

Inspection report for Palfrey Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	361081
Inspection dates	7-8 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Tim Bristow HMI

Centre governance	Sure Start Palfrey Partnership Board
Centre leader	Mr Mick Davies
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Palfrey Day Nursery

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and a child care inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, partner agencies, local headteachers, community associations and users. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

This is a phase 1 children's centre providing the core offer to a community which is in one of the 30% most deprived wards in the country. The centre provides a range of integrated services that include health, family support, adult training and early year's advice and guidance. It takes referrals from, and supports families with, children in five local schools and four Early Years Foundation Stage Settings. The centre manager coordinates the services provided by the centre and those provided by its partners. These take place within the centre and in approximately 20 venues in the reach area. The local authority holds the centre to account through its service level agreement. The Sure Start Palfrey Partnership Board is responsible for overseeing the day to day running of the centre and its strategic development. The centre does not have on site Early Years Foundation Stage provision.

Within the community served by the children's centre there are 11 super-output areas. Families within the community are from many minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest groups are of Pakistani, White British, Bengali and Indian origin. The

proportion of families from homes where English is not the first language is much higher than the national average. The rate of unemployment and the proportion of people who leave school without qualifications are much higher than the average. The obesity rate is higher than average.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

1

Main findings

The outcomes for users are outstanding. This results from users benefitting from an extensive range of excellent services that have been very carefully personalised to meet the needs of individuals and families. As one user reported representing the views of many more, ‘I would recommend this centre to anyone. Staff are absolutely fantastic and bend over backwards to help you’.

Excellent procedures, services and partnerships to ensure the health and safety of the many vulnerable and hard to reach families have led to very impressive improvements to their well-being. For example, very effective work in partnership with the local health services has led to a rise in the immunisation rate from 50% to 94%. Safeguarding has the highest priority, for example, nearly all children on the child protection register have experienced great improvements to their well-being because of the excellence of the outreach work.

The centre has been instrumental in removing the barriers for nearly all the children so that they are well prepared for learning when they enter the Early Years Foundation Stage settings in the community. For example, the activities designed to promote speaking and listening such as the Every Child A Talker initiative, have been so effective that all the children on this programme that were in danger of delayed speech are now making rapid progress and are at, or exceeding, expected levels.

The centre is at the heart of the community. Users really appreciate the many opportunities they have to influence and shape the services so that they meet their needs. For example, a range of excellent activities has resulted in the much greater engagement of many fathers’ in the centre’s work and also in being better able to support their families.

Users who want to embark on adult training are extremely well supported by the centre. One of the main barriers for these users is language. An excellent partnership with a local training agency has resulted in large numbers of users improving their language skills each year. Currently, there are 10 courses running. Inspectors were impressed by the increased confidence of these users who had just completed their

exams. The pass rate every year is very high.

The provision is outstanding because an excellent team of very well trained workers match their thorough understanding of the community and its families very well to the services they offer and the partners they work with. Consequently, other agencies and partners have the greatest respect for the work of the centre. As one senior health manager reported, 'The centre acts as a conduit to pull all services together so that hard to reach families can be effectively supported, barriers are removed and new initiatives can be introduced. The outreach workers are excellent in developing community cohesion, targeting disadvantaged groups and contacting those who traditionally are less visible members of the community.'

The leadership of the centre manager and his team are outstanding. They very successfully demonstrate a passion and relentless determination to improve the life chances of the local community which has responded by placing great trust in the work of the centre. One highly innovative feature of their work is the very effective procedures they use to evaluate and monitor the impact of all services and activities routinely so that they are constantly being improved. They have a very detailed understanding of the impact of their services on users. Consequently, the centre demonstrates an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement. The partnership board holds the centre to account extremely well by championing the needs of the community and ensuring services are effective. They have rightly identified that they need to sharpen up their focus now on making sure that these improvements to services contribute to the centre's strategic development.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that the partnership board checks more thoroughly that the centre developments are contributing effectively to the service level agreement on improvements to outcomes for users.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

The health of users is being improved greatly in many ways. For example, the rate of mother's breastfeeding continues to rise strongly because of the excellent support for mothers and fathers. A scholar at the local Mosque talked enthusiastically about the positive impact of a seminar on breast feeding jointly organised by the centre and local Muslim community. 'This opened up the Islam perspective on the issues of breast feeding and helped fathers to be more aware of the issues, how they could provide support and to discuss a subject that traditionally was not something that is openly talked about.'

User's awareness of the means to tackle obesity and dental health are improving greatly. For example, at a baby clinic, centre staff expertly prepared activities in which parents had to match the sugar content to soft drinks. This had a very powerful impact because users were surprised about what they found in an

atmosphere where they did not feel criticised or judged for the choices they make.

The ability of parents and carers to ensure that their children grow up in a safe environment is well developed because of the extremely high priority that the centre workers place on visiting all families with babies before they are two months old. They very effectively check and advise on safety and provide necessary equipment, such as stair gates.

The headteachers of the local schools were unanimous about how well prepared for learning the children in the reach area are. Consequently, behaviour in all the settings is judged to be outstanding or good. For most children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, their achievement continues to improve unabated when in the Early Years Foundation Stage settings. This is due in part, to the very strong partnerships with the centre. The centre focuses its work extremely effectively on the well-being of families so that schools and settings are better able to concentrate on the quality of teaching and learning.

Users demonstrate much improved parenting skills. For example, a parent was observed managing the challenging behaviour of her child in an appropriate way so that his behaviour improved quickly. She reported that without the support of the centre she would not have had the skills to do this.

Users are enabled to make a highly creative contribution to the community. For example, mothers from a number of cultural backgrounds were supported by the centre in partnership with Walsall Community Arts Team to compile a book of birthing stories which they published. This very inclusive book offers knowledge and comfort to other parents who are about to give birth.

The economic well-being of many families and in particular the vulnerable and those who experienced isolation is very greatly improved because of their engagement with the centre services. An excellent partnership with the Walsall Welfare Rights unit has maximised the incomes of families by ensuring that they get the help and guidance required to claim all the benefits they are entitled to. The very many adults who embark on training courses to improve their basic or vocational skills gain an excellent grounding for future employment and training. For example, there are 150 adults taking advantage of these courses this year. In addition, the centre gives these users excellent advice and guidance on the steps they need to take to ensure they are well prepared for employment or training. Without this excellent foundation users recognise they would be ill equipped to embark on training.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1

The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	1

How good is the provision?

1

Outreach staff are extremely successful at using activities such as home visits and parent and toddler groups to carefully assess users. Services are then very successfully personalised to ensure the improvements to health, safety and achievement of users. The centre has ensured that outreach workers are very well trained to coordinate and deliver a range of different services and partnerships to support users. Consequently, users gain great trust in individual outreach workers that enables them to gain confidence and engage successfully in the services offered. In addition, data about the community is used extremely effectively to target services. For example, data analysis of the effectiveness of the annual health day event showed that although the attendance was high it was not having a sustained impact on its target audience. The event was reshaped this year to much greater effect. One consequence is that 12 users have enrolled on a weight reduction course.

The level of engagement of the very large majority of users in this complicated community is impressive. The importance of home visiting to take the services to the families has been instrumental to the centre's success in breaking down barriers of language and isolation. An excellent example is the very effective work carried out with fathers to help improve their parenting skills so that they can support mothers in bringing up children. One consequence of this is that in some families they have avoided the very real possibility of a break down in marriage because of the greater understanding and appreciation of the challenges of parenting.

Partner agencies hold the centre in very high regard. A very effective relationship has been established so that the centre can ensure that services are of a very high quality for the users and the partner agencies are enabled to be more effective because of the centre's expertise at breaking down barriers and targeting users. As one headteacher reported. 'Care, guidance and support was judged to be outstanding at our last inspection, this was down to the support of the centre.'

Users recognise the centre as a place of great safety. The centre has very successfully established itself as the first place to come to if users need help and advice. As one parent reported, 'When you walk through the door, everyone is smiling. You feel listened to and valued. They know who to get in touch with and if they can't help you themselves they know who to contact, and they understand that when you say you need help – you need it now.' Users report how much they enjoy socialising with the friends they have met at the centre. There are some very

sensible and practical measures in place to support families. Such as the stock of supermarket vouchers held by the centre which they are able to issue to families in crisis so that they do not go hungry.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The centre manager, with the support of the partnership board and the local authority has established a highly skilled team of centre leaders and workers that cover the whole breadth of skills needed. For example, the centre has staff that can speak seven languages and other experts that lead specific aspects of work, such as in evaluation techniques. Accountability through performance management procedures in the centre and the monitoring of the service level agreement by the local authority are extremely rigorous. Supervision is based on an excellent model where staff and leaders have to analyse carefully the impact of all activities and there work on different users. A consequence of this is that providers such as headteachers report that the consistency of the services they use is always of the highest standard regardless of who is delivering them.

Excellent use is made of data, responses from users and case studies that are expertly combined to shape services. This guarantees outstanding value for money because services are so accurately targeted to users needs. The centre also uses a range of measures very well to demonstrate clearly its success in improving lives. For example, it knows that it has successfully increased the number of fathers who have learnt parenting skills to support mothers giving birth by 100% this year. This demonstrates excellent targeting of services based on a very good understanding of the needs of this group.

Safeguarding practice and protocols for making referrals, sharing relevant information and helping families in time of crisis are exemplary. Training courses developed by the centre to raise parent and carers awareness of child protection issues are held in such high regard that they have now been implemented across the whole of the local authority area.

The centre goes far beyond what is expected to ensure that all users possible are included in the services on offer. As one outreach worker reported, he considered

this to be a seven days a week job in order that services reach the users when they are needed. The relentless determination of staff to reach all the families and to break down the barriers of isolation some experience, through activities such as door knocking, are very impressive. The contribution this centre has made to community cohesion is outstanding. Users from all cultural backgrounds were observed mixing seamlessly within the centre. Its work is rightly respected by the local community cultural organisations.

This centre is an excellent model of practice. It has extremely successfully established itself in the heart of the community by developing partnerships with agencies and other local community and faith groups to thoroughly engage its users. As one partnership board member who lives in the community reported. 'I cannot imagine what we would do without this centre.'

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	1

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Inspectors looked at the centre's self evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, minutes of the partnership board and inspection outcomes for the pre-school providers and schools with Early Years Foundation Stage children in the centre's reach area.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Palfrey Sure Start Children's centre on 7 and 8 July 2010. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

This centre is at the heart of the community and is relied upon for the well-being of large numbers of people. The very strong centre leadership of the manager and his dedicated team have provided families with a wide range of excellent services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs.

People that use the centre are now very much better at staying safe and healthy and providing for their families. Many parents and carers are working very hard to improve their skills, such as improving their English because of the encouragement of the centre. Good luck to all those people who were sitting exams when we visited! The children that use the centre are also well catered for. This means that they settle well into the local nurseries and make much better progress than they would if they had not benefitted from the centres services. It was great to see so many fathers becoming involved in child care and the activities in the centre. Inspectors think that with the centre's encouragement many people now make an excellent contribution to the centre services and the life of the community. It was very pleasing to speak to so many confident adults who took a pride in their achievements. These ranged from being more able to deal with children's behaviour to gaining full time employment.

Parents told us that they think that the centre is a very safe and welcoming place for them and their children. Inspectors agreed with this view and think that staff work extremely well to ensure the health and safety of all who use the centre. The centre is also excellent at helping children in need to be safe by working very closely with other agencies such as the health service and social services.

The care, guidance and support that families and children receive are excellent. This is because the staff are very successful at helping all parents to decide how to improve their lives and then making sure that they access the right services to do this. Parents also appreciated that there is always someone to help when they need advice. Many who have felt isolated and alone with their problems have made friends as a result of the centre's work.

The centre staff and their partner agencies have provided families with a very wide range of varied services that cater for all needs. For example, families are looking forward to the day trips that have been arranged for this summer in response to the requests from users. The services for children are also excellent, such as the booster groups, the 'PEEP for' groups and the play and talk activities where they thrive.

The centre is governed by a partner board that has successfully championed the needs of the community. It could do a little more to check that all the activities are guaranteed to contribute to improvements in the centre's work.

The centre manager and other senior staff understand the needs of the families extremely well and they carefully check regularly that their workers are doing an excellent job. They show that they are determined to improve the lives of users even more. They have certainly an impressive track record so inspectors have no doubt that the excellent work will continue.

We have asked the centre to make some improvements by:

- Asking the partnership board to check a little more carefully that the activities and services contribute as well as they can to improvements in the centres work.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.