

## Children's Centres – List of Frequently Asked Questions – Sure Start

### Q1: What are Children's Centres?

**A1:** Children's Centres provide multi-agency services that are flexible and meet the needs of young children and their families. The core offer includes integrated early learning, care, family support, health services, outreach services to children and families not attending the Centre and access to training and employment advice. Children's Centres will be models of multi-agency and partnership working. At the heart of a centre will be high quality learning and full day care for children from birth.

You can find out more about Children's Centres in the rest of these frequently asked questions and on the Sure Start website at [www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk).

---

### Q2: What are the aims of the Children's Centres programme?

**A2:** The Government intends that the provision of good quality integrated services should have broad and lasting impact on children, their parents and the wider community. Children's Centres will contribute towards the Government's commitment to:

- the best start in life for every child;
- better opportunities for parents;
- affordable, good quality childcare;
- stronger and safer communities.

The Children's Centre programme is based on the concept that providing integrated education, care, family support and health services are key factors in determining good outcomes for children and their parents.

The concept itself is not a new one. Children's Centres are about building on existing good practice, rather than starting afresh. A significant number of families with young children already benefit from good quality integrated services. Children's Centres enhance these services and extend the benefits to more families — bringing an integrated approach to service delivery to areas where it is most needed.

---

### Q3: Why is Sure Start making qualified teacher support a priority in Children's Centres?

**A3:** The *Effective provision of pre-school education* (EPPE) Project (1997-2003) clearly demonstrated that:

'Settings which have staff with higher qualifications, especially with a good proportion of trained teachers on the staff, show higher quality and their children make more progress.'  
(Research brief findings from *The pre-school period*, 2003)

The research also demonstrated that the most positive outcomes were achieved where teachers were working directly with children and practitioners. The teachers working in these roles will not only have to have the ability to provide good quality educational experiences for children, they will also need to be able to articulate and disseminate effective practice to a wide range of audiences, as well as embracing the children's centre philosophy. They should be committed to and demonstrate multi agency working and value the significant part that parents/carers play in their children's development.

High quality teacher input is one of the core components of a Children's Centre, it is crucial that local authorities ensure that all children using the Centre receive the very best educational and care experiences. The centres will be, for many families and their children, their first experience of childcare and education. Teachers will play an important role in making sure that they find the centre an inviting, exciting place to be.

---

#### **Q4: What will be different about the role of a qualified teacher in a Children's Centre?**

**A4:** Local authorities should be working with partners in health, education, social services and the private and voluntary sector to reshape services through Children's Centres and linked provision. Everyone who has contact with a family living in the Children's Centre catchment area should consider themselves to be part of the Children's Centre. Families will certainly view them as that. Although this offers exciting opportunities for innovative ways of working, it also means that the remit of the teacher will go far beyond the provision of educational activities. The drive for high quality means that teachers working in Children's Centres will need to be early years specialists, they should have extensive experience of working with young children and be reflective, analytical and committed to continuous professional development. Unless a teacher has been working in organisations such as Early Excellence Centres or Family Centres they may have had fewer opportunities to work with children and families in such a holistic way and to work in such a diverse team of other professionals.

The teacher will need:

- a commitment to flexible, innovative multi-agency and team working;
- an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the other professionals working in the centre;
- the ability to establish effective and professional relationships with colleagues from different backgrounds;
- a commitment to developing themselves and their colleagues as learners;
- experience of leading early years provision;
- strong communication skills, including diplomacy and sensitivity to the needs of others;
- an ability to translate their own knowledge and understanding into effective practice;
- a knowledge of child development and children's learning
- a knowledge of planning, observation- based assessment and documentation and the importance of sharing this with families;
- a commitment to the [Key elements of effective practice](#).

---

#### **Q5: Where will Children's Centres be based?**

**A5:** Children's Centres will be based in the 20% most disadvantaged wards in England. However, the Sure Start unit is promoting this integrated approach to service delivery for all children. Since January 2005, 188 children's centres have been designated so far.

---

## **Q6: What services will be provided in Children's Centres?**

**A6:** Children's Centres will be expected to provide the following services to children under 5 and their families:

- early education integrated with full day care, including early identification of and provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities;
- parental outreach;
- family support, including support for parents with special needs;
- health services;
- a base for childminders, and a service hub within the community for parents and providers of childcare services;
- effective links with Jobcentre Plus, local training providers and further and higher education institutions;
- effective links with Children's Information Services, Neighbourhood Nurseries, Out of School Clubs and Extended Schools;
- management and workforce training.

---

## **Q7: Who is responsible for delivering the Children's Centre programme?**

**A7:** Local authorities have been given strategic responsibility for the delivery of Children's Centres. They are planning the location and development of centres to meet targets set by the Sure Start unit, in consultation with parents and other key partners.

---

## **Q8: How will Children's Centres develop?**

**A8:** The majority of Children's Centres will be developed from Sure Start local programmes, Neighbourhood Nurseries and Early Excellence Centres. However, the Sure Start unit is also encouraging local authorities to think innovatively about how to develop other local provision in the maintained, voluntary and private sectors. Since the Children's Centre programme is very much about building on existing provision, very few new Children's Centres will be built from scratch.

---

## **Q9: How many children will benefit?**

**A9:** By March 2006, Children's Centres are expected to reach at least 650,000 pre-school children in the 20% most disadvantaged wards. This reach target refers to the number of children who might potentially use health or family support services provided by the individual centre. The Government's long term aspiration is that all children in the 20% most disadvantaged wards will have access to Children's Centre services.