

Sandwell - Smethwick Cluster

C/O Smethwick Cape Hill Sure Start Children's Centre, Corbett Street, West Midlands, B66 3PX

Inspection dates	8–10 July 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Good	2
		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 group of centres is good.

- Action for children along with the local authority has a strong commitment to improving the lives of families and children. The centre group provides good support to staff and partners and sets challenging targets which are ensuring improvement. Close and effective monitoring by leaders ensures the centres deliver high quality services that are matched well to users' needs.
- The vast majority of children living in the locality are registered with the centres and the large majority regularly and routinely attend services and activities provided by the centres, partners and commissioned services. Most children in receipt of early education funding access good quality early years provision.
- The well-qualified and highly committed staff team, along with key professionals, work extremely well together to provide a good service to children and families, particularly those considered to be most in need.
- The centre provides good care, guidance and support to all parents, and especially those who have been identified as being most vulnerable. This is achieved through effective one-to-one support and parenting programmes. These build self-confidence and have resulted in parents' greater resilience and support for their children.
- The one-to-one early help that families receive, often when they have multiple and complex problems, is very effective. Parents speak very highly of the staff and the support they receive across many aspects of their lives. One parent summed this up when they said, 'we wouldn't have made it without their help'.

It is not outstanding because:

- The local authority and health services do not always provide information specific to the area. This hinders the centre's ability to identify and target those families who are not accessing services.
- The parent forums are not clear about the part they play in challenging the work of the centres and there are no parent representatives on the advisory board sub-groups. Consequently, 'the voice' of the parent is not always taken into account.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Work with health partners and the local authority to obtain data, including new birth data and other information to support clear identification and consistent engagement with children and families. Pay particular regard to those who do not take up their free entitlement to early years funding, expectant mothers, and those children who have not attended their development check.
- Improve the role of parents in the governance and leadership of the centre by clarifying and strengthening the representation of parents in advisory board sub-groups so that they provide better challenge and contribute to the decision-making process.

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the children services manager, the centre managers of the locality group and leads for the relevant sub-groups; senior leaders and managers in the local authority; family outreach workers; family partnership workers and volunteers. They also met with representatives from health, social care, childminders, nurseries and playgroups in the area and local schools; benefits advice; adult education; Birmingham City University, library service; parents and centre users; members of the parents' forums and advisory board.

The inspectors visited a range of services offered at each of the centres, including adult learning courses, English for speakers of other languages classes, sewing club, 'Brush Strokes' job club, speech and language support session, Baby Club, Baby Clinic, Immunisation Clinic, various different types of stay and play, Rhythm and Rhyme, physical play sessions, Pop-ins playgroup on the site of Cape Hill children's centre and also attended multi-agency meetings.

The inspectors visited all of the centres, Thimblemill Library and Devonshire Infants School.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at the self-evaluation process, development plan, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures and a range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Susan Crawford, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Karen Cooper	Additional inspector
Pippa Wainwright	Additional inspector
David Baber	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Smethwick cluster of children's centres is managed by Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. The cluster's advisory board comprises of key partners and assists in the group's governance. The advisory board is supported by four sub groups; adult education, health, early years education and family support which focus on the main areas of service delivery. Each centre has a parent forum.

There are four children's centres in the locality that are managed by the Children's Services Manager. The Smethwick locality covers the wards of Soho and Victoria, Smethwick, Abbey and Saint Pauls. The cluster has been operational since August 2012. Services are shared across all of the children's centres and the centres are open five days each week.

There are approximately 4,592 children under five years of age living in the locality area. Data demonstrates that the population is extremely diverse with a changing and transient community. The vast majority of the areas are ranked amongst the 30% most deprived nationally with some small areas of affluence. High numbers of children under five years of age are living in workless households. Levels of obesity among children are high in some areas. Children's skills, knowledge and ability on entry to school are below the levels expected for their age.

The centre offers a range of services for families and children under five years. These include child health services and family support, including outreach and signposting for those seeking employment. The services are run from the centres and a variety of community venues, including schools, libraries, community and faith venues, nurseries and playgroups.

One centre has registered early years provision, Pop Ins Playgroup EY466976 which is subject to a separate inspection. The report can be found on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families **Good**

- Leaders use the available information well to match services to local needs. The large majority of children and families are accessing services and activities on a regular basis. The centre targets its services and support to the most vulnerable families very well. Engagement with those families is particularly good and shows that their home life is improved as a result of their take up of services.
- The local authority and health data systems provide the large majority of the information about key target groups. However, there are some gaps in the information for some groups. For instance, there is little detailed information about those two-year-old children who have not taken up the early education offer, expectant mothers and children who have not had their two-year development check. New birth data has only recently been made available and this system has yet to become embedded.
- The lack of specific information hinders the centre group's ability to demonstrate the impact

on children, families' and expectant mother's well-being overtime. However, due to the tenacity of staff and partners this does not prevent services from being received by the large majority of those who most need their help.

- The centres closely monitor access to services, and attendance and participation of children and families. Engagement levels are predominantly good, and in some instances are outstanding. For instance, the baby clinics and stay and play sessions attract high levels of participation. A quick phone call or visit when attendance is seen to fall off often reveals underlying problems that the family has been unable to resolve. Any family that remains missing is automatically referred to the most appropriate agency. Families who made their comments known to inspectors spoke highly of centre workers who were said to be, 'a life line', giving help when they most need it.
- Children with disabilities and special needs and parents with a disability are well supported through good access to well-resourced centres and clear signposting to specialist support groups. Good links with partners, such as Women's Aid is helping to increase adults' awareness of domestic violence and the help and support available.
- Home visits managed by family support workers and family partner workers provide highly personalised support and access to other services. Staff work well with families, developing trusting and constructive relationships to support improving outcomes.
- Highly knowledgeable staff and professionals from many agencies share a common vision of improving the lives of vulnerable families. They work extremely well to identify and refer the most vulnerable families to the multi-agency, Community Operational Group, to ensure they receive early help and timely support.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The effective early years' teacher team supports all schools and Early Years Foundation Stage settings in the area. Their analysis shows the children who use the centre make good progress in their learning and development. These children are better prepared for school and achieve higher scores across the Early Years Foundation Stage than their peers.
- Targeted sessions are provided to boost children's development, such as activities specifically designed to encourage parents to become engaged in their children's learning. For instance, 'Story Time' and focused stay and play sessions, have a good impact on improving children's communication and language and personal, social and emotional skills. As a result, they help to narrow the achievement gap.
- Good-quality services, based on a thorough assessment of individual needs, are provided for the large majority of target groups. Leaders' timely reviews of the impact of services on improving families' lives and reducing inequalities leads to on-going adjustments. For instance, in weighting the programme in favour of targeted rather than universal services.
- Some adults make a valuable contribution to shaping services, for example as volunteers or as representatives of the advisory board. However there are no parent representatives on the advisory board sub-groups and parents who attend the parent forum do not always provide sufficient challenge or hold the work of the centres sufficiently to account.

- The centres offer a good range of opportunities for parents and children to learn about food, nutrition and healthy eating in a practical way. Parents are improving their cooking skills through planning and preparing well-balanced meals through groups such as 'Fab Tots'. This is increasing parents' awareness of healthy eating.
- Well-targeted courses build many vulnerable parents' confidence and equip families to better manage their children's behaviour.
- There is a strong focus on improving English skills to enable non-English speaking families to be full participants in the community and to gain meaningful employment. All centres have a clear focus on equality and diversity and actively promote the inclusion of all children and their families, including those with disabilities.
- Case files for families receiving one-to-one support, or where other organisations are involved, such as through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process, are comprehensive and maintained to a good standard. Where families have turned to the centre, often when there are major traumas in their lives, they are given high levels of non-judgemental care, guidance and support which have a very positive impact on their lives.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Strong and effective leadership and governance, and a commitment to positive partnership working, lead to the success of the centres. The quality and impact of services are carefully monitored and rigorously measured through observations and quality assurance visits, and audit reviews. There is a clear focus on individual performance, continuous professional development and raising ambitions across the locality team.
- There are good links between the advisory board, sub-groups and the parents' forum which ensures information is disseminated effectively. However, parents do not attend the sub-groups and do not always challenge the work of the centres at the parent forums.
- Staff feel valued and well supported in their roles and highlight supervision arrangements as being a very positive feature of management. They keep abreast of best practice, undertake useful training to extend their expertise and are well qualified. Staff make very good use of the high quality resources in the beautifully decorated stimulating centres and the various accessible venues in the community.
- Leaders have developed good strategies to engage with those families seen as being particularly vulnerable and in need of support despite some up-to-date information not being available. In the absence of this information, they have developed strong inter-agency partnerships to identify and reach out to these children and families.
- Reducing the risk of harm to children and all users is deeply embedded in the locality's work. Safeguarding policies and procedures are rigorously applied and understood by all who work with children and their families. Families who access services are kept safe and well protected. The centres' role in the local authority's early help, intervention and

prevention strategy is well developed ensuring families experiencing troubles and in times of crisis, receive intensive and targeted support. The good use of the Common Assessment Framework, 'Team Around the Child' and the Early Help team helps to tailor multi-agency support that enables families to move forward in their lives. The needs of the most vulnerable children are well met.

- Inclusion and equality are actively promoted and every effort is made to reduce inequalities, to remove barriers and to challenge discrimination. The success of the centre in this regard is seen in the narrowing of the achievement gap for those children who in danger of doing less well than their peers across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

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.

Group details

Unique reference number	80611
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	451418
Managed by	Action for Children on behalf of the local authority.

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	4,592
Centre leader	Adam Cooper
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected.
Telephone number	0121 5556756
Email address	adam.cooper@actionforchildren.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 22742 Cape Hill Sure Start Children's Centre
- 20228 Bearwood Children's Centre
- 20705 Galton Valley Sure Start Children's Centre
- 22743 Uplands Sure Start Children's Centre

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