

Birmingham - Aston/Nechells Group 2

Bloomsbury Street, Nechells, Birmingham, B7 5BX

Inspection dates	20–21 January 2015
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires Improvement	3
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		Requires Improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This Group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Too few children in the Aston area achieve a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The tracking of children's progress across the group is very inconsistent. Leaders cannot demonstrate the difference children's centre services are having on improving outcomes for all children in their learning and development.
- While a majority of two-year-olds who are entitled to early education funding attend early years provision, too many do not take-up places when offered to them.
- Not enough individuals participate in adult learning activities in the Aston area.
- Too few parents play a role in the governance of the setting. Overall, across the group, parents play too little a part in evaluating the effectiveness services and activities and in influencing the work of the group.
- Case file recording is sometimes weak and often inconsistent. In some instances, there is insufficient information recorded to clearly explain the early help and support required.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Skilled and determined leaders have secured the formation of this new Children's Centre group under very challenging and demanding circumstances; and provision is improving.
- At Bloomsbury Children's Centre, members of the parents' forum actively campaign to raise awareness of the risks associated with female genital mutilation (FGM). Their concerted lobbying and sensitive opposition to FGM is gathering support within the reach, and in the region, and importantly they are helping to safeguard children. 'Saving the next child' is the campaigns dedicated approach to end this form of child harm.
- Families experiencing domestic abuse, and other families in crisis, access immediate and effective support. The way the skilled staff respond to families in need is commendable. Several parents commented that the centres are 'like a second home'.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve the leadership and management of the group by:
 - increasing the parent representation in the governance of the group, especially those living in the Aston area
 - providing further opportunities for parents to evaluate the effectiveness of the group's work, contribute their views and opinions, shape services and activities, and influence the strategic direction of the centres.
- Raise the attainment of all children by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - developing consistent tracking systems to monitor children's progress across the centre's services and beyond
 - increasing the take-up of early education funding by those two-year-old children who are eligible and ensuring they access good quality early years provision.
- Improve the chances of employability and the future economic well-being of the families living in Aston by increasing the numbers of individuals participating in adult learning activities and personal development programmes.
- Ensure that case records regarding family case work and children in need, and any written assessments are of consistently good quality.

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 Bloomsbury Children's Centre and Six Ways Children's centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and centre manager, senior leaders from the local authority, members of the centre group leadership team, education and health, early intervention and family support workers, early childhood providers, volunteers, health and social care professionals, community partners, adult education and commissioned services, parents and centre users, speech and language therapists, and representatives of the parents forum and governing body.

The inspectors visited a range of services offered, including 'Stay and Play' sessions, 'Talking Tips', the Freedom programme, Promoting Happier Parents, and 'Talking Together'. The inspectors visited both of the children's centres and spent time meeting children and families.

They observed the centre's work, and conducted two joint observations with the headteacher. They looked at a range of relevant documentation, including case files.

Inspection team

Deborah Udakis, Lead Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Janet Stacey

Additional inspector

Mary Dudley

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Birmingham City Council city has 43 Children's Centres divided into 16 localities, a number of additional centres operate as collaborations. The Aston/Nechells Children's Centre group is one of three groups in a larger locality. The local authority made significant changes to the way the children's centres were delivered in the Aston area following the closure of one centre group, that included Six Ways Children's Centre, which was judged to be inadequate overall in March 2014. Bloomsbury Children's Centre was previously a stand-alone centre. In April 2014, the local authority decided to merge the two children's centres into one group.

The group is led, on behalf of the local authority, by an education provider. The headteacher at Bloomsbury Nursery School, Daycare and Children's Centre leads the group with support from her leadership team and the governing body. Some 3,804 children under five years of age live in the group's reach area.

Each of the group's two centres delivers a range of services, including family support, early childhood services, adult learning, parenting support, health services, speech and language therapy and family welfare. Governance arrangements for the locality are provided by the local authority and the governing board. Registered early years provision is located in each of the children's centres. The most recent inspection reports can be found at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

The centres serve a number of areas of significant disadvantage, particularly poor quality and high rise housing, low income (causing financial hardship), and many adults who have little or no qualifications. A larger proportion of children under five years are living in homes dependent on workless benefits than seen nationally. Statistics show that the percentage of ethnic minority residents is higher than the city average. The large majority (76%) of children living in the area are from minority ethnic groups and there are at least 42 different languages spoken in the reach area. In Aston, the Pakistani community make up the largest group, while in Nechells the African community is the largest.

Services within the group are targeted specifically at families experiencing poverty, those from minority ethnic backgrounds identified as being vulnerable due to their circumstances, families living with domestic violence, and those experiencing poor mental health.

Children's skills and understanding on entry to early years provision are below typical levels for their age.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Too few disadvantaged two-years-olds take-up their entitlement to free early education. As a result, these children are not sufficiently well-prepared to start and fully benefit from school.
- Centre staff, along with key partners fail to consistently track, or capture effectively the impact of the entire centre's work on children's learning and development over time.
- Systems for monitoring children and families' access to services, their attendance and participation are in place. Levels of engagement with children and families who are registered with the group are good and are improving rapidly. Those children and families who do attend the centres, including African, Pakistani and African-Caribbean families, do so time and time again. However, the centres

have yet to fully engage with the large majority of families living in the reach areas, including some families who may be particularly vulnerable.

- Family support workers, Women's Aid and the Freedom Group ensure that women living with, or fleeing from domestic violence, receive effective care in times of crisis. Trusting relationships are quickly established between staff and families. The successful outreach work ensures many families in need access relevant services.
- Good partnerships with health is helping expectant and new mothers to access a good range of services at the centres, including ante-and post-natal support. Importantly, almost all new born children are registered with the centre group and babies regularly attend health and development appointments with the health visiting teams.
- Children with special educational needs and disabilities access good quality early help. Centre staff make good use their expertise and that of their key partners to identify potential signs of developmental delay.
- Parents with anxiety or depression are well supported by the centre staff and improve their mental health through access to specialist practitioners, and consistently good quality individual support.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- In Nechells, children who attend centre services and good quality early years settings achieve well at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, none of this essential tracking is conducted at Aston. Children in the Aston area do considerably less well in their overall learning at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage than their peers.
- The quality of case file recording requires improvement. Staff do not always effectively record the impact that the group's work is having on improving outcomes for vulnerable families.
- Partnerships with health visitors and midwives are helping to improve the health of children and families in the reach area. Family support workers train staff in early years settings to deliver healthy lifestyle programmes to help combat risks associated with obesity. This is a new initiative and the impact of the programme on children's health has yet to be seen.
- Many parents benefit from the good range of quality parenting courses offered at the centres. Consequently, they become more confident and skilled parents and their ability to communicate with their children improves. However, far fewer individuals living in Aston attend the available learning opportunities than in Nechells.
- Early years consultants employed within the group are beginning to provide effective on-going support to early years settings in the area.
- Effective speech and language services support children's learning and development. 'Talking Tips' sessions are boosting children's communication skills and are helping parents to support their child's communication at home.
- Families with significant needs benefit from the intensive one-to-one training and support offered by the family support workers. The group provides a strong programme of both universal and targeted activities.
- The centres' volunteering programme makes a positive contribution to the life of the community. Together with partners, volunteering opportunities are promoted and managed well, and this helps

to improve the employment prospects of parents. Centre volunteers benefit from effective induction and training. The majority of volunteers have been drawn from the groups that the centres have identified as needing additional support.

- Families' living in poverty and in difficult financial circumstances, have their economic well-being greatly enhanced by the highly individualised support they receive from commissioned services. In 2014, parents in the reach area benefitted by almost £600,000 in claiming benefits they were entitled to through the support of the Employment Development Advisory Service (EDAS) Foundation, and had just over £300,000 of debts managed by them.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Within a very short time, the centre group's leaders, under the skilled leadership and watchfulness of the headteacher have effectively managed the merger of a successful single stand-alone centre and one centre which was part of a group of centres that was judged inadequate overall in 2014.
- Leaders have successfully laid the firm foundations to support ongoing improvement. Clear roles and responsibilities and consistent and effective reporting and accountability processes across the group helps leaders to tackle the performance of staff that is not yet good.
- Too few parents are involved in the leadership and governance of the group. Leaders have accurately evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of the group but parents do not take an active part in this vital work.
- Leaders know of the inconsistencies in practices across the group, with some mediocre performances from staff. Weaknesses in case recording have been identified during quality assurance monitoring as an area for improvement. Plans to improve the quality of practice across the group are in place and are beginning to make a positive difference.
- Looked after children and those subject to child protection plans are well-supported and safely monitored because of the effective multi-agency approach to safeguarding in the area. Close links with the Willow Hub ensure that children and families are assigned a skilled case worker with relevant skills and expertise to work with the family. Some centre staff are skilled in the use of the Common Assessment Framework, others do not pay sufficient attention to the importance and accuracy of case recording.
- The local authority, governing body and group leaders effectively use lessons learned from previous inspections and information gained to address identified weaknesses and to drive forward key improvements.
- The last six months has been a period of significant change, challenge and transition for the two centres. Leaders at all levels have secured the commitment and support of staff, key partners and parents across the group. Consequently, staff morale is good overall, and there are clear signs of improvement.
- The leadership team have implemented an effective system of professional supervision and support which is greatly appreciated by staff. One member of staff from Six Ways Children's Centre said that they were 'overwhelmed' with the support and encouragement they have received from their new leaders.
- Secure networks of support and strong links with key partners' means that families in times of difficulty receive the early help they need, including families new to English. With 30 staff employed

in the group able to speak a wide range of community languages, and access to translation services, potential inequalities and barriers to communication with families are quickly overcome.

- Staff are genuinely interested in the welfare of children and families and they employ a good range of resources to meet specific needs. Parents appreciate the good and trusting relationships they have developed with staff. 'If this centre was not here many families would be homeless and in debt, we have everything here', typifies the comments expressed by parents during the inspection.

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	80199
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	456454
Managed by	An education provider on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3804
Centre leader	Carmel Faulkner
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	0121 4642034
Email address	C.Faulkner@bloomsbury.bham.sch.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- URN 20340 Bloomsbury Children's Centre
- URN 22732 Six Ways Children's Centre

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