

# Inspection report for Story Wood Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	383481
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 September 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Sheelagh Barnes

<b>Centre leader</b>	Julie Doyle
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Story Wood School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Story Wood

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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.

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings and interviews with the headteacher of Story Wood Infant and Junior School, senior managers of the centre, governors, a representative of the local authority, parents and carers, a community health visitor, a community midwife, a childcare worker, a psychological therapist, a tutor from Birmingham Metropolitan College, the headteacher and support teacher from a local school, and family support workers.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

This is a phase one children's centre which delivers the full core offer for 52 weeks of the year. The centre is funded by the local authority. It is open from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm five days a week. The local authority has delegated responsibility for the day-to-day running of the centre to the governing body of Story Wood School, with which the centre now shares a site. The centre moved to this current main site relatively recently. The move necessitated a change to the designated reach area, which overlaps, but is not exactly the same as, the catchment area of the school. Family support and early years' services are delivered at Story Wood, via a service level

agreement with Spurgeons, which is a voluntary sector children’s services provider. The centre has a partnership advisory group and parents’ forum which meet on a regular basis to discuss and evaluate the effectiveness of the provision. Most services are run on site, but there is also outreach provision at the original site of the centre and at several local schools.

The centre serves the eighth most deprived ward in Birmingham. Data indicate that nearly three quarters of the population in the reach area live in areas which are in the top 5% in England with regard to levels of deprivation. Crime rates in the area are high. Most families in the reach area are White British, but there are growing numbers of families with a range of backgrounds, including Asian, Eastern European and African. Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years’ provision are below those expected for their age. The centre does not have precise figures of the proportions of families where no one is in work, although the information it does have suggests that this is significantly higher than the average for Birmingham as a whole and also the national average. There are five children subject to a child protection plan and two children subject to a child in need plan that currently have active children’s centre family support case files. Teenage pregnancies and the proportion of teenage parents not in employment, education or training in the area are higher than for Birmingham. The centre does not have precise information on how many children in the area are in the care of the local authority.

In 2009, the centre received an ‘Excellence in Working with Fathers’ award and a commendation in ‘Excellence in Maternity/Health Services’ awarded by Birmingham City Council following parent-led nominations.

## 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

This is a warm and welcoming centre that provides satisfactorily for families and their children. Parents and carers say they feel comfortable and supported when they attend activities at the centre. Centre staff are diligent in planning and evaluating

activities for individual families. However, information about the reach area, and particularly that of target and vulnerable groups, is not always made readily available by the local authority and partner agencies. As a result, the picture of the profile of families in the area held by the centre lacks precision. Centre staff regularly monitor the impact of services they provide to the parents, carers and children who attend. However, this is completed on an individual basis, family by family. The information is not then collated in any way that allows the swift evaluation of the impact of services on particular groups. As a result, the knowledge of the impact of the centre's work on those from vulnerable groups is very general. Evaluation such as the value for money of different activities, is satisfactory, but lacks rigour. Planning of activities meets the perceived needs of those who attend, but is not always tailored specifically to vulnerable groups, such as disabled parents or teenage parents not in employment, education or training. However, the recent work started to identify and support victims of domestic violence is good, well recorded and evaluated, and is a particular strength of the centre.

Governors and managers are committed to ensuring the centre's work is evaluated and improved systematically, but have not been provided with training on how best to do this for a children's centre, as opposed to a school. They regularly review the quality of the provision and provide support and advice for the manager. They rely largely for their monitoring on reports from the centre manager, from local authority monitoring or from commissioned reports. While these provide a satisfactory overview for governors, some reports lack sharpness and enough detail to enable decisions to be made that drive up standards further.

The centre uses the local authority's system to plan for improvement. This comprises a database system, which is held on computer and accessed in the centre by the manager and senior managers. The children's centre manager inputs the plan and the quarterly review information following consultation with the rest of the team. As it is not easily printed out, those who work in the centre have a general, but not sufficiently detailed awareness of the areas targeted for development. Criteria against which staff and stakeholders can measure the centre's progress towards the six areas highlighted for each year are also very general. They lack precision and are not broadcast widely enough to push forward improvement more than satisfactorily. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- The local authority should:
  - provide a clear steer to the governing body, and any necessary training, to enable its members to understand their roles and responsibilities and how they differ from those for the school
  - ensure that the centre managers have relevant data from partner agencies, with particular regard to target groups.
  
- Ensure that the systematic evaluation conducted by centre leaders takes greater

account of the progress of target groups so that value for money of the services is more easily measured and information can be used to provide a tighter match of services to the needs of vulnerable groups.

- Ensure that the development of the improvement plan is conducted with greater involvement of stakeholders and that the criteria by which outcomes can be easily evaluated are shared with all.

## How good are outcomes for families?

3

Parents, carers and children who use the centre regularly are enthusiastic about it. They appreciate the friendly approach of the staff. They say they feel comfortable and welcomed. Parents, carers and children enjoy opportunities to work and play together at the centre. Several choose the centre specifically for what they see as the relaxed and non-judgemental approach of staff. For example, one parent said, 'Using the crèche helps me to have time to myself.' Some parents and carers are involved in the management of the centre through membership of the advisory board and the recently developed parents' forum.

Health outcomes for users of the centre are satisfactory. Centre leaders have set up a number of health-promoting activities, including advice on eating and baby massage. These are much enjoyed. Parents and carers say that the combination of sensitive staff, childcare facilities and making new friends helps them immensely. Breastfeeding figures at birth and after six weeks are significantly below those of the city overall. Because of this, the centre is working to raise awareness of the benefits to mother and baby alike.

Safety and safeguarding of children and families are good. The centre has clear and relevant policies which are implemented well. It provides a safe and welcoming place for children and adults alike. Feedback from adults who have attended courses for victims of domestic abuse indicates that they feel there has been an improvement in their self-confidence and outlook. Support for children with a child protection plan and for those with a child in need plan, is effective.

The proportion of children who attain expected levels for their age in their skills knowledge and understanding by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved steadily over recent years, but is still below local and national levels. The progress of children in the day-care, crèche and school is good. However, the gap in attainment between the lowest-attaining children and the rest by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has not decreased.

The centre commissions some accredited courses to help parents and carers increase their qualifications and confidence. However, take-up so far has been low. The centre plans to commission courses in numeracy and information and communication technology in the new year. There are facilities for parents and carers to access information about Jobcentre Plus and a representative from this agency has visited coffee mornings in the past to speak to parents and carers. However, while the centre staff have spoken to individual parents and carers about this, the centre has

no overall data on how many people have gone on to apply for jobs, develop skills in writing curriculum vitae, attended interviews or claimed benefits.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

### **How good is the provision?**

<b>3</b>
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The centre has an adequate understanding of the general needs of the families in the area and can demonstrate some improvement in outcomes. Centre leaders get some information from the local authority and health services and this is helpful in assessing what needs to be provided for families in the area. However, there are gaps in information provided about some vulnerable groups, which would be helpful to the centre in its planning and in measuring the impact of its work. For example, information about children who have been identified as particularly vulnerable or who are on the child protection register is not automatically provided to the centre in a systematic way. The centre receives limited information about teenage parents who are not in education, employment or training. There is satisfactory provision for children with disabilities.

Centre leaders are aware that the ethnic profile of those who use the centre does not accurately reflect that in the reach area. Proportionally fewer families of Asian and African background use the centre as yet. The increase in numbers of families of minority ethnic backgrounds who are now entering the school is not yet reflected in the profile of those who use the centre. Encouraging greater participation from target groups is identified as an area for development on the improvement plan.

The centre promotes purposeful learning for babies and young children. Sessions are planned well according to the needs of the children attending. As a result, they support children's learning effectively. Children and babies are relaxed, happy and engaged. Care is taken to ensure that the environment is bright and attractive. A small number of fathers and grandparents attend sessions at the centre. A specific session for fathers has been developed, which is temporarily suspended because of

accommodation issues.

Outreach services meet the needs of the wider community satisfactorily. The quality of advice about universal preventative treatment is appropriate. All centre staff are fully trained in using the Common Assessment Framework. Provision and support for families in times of crisis are good. Parenting courses, such as 'Triple P', are greatly appreciated by the parents and carers who complete them. Families who experience crisis are supported well by the centre. Case studies indicate that the centre provides good support for parents and carers and children, in times of trouble, resolving issues and improving lives.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

The leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory. There are satisfactory links with other agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus, health services and Birmingham Metropolitan College. Staff training is targeted towards developing skills and services further. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are aware that there is a need for specific training to help them to fulfil their role of monitoring the work of the centre and challenging it with greater confidence. Suitable numbers of parents and carers are involved in the governance of the centre. Planning for improvement is satisfactory, but the system used does not easily allow for stakeholders to have a full input. In addition, criteria to measure the effectiveness of these plans are not always precise enough, made fully explicit to all stakeholders or easily evaluated.

Both the centre manager and the head of the school acknowledge that not enough is done to evaluate the impact of the centre's work on target groups and to use data to plan to meet the needs of all groups in the area. While the centre caters caringly for members of all groups and follows up with each family to check how they have got on, it does not always analyse the impact of its services on each target group specifically. Information about provision for victims of domestic violence and its outcomes are collated carefully. As a result, all those involved in this work know how effective this work is. The extent to which the centre enables individual users to progress to further employment, education or training is satisfactory. However, although individuals are contacted and asked how well they have got on, results for those not in work are not recorded or analysed as a whole. The centre does not collate overall figures for families who have accessed benefits as a result of the advice or guidance it has provided. As a result, the value for money of specific

activities, such as coffee drop-in sessions, can only be evaluated in general terms. Centre leaders ensure sound use is made of skills of staff and resources of the centre. As a result, value for money overall, is satisfactory.

Senior leaders ensure a satisfactory range of enjoyable services are matched to the wants and needs of the families who use the centre. They are aware, however, of the need to extend the range of users to include more from vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups, such as teenage parents and members of the increasing numbers of minority ethnic groups in the area. Effort has recently been put into trying to promote the centre's work, in particular with regard to encouraging breastfeeding, to a wider part of the community. This has had little measurable effect so far, although breastfeeding mothers say they are made to feel comfortable at the centre.

The centre provides satisfactorily for equality and diversity. Equality of opportunity is given suitably high regard and all staff work to ensure that activities are inclusive. The welcoming atmosphere is something parents and carers are particularly pleased with. Provision to ensure disabled access is good. Celebration of cultural diversity is satisfactory. Safeguarding arrangements are good, including those for child protection. The centre has clear policies for safer recruitment and risk assessment, which are implemented well in practice.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made**

## during this inspection

The inspection of Story Wood School judged the provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage to be good. The inspection of Story Wood day care and crèche, judged provision for children to be good.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Story Wood Children's Centre on 27 and 28 September 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank all those of you who gave up time to meet with us and tell us about your experiences at Story Wood Children's Centre. It was very helpful to hear your views. We agree with you that the activities the centre plans for you and your children are enjoyable and valuable for those who attend. You also told us that all of the staff involved in the centre work hard to help you and your children, especially when you have a problem, and we could see that that is the case. You told us how friendly and approachable everyone is and how happy your children are, and we agree with you.

All of the people who work at the centre are working hard, supported by the governors of Story Wood School, who have responsibility for the centre. The work that they do, to assess what is needed and to plan to make things even better, is satisfactory. We think that when the local authority gave the governing body of the school the day-to-day responsibility for the running of the centre, it should also have given them advice and training on how to do this in an easy yet effective way. We have asked the local authority to arrange for this now. We have also asked the local authority to ensure that the centre gets better information about all of those in the area who would benefit from its work. This will help the centre in its planning. We have asked the centre to measure the effect of its work, particularly with regard to the vulnerable families in the area. This way we believe the centre managers will know which of the services are very effective and if any are less so. It will help leaders to work out which things are most cost-effective and which services could be improved.

The range of services and activities that the centre plans for you and your children is satisfactory. The centre helps you in many ways, by giving you advice on where to go to resolve any problems you have. We know the staff have given advice to you on a range of things, such as how to make your homes safer. Safety and safeguarding are good at the centre. This is because everyone puts the safety of you and your children high on their agenda. We know that some of you, including some of you who spoke with us, already contribute to decision making at the centre through the parents' forum and the advisory board.

The centre plans for improvement using a system based on a computer programme. It is not easy for groups of people to be involved in this and it relies on the centre manager typing in all data and suggestions. The system is not easily printable and so difficult for a group, such as the governing body or the advisory board, to work on together. The targets for improvement are not presented in a way that allows everyone to measure how well things are improving, so we have asked the centre to try to improve this.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).