

National Standards for Leaders of **SureStart** Children's Centres

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Every Child Matters

Change For Children

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01 Introduction

Sure Start Children's Centres bring together services for children under 5 and their families in new and radical ways.

They offer children and their families services that integrate health, childcare, education, parent involvement, family support and employment services. Children's Centres that provide more and better integrated services are improving outcomes for children.

Children's Centres work with all the children and families in the community. In order to reach the most vulnerable children, staff take services into children's homes and other community settings used by families. Instead of defining families as hard to reach, Children's Centres are committed to ensuring that their services are accessible to all and especially to the most vulnerable.

The leaders of Children's Centres have a responsibility to ensure that their centre really makes a difference to the individual children and families it serves. How well are those services managed? How well integrated and how effective are they in reducing the gap between the most disadvantaged children and their peers? Is every child and family better off? Are they healthier, more resilient, better able to enjoy new opportunities?

A disposition to learn is a powerful determinant of sustained and long term educational success. Helping parents to nurture and develop this disposition can make a huge difference to their children.

Fathers, mothers and other carers learning alongside their children model the importance and enjoyment of learning. It is this engagement and active involvement with their children that makes such a difference.

Staff working in Children's Centres are from different professional backgrounds. They are pioneering new ways of operating within multi-professional teams. This way of working is complex and challenging. It demands new systems and structures to support models of sub-contracting and commissioning in partnership with agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

What makes Children's Centres so distinct is the collaboration and cooperation of different professional groups and the role of parents in shaping and driving Children's Centre services – as participants in the centre's governance, management or advisory groups and as partners in their children's learning and development.

02 Purposes of the National Standards

- ▶ These National Standards are intended to set out the key areas of responsibility for heads of Children's Centres and to define the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to fulfil them. In particular they address the specific requirements of those leading complex integrated teams.
- ▶ The Standards aim to be both aspirational and inspirational, reflecting the excitement, complexity and challenge of the role of head of centre. They aim to describe the full extent and potential of the role.
- ▶ For the sake of brevity, the Standards use the term 'Children's Centre' to describe a Sure Start Children's Centre and all its associated activities and services. Such services would include outreach and support in the home. Similarly, the word 'parents' denotes mothers, fathers, extended families and carers.
- ▶ The National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre leadership (NPQICL) is a National Qualifications Framework level 7 post-graduate qualification and this is reflected in the level of these Standards. The Standards will be used to assess the leadership capability of NPQICL participants. The NPQICL is designated an equivalent qualification to the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) for headteachers of maintained nursery schools. Headteachers of maintained nursery schools can choose either qualification.
- ▶ These National Standards for Children's Centre leaders are distinct from but complementary to those recently produced for Early Years Professionals (EYPs). Early Years Professional Standards lay down the national expectations for anyone wishing to gain EYP Status and work as an Early Years Professional. It is not assumed or intended that an EYP should lead and manage multi-agency, multi-disciplinary, Children's Centres.
- ▶ The Standards will have a variety of applications but essentially their purpose is to specify what is expected of heads of centres. They will be used to assess the leadership capability of participants completing the NPQICL. They will also be used to inform job descriptions, person specifications and performance management.
- ▶ These Standards use the term 'head of centre' to describe the role of the Children's Centre leader. The Standards apply to all Children's Centre leaders, whether they are called managers, co-ordinators or directors and whether they are directly responsible for one or more centres.

03 The Core Purpose of the Job of Children's Centre Leader

The core purpose of a Children's Centre leader is to ensure that their centre really makes a difference to the children and families it serves. How well are those services managed, how well integrated and how effective are they in reducing the gap between the most disadvantaged children and their peers? Is every child and family better off? Are they safer, healthier, more resilient and better able to enjoy new learning opportunities?

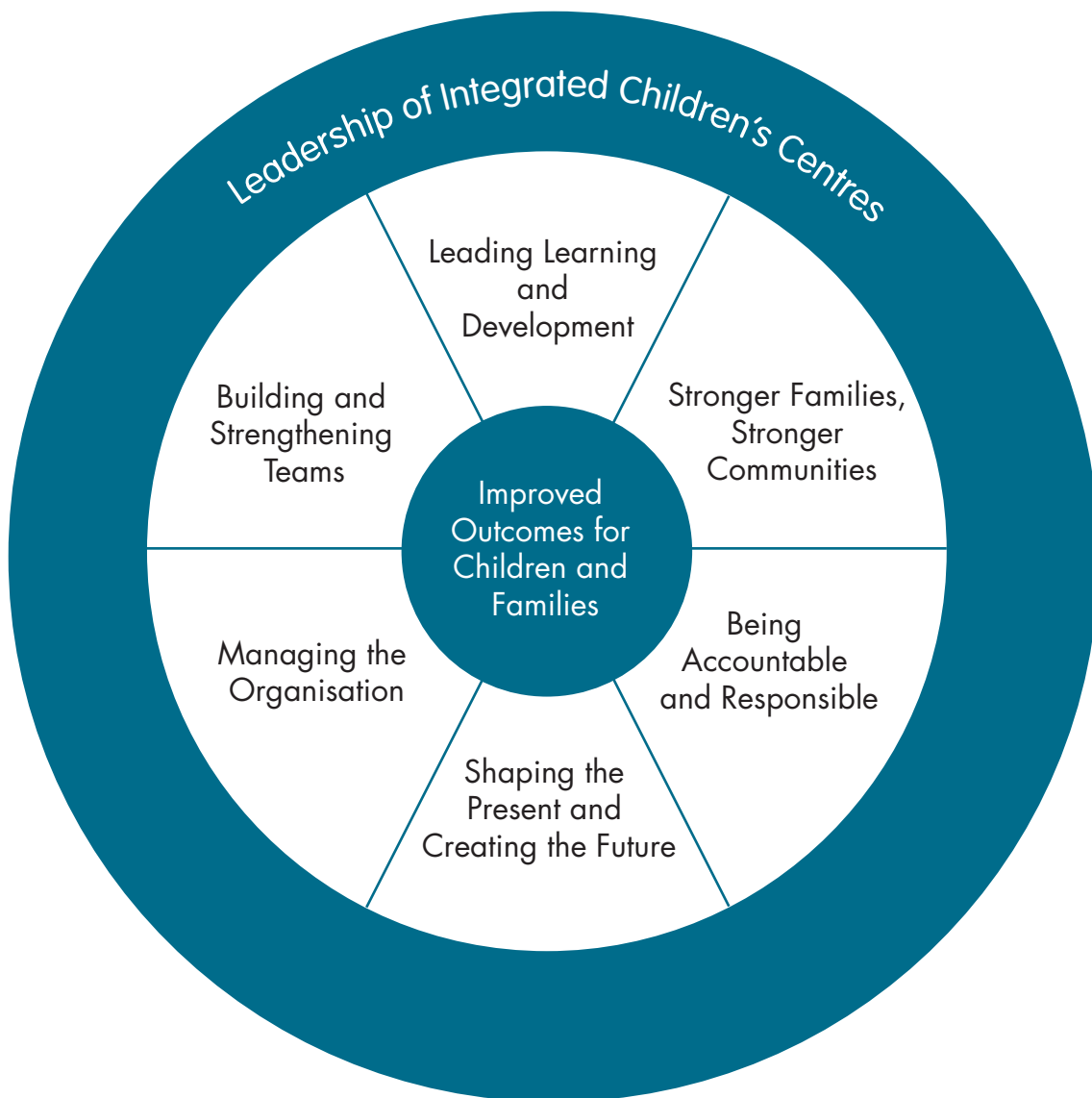
Leaders will make a difference by:

- ▶ Establishing and sustaining an environment of challenge and support where children are safe, can flourish and learn.
- ▶ Providing the vision, direction and leadership vital to the creation of integrated and comprehensive services for children, mothers, fathers and families.
- ▶ Leading the work of the centre to secure its success, its accountability and its continuous improvement. Central to such success is the quality and level of collaboration with other services and the whole of the community.
- ▶ Working with and through others to design and shape flexible, responsive services to meet the changing needs of children and families.
- ▶ Ensuring that all staff understand children's developmental needs within the context of the family and provide appropriate services that respond to those needs.
- ▶ Ensuring that the centre collects and uses all available data to gain a better understanding of the nature and complexity of the local community served by the Children's Centre.
- ▶ Using such knowledge and understanding to inform how services are organised and how to offer differentiated services that are responsive to all groups including fathers, children or parents with disabilities or additional needs, and black and minority ethnic communities.

04 The Key Areas

These leadership Standards are informed by a range of legislation, policy and guidance. Currently these include: 'The Children Act 1989', 'The Children Act 2004', 'The Childcare Act 2006', 'Every Child Matters', 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' and 'Championing Children'.

The Standards are grouped into six key areas. All areas are interdependent and are of equal importance. By achieving strongly in all six key areas of these Standards, leaders will help to ensure they and their Children's Centres are providing the services needed to improve outcomes for children and families.



05 Leading Learning and Development

The head of a Children's Centre has responsibility for the quality of learning, teaching and achievement. The head of a Children's Centre leads a culture that encourages children, parents and staff to become enthusiastic, independent and successful lifelong-learners.

Standards

The head of a Children's Centre must be able to show that they can:

- ▶ Review and evaluate learning, teaching and care practice to promote improvement in outcomes for children and families with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged
- ▶ Identify, promote and encourage effective practice
- ▶ Establish a safe environment in which children can develop and learn
- ▶ Develop and foster a learning culture that enables children, families and staff to become successful, enthusiastic and independent learners
- ▶ Ensure that staff acknowledge the expertise of parents and find ways to share this knowledge and understanding of individual children's learning at home, in order to work together and improve learning opportunities in the centre
- ▶ Help parents overcome barriers such as lack of confidence or poor basic skills and support them to take decisive action to return to study, training and employment
- ▶ Respect diversity and respond with sensitivity to different cultures and beliefs and ensure equality of access to learning opportunities
- ▶ Regularly review their own practice and take responsibility for their own personal and professional development, seeking support where appropriate
- ▶ Create experiences that will inspire children, their families and staff to raise expectations for their own achievement, enjoyment and economic success and make a positive contribution to the community

These are the professional knowledge, qualities and skills that a Children's Centre head needs to have to meet the Standards:

Professional Knowledge

- ▶ Has an understanding of the content, implementation and monitoring of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework for children's development and how this links to subsequent phases of learning and development
- ▶ Understands the principles of what constitutes effective observation, learning, teaching and assessment
- ▶ Understands how to monitor the progress of each child and how to share this information with parents to strengthen the active involvement of parents in their children's learning
- ▶ Understands how to create a learning culture which permeates every element and aspect of the centre
- ▶ Understands how the safe and imaginative use of new technology can support learning
- ▶ Understands how to establish an environment of challenge and support where children can flourish and learn

Professional Qualities and Skills

- ▶ Commits to monitoring and improving achievement and creating an environment that supports the continuing learning and development of the whole centre community
- ▶ Demonstrates personal enthusiasm for and commitment to learning
- ▶ Initiates, supports and participates in research, analysis and debate about effective learning and how to improve achievement
- ▶ Helps parents adopt practices that will promote their children's health and development, increase the level of their engagement in their children's learning and encourage improved nursery and school attendance
- ▶ Identifies and challenges discrimination that obstructs access to and engagement with learning

06 Stronger Families, Stronger Communities

Children's Centres have the potential to transform the way in which families gain access to and can benefit from local services. The head of a Children's Centre must have a comprehensive understanding of their local community and its strengths. Developing the capacity of community organisations and individuals will support sustainable community development.

Standards

The head of a Children's Centre must be able to show that they can:

- ▶ Raise expectations and aspirations so that families and the local community are encouraged to enjoy new opportunities for learning and better health
- ▶ Ensure effective and sustained outreach into the community so that the most disadvantaged families are identified and encouraged to engage with the centre
- ▶ Ensure that parents, staff and collaborating agencies use the common assessment framework to identify children's additional needs and share appropriate information about children's health, welfare, learning and development to promote mutual understanding
- ▶ Lead a whole centre approach to promoting and publishing the range of activities and opportunities available to parents and the local community (using accessible formats)
- ▶ Create imaginative opportunities for ways of including the wider community in the activities of the centre and ensure that parents' views and feedback shape services
- ▶ Demonstrate both an awareness of local opportunities such as local regeneration initiatives and the capacity to make best use of their potential resources
- ▶ Understand the protocols and procedures to be followed when there are concerns about children's safety and welfare, including the ways that information is shared
- ▶ Promote and lead a culture which reflects and respects the diversity of the local community
- ▶ Create and promote positive strategies for challenging all prejudice and dealing with harassment
- ▶ Build on the strengths of the child and the family and develop plans and focused interventions that improve outcomes

These are the professional knowledge, qualities and skills that a Children's Centre head needs to have to meet the standards:

Professional Knowledge

- ▶ Understands the diverse physical and human resources within the local community and can deploy them for the benefit of the centre
- ▶ Understands the opportunities for developing the centre as a space for community activity
- ▶ Understands how to make safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children the business of all staff, parents and carers
- ▶ Understands how the changes in political direction and policy influence the centre and impact on children and families

Professional Qualities and Skills

- ▶ Encourages, mobilises, connects and supports people to take action to make a collective difference to the lives of children and families
- ▶ Builds, maintains and nurtures close reciprocal relationships with parents, partners, local organisations and communities to enhance the quality and range of the centre's services
- ▶ Recognises the importance and mutual benefit of networking, sharing and working with other Children's Centres, schools, health and social care agencies and other partner organisations
- ▶ Negotiates and mediates both with and between individuals and groups to break down barriers and promote better mutual understanding

07 Being Accountable and Responsible

The head of a Children's Centre must be accountable to all those who use the centre's services, those who work within it, those who fund it and those who govern it. They are responsible for the quality of the centre's work, for the centre's staff and for the centre's financial management. The head of a Children's Centre is responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children who use any of the centre's services.

Standards

The head of a Children's Centre must be able to show that they can:

- ▶ Be accountable to the Management/Governing body, parents, carers, staff, children, the local community and the local authority
- ▶ Be responsible for the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainable development of the centre. Central to this is responsibility for the financial management of the centre's current budget and future viability
- ▶ Understand, implement and comply with relevant legislation including discrimination legislation, regulations, statutory guidance and inspection requirements. In particular, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and ensuring the welfare of staff and other service users
- ▶ Develop, implement, monitor and audit all the Children's Centre's policies, procedures and practices to ensure they comply with legislation, regulations and guidance
- ▶ Provide information, advice and support so that the Management/Governing Body can fulfil its responsibilities
- ▶ Seek appropriate support to form an objective review of their own performance

These are the professional knowledge, qualities and skills that a Children's Centre head needs to have to meet the standards:

Professional Knowledge

- ▶ Understands current legislation, regulations and guidance relevant to the operation and responsibilities of the centre, including the local Safeguarding Children Board's safeguarding children procedures
- ▶ Understands the principles and practice of quality assurance, self-review, performance monitoring and management and inspection systems
- ▶ Understands how to involve and engage the local community in the centre and how the centre can collaborate with and contribute to its local communities well-being
- ▶ Understands how to avoid stereotyping, cultural bias and assumptions in all aspects of work with children and their families, staff, partner agencies and the local community
- ▶ Understands what to do if a child is or may be being neglected or abused

Professional Qualities and Skills

- ▶ Secures the trust of governors/management committee, parents, carers, children, staff and partner agencies
- ▶ Deploys information and data from a variety of sources to understand the needs of the community, the strengths and weaknesses of the centre and how children and families have benefited
- ▶ Establishes and maintains responsibility for an agreed framework for the support of centre staff who require professional supervision
- ▶ Assumes responsibility for developing and presenting an accurate, understandable and comprehensive account of the centre's performance to a wide range of audiences
- ▶ Safeguards and promotes the welfare of children attending the centre
- ▶ Ensures staff are trained and competent to implement the local Safeguarding Children Board's safeguarding children procedures
- ▶ Reflects on personal performance and takes account of comments and feedback from others

08 Shaping the Present and Creating the Future

The head of a Children's Centre will work with their Governors/Management Committee and with other partner organisations to develop a shared vision for the centre which inspires, challenges and motivates. The head of a Children's Centre will analyse current community needs, anticipate future needs and plan for further development within the local, regional, national and international context.

Standards

The head of a Children's Centre must be able to show that they can:

- ▶ Work collaboratively to explore, clarify and develop shared values, principles and vision, recognising the diversity and differences within the centre's local community
- ▶ Demonstrate the centre's values, principles and vision in everyday practice
- ▶ Be creative, open to innovation, inspire, challenge and empower others to carry the vision forward
- ▶ Monitor and evaluate services to ensure that they are relevant, responsive to changing needs and can demonstrate sustained and continuous improvement
- ▶ Lead a whole centre approach to continuous organisational self-evaluation
- ▶ Demonstrate imaginative ways of working with other local Children's Centres and extended schools to establish collaborative networks that offer mutual benefits and advancement
- ▶ Anticipate the need for change and lead its implementation
- ▶ Lead a culture of critical reflection and practitioner research, engaging with others to identify, share and promote effective practice that is evidence based
- ▶ Work with the governing body/management committee to develop and implement a strategic plan and accountability systems
- ▶ Identify and promote the development of potential future centre leaders

These are the professional knowledge, qualities and skills that a Children's Centre head needs to have to meet the standards:

Professional Knowledge

- ▶ Knows about relevant local, national and international trends and policies
- ▶ Knows how to plan both in the short and long term taking account of changing legislation, new organisational structures within partner agencies or major changes within the local community
- ▶ Has knowledge, understanding and commitment to a fully inclusive centre that welcomes and includes all children and families ensuring that their cultural, social, faith, ethnic, economic status or special needs are addressed
- ▶ Knows about how to extend services into the home environment to include families who find it difficult to attend the centre
- ▶ Has knowledge and understanding of the Common Assessment Framework and the guidance on safeguarding and promoting children's welfare in Working Together to Safeguard Children
- ▶ Knows about generating income and where to secure a range of funding
- ▶ Knows about new technology and its potential use and impact

Professional Qualities and Skills

- ▶ Develops strategies for introducing and maintaining good communication both within the Children's Centre and with other agencies and the local community
- ▶ Creates and communicates a shared vision in a range of compelling ways
- ▶ Sets challenging targets to improve outcomes for all children and their families with a particular emphasis on the most disadvantaged
- ▶ Advocates for the continuous improvement of services for children and families
- ▶ Promotes the active involvement of parents, the local community and children in the management and organisation of the centre

09 Managing the Organisation

The head of a Children's Centre is responsible for the effective organisation and management of the centre they lead. They must ensure that the centre, its staff and resources are organised to offer a safe, efficient and accessible environment that can be enjoyed and used by the community it serves. Financial management and planning should be informed by the centre's aims and priorities.

Standards

The head of a Children's Centre must be able to show that they can:

- ▶ Create organisational structures that support the effective delivery of services, the deployment of staff and good value for money
- ▶ Lead the creation, review and implementation of centre development plans and policies that comply with legal requirements
- ▶ Ensure that financial management and planning reflect best practice, best value and the centre's aims and priorities
- ▶ Sustain and demonstrate personal motivation and be able to motivate all staff
- ▶ Prioritise, plan and organise within a complex environment where organisational boundaries are shifting and uncertain
- ▶ Devise and refine different models of shared leadership and management
- ▶ Ensure that the policies, procedures and practices for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children are implemented effectively
- ▶ Demonstrate a systematic approach to performance management
- ▶ Use performance management of staff to set targets, improve practice and raise outcomes

These are the professional knowledge, qualities and skills that a Children's Centre head needs to have to meet the standards:

Professional Knowledge

- ▶ Understands the legal, regulatory and statutory guidance frameworks and knows when and how to seek expert advice and guidance
- ▶ Understands the components of creating a safe environment for children and families, including the safe recruitment and vetting of staff and volunteers in the centre
- ▶ Understands the principles and practice of self-evaluation and performance management
- ▶ Understands financial planning, budget and project management
- ▶ Understands supervision and support for staff, including mentoring and coaching
- ▶ Understands the creation of policies through consultation and review
- ▶ Knows how to ensure that all staff understand their roles and responsibilities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children

Professional Qualities and Skills

- ▶ Manages change in a positive way and adapts quickly and flexibly to a constantly changing environment
- ▶ Creates and maintains a safe environment for children, families and staff
- ▶ Evaluates complex situations, clarifies priorities and sets clear and achievable objectives
- ▶ Values the contributions and views of others and consults widely
- ▶ Delegates and collaborates to improve the centre's organisational capacity
- ▶ Possesses political astuteness and intellectual flexibility
- ▶ Displays resilience and tenacity in the face of difficulties and challenge
- ▶ Interrogates financial information and data effectively

10 Building and Strengthening Teams

The head of a Children's Centre will work both with and through others. They will forge strong working relationships with children, families, centre staff, partner agencies and the local community. They will build on current good practice and identify new and creative ways for staff from different disciplines to work together to improve the quality of all the Children's Centre's services.

Standards

The head of a Children's Centre must be able to show that they can:

- ▶ Develop, inspire and motivate multi-disciplinary teams, so that their individual and collective strengths are deployed imaginatively and effectively
- ▶ Foster a climate of mutual trust and respect that facilitates effective partnership, communication, collaboration and integrated working practices within and beyond the centre
- ▶ Recognise, develop and promote leadership qualities in others, sharing responsibility and authority in imaginative ways
- ▶ Maintain, affirm and improve team effectiveness
- ▶ Establish effective professional development opportunities to promote successful team working
- ▶ Be able to resolve conflict and make difficult or unpopular decisions
- ▶ Manage a complex set of relationships with other agencies and encourage constructive and critical debate
- ▶ Enable staff to pioneer different ways of working together to improve outcomes for children and families
- ▶ Use performance management and professional development systems to set objectives, improve practice and raise outcomes

These are the professional knowledge, qualities and skills that a Children's Centre head needs to have to meet the standards:

Professional Knowledge

- ▶ Understands how to promote individual and team development
- ▶ Understands the relationship between continuous professional development and sustained centre improvement
- ▶ Understands how to develop good interpersonal relationships and the importance of facilitating co-operative group dynamics
- ▶ Understands the importance of continuous training and staff development and promotes training programmes in a way that conforms to the learning needs of all those involved

Professional Qualities and Skills

- ▶ Secures the trust, support and respect of staff
- ▶ Fosters an open, inclusive and safe culture
- ▶ Collaborates and negotiates within and beyond the centre
- ▶ Promotes a collegial approach to decisions but has the confidence to be decisive when necessary
- ▶ Recognises and celebrates good practice and can also challenge, influence and motivate others to improve
- ▶ Mediates and manages conflict
- ▶ Seeks and accepts support and advice from others

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