

Birmingham - Aston/Nechells Group 2

c/o Birmingham Settlement, Centre for Aston Families, 359-361 Witton Road, Aston, Birmingham, B6 6NS

Inspection date		12–13 March 2014	
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Inadequate	4
The quality of practice and services		Inadequate	4
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group is inadequate.

- Centre leaders have a limited understanding of how to use information when planning their work and judging if services have got better. Leaders are not clear enough about which families the centres should support most and why. Consequently, centre priorities do not match local needs well, and too few families, including those in greatest need, are using the centres.
- The local authority has not ensured that centres have access to enough information about the local community to identify which families need help most. Targets set by the local authority are not clear or precise enough to ensure that the lives of children and families improve.
- The quality of services is variable and too few activities are provided to help adults with their own learning. Improvements in the lives of families are not recorded well, so leaders do not know what difference the centres are making to the health and education of families. Too little information is shared by health and schools with the centres.
- Leaders have achieved too little because they do not have a good understanding of how to move centres forward. The relationship between the local authority and the centres is poor. The local authority has failed to ensure that their extensive support has improved the centre group enough. Delays in providing the centre group with budget information are not helping the centres to make plans and decisions.
- The local authority, Birmingham Settlement and the advisory board do not assist the centre leaders to have an accurate view of the centres. Nobody has made sure that the centres are improving well. No parents are members of the advisory board, there is no independent chairperson, attendance at meetings is too low and members do not know the centres in adequate detail.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Centre leaders and staff expect a lot of themselves and they are enthusiastic and hard working. They want to improve and have tried to make improvements to centres in the past year. As a result, the numbers of families registered with the centres has increased.
- Families who use the centres value the care and support that staff provide.

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. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Birmingham Settlement Children's Centre and Six Ways Children's Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with staff, leaders, partners, the Chief Executive of Birmingham Settlement and representatives of the advisory board and the local authority.

The inspectors visited both centres. They observed the centre's work, spoke informally to parents and looked at a wide range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Tim Vaughan Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Linda McLarty	Her Majesty's Inspector
Karen Cooper	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre group

Birmingham Aston/Nechells Group 2 is a children's centre group that consists of Birmingham Settlement Children's Centre and Six Ways Children's Centre. The centres are located less than one mile apart. Since April 2013, the centres have been linked together and share two overall centre leaders, an advisory board, and a parents' forum. The local authority has commissioned Birmingham Settlement, a not-for-profit organisation, to manage the centre group. The centres are part of a wider locality of seven children's centres in the north of Birmingham. The centre meets the core purpose by providing a range of family support services, play and learning activities, and health promotion activities.

Birmingham Settlement Children's Centre is a phase two centre, designated in August 2007. The children's centre was inspected in December 2012 and judged to be inadequate. The children's centre is based within the 'Centre for Aston Families' - a family and community centre delivering a wide range of services including Birmingham Settlement Early Years and Pre-school. Six Ways Children's Centre was designated as a phase one children's centre in March 2007 and located within Mansfield Green Primary School and on the same site as Mansfield Green Daycare Nursery. The centre was inspected in September 2010 and judged to be inadequate. It was re-inspected in September 2011 and judged to be satisfactory. Mansfield Green E-Act Academy replaced the primary school from January 2013. The Academy is the employer of some staff working within the children's centre group. There is a management agreement in place between the Academy and Birmingham Settlement. Neither the Academy nor the early years provision was inspected as part of this inspection; their reports are available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre group serves 2,613 children under five years of age living within 13 super output areas in the north of Birmingham. All of these super output areas are ranked in the top 20% of the poorest areas in the country. Children start early education with a range of skills that are well below those expected for their age.

The proportion of young children who live in households where no one is working is 39%. The large majority of families living in the area are from a range of minority ethnic groups, including 38% from a Pakistani heritage and 21% from a Bangladeshi heritage. There are a growing number of families from the African continent and Eastern Europe living in the area and 37% of local people speak English as an additional language.

The centre group has identified target groups as children living in the poorest 20% areas, fathers, children living in low income households, children experiencing domestic violence, pregnant and teenage mothers, children subject to a child protection plan, children in need and children from a minority ethnic background particularly those from a Black African or Bangladeshi heritage.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority, Birmingham Settlement and the centre advisory board to improve access to services by young children and families by:
 - providing the centres with enough information about the characteristics of the local area to identify more accurately the needs of families
 - supporting leaders to undertake a thorough analysis of need across the local area and ensuring that centres understand how to use this to plan services, prioritise those in greatest need and raise levels of participation by target families.

- Work with the local authority, Birmingham Settlement and the centre advisory board to improve the quality and impact of services by:
 - improving the tracking and evaluation of the impact of the centre upon children's readiness for school, child and family health and adult learning
 - working with partners to ensure adequate opportunities for adult learning
 - ensuring that the quality of centre activities is always good or better by increasing the checks on centre activities and improving the training and advice for staff
 - improving systems for exchanging information with health and schools so that the centre has a better understanding of the longer term impact of its services

- Work with the local authority, Birmingham Settlement and the centre advisory board to strengthen governance, leadership and management arrangements by:
 - ensuring that improvement priorities are matched closely to the identification of need and include clear and measurable targets by which progress can be reviewed regularly
 - agreeing a package of support for centre leaders from outside of the centre group that is planned and monitored carefully - so that leaders are clear what actions they need to take to bring about rapid and lasting improvements across the work of the centres
 - ensuring that there is an accurate evaluation of the centre group agreed between leaders, the advisory board, Birmingham Settlement and the local authority
 - recruiting more members to the advisory board, including parents, and ensuring that the chairperson is a parent or representative of the local community, so that the board can provide high quality, independent challenge and support to centre leaders
 - improving the quality of the relationship between the centre group and local authority so that there is a shared, coordinated effort to improve the centres.

- The local authority should strengthen the work of the centre group by:
 - providing timely budget information to the centres to enable proper planning and staffing
 - improving the quality of advice and support to the centre group so that services improve quickly.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- The centre group has improved the levels of registration by local families over the past year, so that a large majority are registered with the centres. However, strategies to encourage families to use services are having limited success. Consequently, too few children and adults, including those in greatest need, attend groups and activities.

- The local authority does not provide the centres with sufficient data about who lives in the local community. In addition, centre leaders do not know how to use the data that they do receive, to plan and evaluate services. As a result, leaders do not track and evaluate the engagement of target groups nor the impact that services are having upon the most vulnerable families. For example,

centres are unclear as to how many families expecting children are using services.

- Centre leaders cannot explain adequately why some groups of children and families have been chosen as target groups and not others. Some of their selection of groups is too simplistic. This is because no local analysis of need has been undertaken. Consequently, there is an inadequate understanding across the centres as to which families are most in need.
- Some partnerships are at an early stage, for example, with health. Information sharing protocols with health are still in draft form and not yet signed off, which means that centre leaders do not get information about live births in a timely way to contact families.
- The take-up of free early years places with local nurseries and childminders by 61% of eligible two-year-olds is satisfactory, being higher than Birmingham average. However, the centre does not receive data from the local authority to find those vulnerable two-year-old children who are not taking up these places. The take up of places for three- and four-year-olds at 90% is higher than the Birmingham average but below national figures.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- Centre leaders cannot demonstrate their impact on reducing inequalities in health outcomes in the reach area. This is because centres do not receive information from health partners about obesity in the Reception Year, child immunisations, smoking cessation, dental health or mental health outcomes in the reach area.
- Centre leaders are unable to demonstrate their impact on improving outcomes for children's well-being. This is because the local authority does not provide enough information to centres about children's readiness for school, as shown by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile in the centre area. Furthermore, some schools are reluctant to share information about children's levels of skills and knowledge on entry to school, and individual Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores.
- Centre classes for English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) are popular and provide a good opportunity to reduce inequalities between groups. However, the range of adult learning on offer throughout the centres is unsatisfactory.
- The quality of groups and activities seen during the inspection was variable. A lack of staffing and resources meant that on occasion, the organisation of activities limited the learning and development taking place. For example, by merging the ESOL crèche with the Stay and Play session, the number of adults in the room meant that children had insufficient space to move between activities.
- While one of the early years settings linked to the children's centres was judged to be good when inspected, the other has been judged satisfactory at two consecutive inspections. This and a shortfall of good provision across the city, means that too many young children are attending settings that are not good enough.
- The balance between universal and targeted services at the centres does not reflect the needs of families in the area, and is predominantly universal provision with limited targeted provision. Nevertheless, families who use the centres feel welcome and praise the care and support that staff give for their individual needs.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- The relationship between the local authority and the centre group is dysfunctional. The high quality communication and working together that weak centres need so that they can improve rapidly, are

not adequately in place.

- The local authority decision to combine two children's centres, each with historical weaknesses, has presented great challenges for centre leaders over the past year. The local authority has provided what it considers to be intensive support and monitoring to the centre group. However, centres have felt overwhelmed, frustrated and at times confused, by this support. In addition, leaders have a weak understanding of how to set priorities, identify the most vulnerable families, form clear plans, evaluate progress and use data to improve services. Consequently, leaders have struggled to set a clear direction for the centre group and bring teams together. Delays in the notification of budget from the local authority to the centre group are not helping the centres to plan ahead. Improvement within the centres has been slow and previously identified inadequacies have not been addressed well.
- Targets set by the local authority for the centres are limited, vague and confusing. Too few data are available to show that the centre group is having enough impact upon the lives of children and families and reducing inequalities between different groups. As a result, resources are used poorly to meet local needs.
- The advisory board for the centre group is weak and ineffective. Too few professionals and local representatives are members, no parents are members, and the chairperson is not independent, as a centre leader currently holds this role. Attendance at meetings of the advisory board is low and declining, and members' understanding of the work of the centres is too general. As a consequence, the advisory board is not making enough difference to the work of the centres. Furthermore, the centre group has an overly generous view of itself because the advisory board and the local authority have not provided enough challenge to leaders.
- Centre leaders and staff are passionate, ambitious and they want to improve services. They have worked tirelessly to develop the centres. However, the training and support given to staff, and checks by leaders have not had the impact that they are seeking.
- Staff have a sufficient awareness of what to do if there is a concern about the well-being or safety of a child or family. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework processes adequately in their work. The quality of record keeping and the supervision of case files are acceptable. Staff have reasonable access to training about safeguarding.
- Child protection policies and procedures are clear and visible throughout the centres. The recruitment and vetting of staff meets minimum requirements. Through appropriate liaison with a range of agencies, children known to the centre who are subject to a child protection plan, in care, or deemed to be in need, receive satisfactory levels of support and are increasingly safe. Links with health and with social care in support of families are improving steadily.

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	80016
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	443673
Managed by	Birmingham Settlement on behalf of Birmingham local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,734
Centre leader	Rebecca Hadley & Jayne Cole
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0121 2500777
Email address	rebecca.hadley@bsettlement.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- URN 20099 Birmingham Settlement Children's Centre
- URN 22732 Six Ways Children's Centre

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