority groups. Leaders recognise that it is time to take stock of key development priorities and ensure that action plan targets are precise, challenging, and measurable; and to set a rapid pace to further improvement.
- Governance arrangements across the locality are well established and effective. The county authority monitors the centre's performance regularly and targets are set at the annual conversation meeting. Action plan priorities are usefully reviewed by the advisory board during the year which allows members to have a firm grasp on staffing matters and what is happening in the centre. However, the absence of localised information, for example about the take up of services to improve the economic well-being of workless or low income families, hinders critical challenge by all those responsible for governance, particularly in checking how effective the centre is in reducing inequalities.
- There is good involvement of parents in centre decision-making to help shape the programme of activities. The recent survey shows high levels of centre user-satisfaction and good ideas to take forward such as developing the use of social media. Parents on the advisory board do a good job of canvassing views and are instrumental in shaping services, for example in setting up a first aid course in response to parents' requests.
- Safeguarding policy, procedures and practice meet current requirements about keeping children safe in education. The early help procedures are well understood and involve multi-agency professionals working together to reduce the risk of harm to the most vulnerable children including those subject to a child protection or in need plan. Staff vetting checks are robust and training on child protection matters is up to date. Some staff are currently undertaking additional training concerning domestic abuse so that they can lead the 'Freedom' programme in response to the rising incidents of domestic abuse.

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 details

Unique reference number	20426
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	455103
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,387
Centre Coordinator	Nina Kooner
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
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