

Inspection report for Bloomsbury Children's Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Bloomsbury Children's Centre 229163

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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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.

The inspector held meetings with the centre's management team, members of the children's centre committee of the governing body, the local authority, partnership agencies, members of staff and families using the centre. She observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre and about the wider community.

Information about the centre

Bloomsbury Children's Centre is a phase one children's centre. It is co-located with Bloomsbury Nursery School and Bloomsbury Children's Centre early years provision. The centre was designated in 2006, having previously been a neighbourhood nursery. The centre is governed by the governing body of Bloomsbury Nursery School and Children's Centre. The centre works as part of a locality of seven children's centres. It meets its core purpose by offering a range of provision, which includes health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes and outreach services. Services are provided from the main centre and from community venues.

The centre's reach area covers the Nechells ward, a densely populated urban area which is in one of the 10% most deprived areas of the country. The area has few employment opportunities and, when compared with other centres in the city, a higher than average proportion of families are dependent on workless benefits. The population is made up of a diverse range of ethnic groups with the largest proportions being families of African, Pakistani and White British heritages. Many families speak English as an additional language with 18 languages being spoken in total. There are currently 1047 children under five living in the reach area. Overall, children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early year's provision are low compared with developmental expectations, particularly in relation to their communication and language skills and their personal, social and emotional skills.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Bloomsbury Children's Centre is a good children's centre which has some outstanding features. It is making a strong contribution to improving outcomes for families because staff and managers show high levels of commitment and work extremely well together to meet the needs of families. Good communication and close collaboration with partners results in all agencies working towards common goals. Staff have been successful in registering a high proportion of families in the reach area and the number of families, including those from target groups, engaging in services is increasing. Leaders continue to focus on increasing participation rates so that the centre has an even greater impact upon improving outcomes for families in its reach area.

Staff place the safeguarding of children and their families at the heart of everything they do. Provision to support parents' understanding of how to keep their children safe is extremely strong and has led to a reduction in the number of children being admitted to hospital in the area. A good example of the centre's work can be seen in delivery of the 'Baby Lifesaving' course, where parents rapidly develop a secure understanding of risks within the home and how they can keep their children safe. Through integrated working with children's services, staff have had a very positive impact upon the lives of those families subject to a child protection plan. Case studies and data provide significant evidence of improved outcomes for most of these families who are very well supported to be able to remain together.

Staff provide outstanding care, guidance and support tailored to the personal needs of each family. They genuinely care about the families they work with and parents truly value the support they receive. They express their complete confidence in turning to staff in times of crisis. 'I can't describe how much they have helped me', 'If [staff member] hadn't noticed how I was feeling, I would still be in my four walls' and 'I have really come a long way' were typical comments shared by parents. Those who may be at risk from domestic abuse receive excellent support. For example, 'The Freedom Programme' provides a safe, non-judgemental environment where

parents are able to explore the impact that domestic abuse has on them and their children. Staff truly empower them to make positive changes to their lives.

The centre demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement. Centre leaders and staff have a good understanding of the strengths of the provision and the areas which require further development. Self-evaluation is grounded in detailed analysis of data and evidence of impact upon outcomes for families although systems used are somewhat cumbersome. Plans in place support further development, although targets set not always sufficiently sharp. Planning is, on occasion, hampered by the lack of accuracy and late availability of some data provided by the local authority.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Continue to increase the participation in services by families in the reach area.
- Together with the local authority, continue to drive improvement by:
 - sharpening targets set in development plans to ensure they are clearly measurable
 - streamlining the self-evaluation process
 - providing timely access to accurate data to assist with the targeting of services and the measurement of success.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families are successfully learning about the benefits of adopting healthier lifestyles as there are many programmes in place to support and encourage them. Staff place a good focus on the promotion of breastfeeding which has led to a significant increase in the level of mothers who sustain breastfeeding from 19.8% in 2009 to 68% in 2012. Staff are trained breastfeeding mentors and provide mothers with easy access to equipment to facilitate breastfeeding. These initiatives have led to the centre successfully gaining the 'UNICEF Breastfeeding Friendly Setting Award'. Maternal mental health is given good priority, for example 'Bumps to Babies' provides a range of relevant experiences such as baby massage, creative experiences, one-to-one and peer support.

Parents confirm that the children's centre is an exceptionally safe place to come and are very confident that they can share their worries with staff who listen to them and act upon their concerns. An increasing number of families who are experiencing difficulties in their lives, including those subject to child protection plans and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), are receiving excellent support through outreach work delivered by the family support team. Through individualised support, including the use of parenting programmes such as 'Incredible Years', 'Happier Parenting' and 'Parents Why's', parents show clear improvement in their confidence and parenting skills. Children are well behaved and parents report that their involvement with the children's centre has seen a significant improvement in their child's behaviour and in their confidence in how to manage this positively.

From very low starting points, overall children make good progress so that they are developing skills that will help them in the future. Their development is promoted well within groups as provision is of good quality and staff have a very secure understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They plan sessions well, taking account of the needs and interests of children. Tracking of children’s progress means that staff know the stage of development reached by each child and they tailor provision to ensure each child makes good progress. Data show that 53% of children reach a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Although the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children in the area and the rest has increased over time, staff are able to show the clear impact that centre services are having on children’s overall achievement; 56.5% of children who accessed services reached a good level of development compared to 47.6% of children who did not. Leaders are aware that they now need to ensure more children in the reach area access their good quality provision. The centre focuses well on improving children’s levels of communication and language and their social development. For example, a speech and language therapist leads ‘Talking Tips’, a play session targeted at children who present with a speech and language delay. All staff have received speech and language training and continually deliver effective practice.

Children, parents and staff treat each other with respect and the centre is a hub for the community. Parents from a range of different backgrounds come together and work well to support each other, for example, together they raised funds to support a family facing particularly difficult circumstances. Parents are routinely engaged in governance and influencing provision through the parents’ forum and the governing body. The centre takes a creative approach to obtaining parents’ views such as through the monthly family breakfast event. Staff recognise that children’s voices are important to shaping provision and use information gained through listening to and observing them to influence planning of activities and services. A programme to support parents and local residents to volunteer their services within the community is developing.

In order to help address the high levels of poverty and unemployment in the reach area, information and advice regarding employment is provided for parents through a range of means such as job boards and a ‘drop-in’ provision with local employment agencies. A strong partnership with the EDAS Foundation means that families are improving their economic stability through access to benefits, welfare and housing advice.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
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 children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal	2

and social development	
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

Centre leaders and staff have a very good understanding of their community. This is due to rigorous analysis of data, liaison with other agencies and consulting with families which has informed the development of a good range of high quality services. Extremely robust assessment systems mean that families' needs are effectively assessed and planned for. This includes the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) which is embedded in the work of the centre. Good multi-agency working results in families with complex needs receiving well-coordinated and integrated services. Outreach services are effective at engaging those users who are hard to reach; this ensures that some of the families whose circumstances make them most vulnerable access relevant services. Provision is regularly reviewed and refocused to meet needs and, as a result, participation rates are improving.

The centre promotes purposeful learning well. The centre's vision 'to foster a learning community with high aspirations' is being realised as good take-up rates for adult learning have raised families' aspirations. Tracking of those who have engaged in learning programmes shows that 78% have gone on to access accredited training or enter employment. Staff recognise and celebrate the achievements of individuals by providing certificates and sharing their good news in the centre's newsletter and on the website.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre is very well led by an extremely committed manager and a passionate senior leadership team. As a result, staff show equal passion for improving outcomes for the families they work with. They have high expectations for children and their

families. Clear line-management arrangements and effective supervision mean that staff are well supported. The centre manager delegates responsibilities effectively in order that projects and tasks are well managed and led by members of the team. Leaders and staff are well supported by an enthusiastic governing body whose members communicate a clear commitment to ensuring the centre provides high quality services. They appropriately challenge the centre and hold staff to account.

Leaders are motivated to seek improvement. They are clear about where they need to develop their provision and how this can be achieved. The centre's development plan focuses on appropriate key issues identified through accurate self-evaluation. Targets for improvement are set both by the local authority and by the centre itself, although these are not always sharp enough to enable the centre to clearly measure the impact of the work it undertakes or to securely promote rapid improvement. Staff evaluate the quality of provision on a very regular basis and involve parents fully in this process. Leaders make good use of the data provided by the local authority to help them to identify how best to focus their efforts. However, this work is somewhat hampered due to the late availability and inaccuracy of some data.

The centre provides good value for money. Staff take pride in maintaining a well-organised, comfortable environment for families. They take time to create spaces which are conducive to providing services, such as providing subtle lighting and soft furnishings in areas used for meeting with parents to create warm and welcoming spaces. Leaders have built a strong and well-qualified team, having recruited family support workers from a variety of professional backgrounds.

The inclusion of all children and families is at the heart of the centre's work. Centre leaders are using data well to help them to identify levels of engagement of target groups and they work to remove barriers. For example, a concerted effort to raise awareness of centre services within the Caribbean and Bangladeshi communities has seen an increase in the level of families from these groups registered with the centre. Families who have English as an additional language are supported to access services through the use of staff's linguistic skills or the use of translators. Disabled children and those who have special educational needs receive good support through the provision of a targeted stay and play session. This provides children and their parents with access to relevant equipment to play and learn together and staff are on hand to offer guidance and support.

Staff give the safeguarding of children and their families the highest priority. They have an acute understanding of safeguarding issues due to a good level of training and information sharing, both during induction and throughout their employment. Rigorous recruitment and vetting procedures ensure that those who may come into contact with children are suitable.

Staff have developed good partnerships in order to provide a comprehensive range of services aimed at meeting the needs of the families in the reach area. All partners work towards common aims and, as a result, services are integrated and cohesive. This was reflected in the comment made by one partner who told the inspector, 'I feel like I am part of the Bloomsbury family'.

Parents have regular opportunities to participate in shaping and evaluating provision, resulting in strong levels of satisfaction and engagement. The centre is increasingly reaching more families, including those in target groups, through strong partnership and outreach work, and staff recognise that they need to build on this work to further increase rates of participation.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

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

Not applicable

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Bloomsbury Children’s Centre between 4 and 6 December 2012. We judged the centre as good overall. We found that it has some outstanding elements.

We found that the care, guidance and support that staff offer you is outstanding. We agree with you that staff go out of their way to help and support you. They are always ready to listen when you need to talk with someone and do their utmost to help you to make positive changes to your lives, for example through the support they give through 'The Freedom Programme'. Staff and managers show a very strong commitment to improving the lives of all of you and they work well together to do so. They have developed some strong partnerships with other professionals and organisations so that they can offer you the correct support, advice and guidance. We have asked leaders and staff to continue to encourage more families to participate in the services so that they too can make positive changes in their lives.

Centre staff do all they can to make sure you and your children remain safe. For example, they are well trained in how to safeguard children and managers have taken the correct steps to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable. Staff work closely with you to help you ensure that your homes are safe places for your young children and it is clear that many of you have learned a great deal from the activities you have participated in such as the 'Baby Lifesaving' course. Staff have also worked very well with families who have been supported so that they can remain living together.

It is clear that the whole staff team are determined to make your lives the best they can be. They know what the centre does well and where they need to develop further. In order that they improve quickly, we have asked the centre's leaders to make sure their plans for development are as clear as possible. We have also asked that the local authority helps by providing them with the information they need as early as they can and that they ensure it is as accurate as possible.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with the inspector and were willing to share your thoughts about the centre. We are very grateful and we wish you all every success for the future.

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