

Inspection report for Alwoodley Children's Centre

Local authority	Leeds
Inspection number	383378
Inspection dates	29 February - 1 March 2012
Reporting inspector	Alison Veall HMI

Centre leader	Sadie Corbett
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Allerton Church of England Primary School URN 135210
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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.

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

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, parents, partner agencies and local authority senior managers.

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

Information about the centre

Alwoodley Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre. It was designated in February 2008. Full delivery of services commenced December 2009. The centre is attached to Allerton Church of England Primary school site and is integral to the main school building. Within the centre there are three multi-functional community rooms with small kitchen facilities and access into an outdoor area which comprises of both a hard surface and a grassed area. There are also two office spaces, with hot desk facilities, and toilets with an accessible cubicle and baby changing facility.

The children's centre area is economically diverse. Parts of it are listed as being in the 20% most deprived areas and comprise of local authority and privately rented accommodation whilst others are listed in the 70-90% and comprise of privately owned accommodation. As a result of the economically diverse nature of Alwoodley, the percentages of children under five years living in households dependent on workless benefits range from 10-36%.

The strategic management and governance of the centre is the responsibility of the Alwoodley Extended Service Cluster leadership group who is commissioned by Leeds City Council to provide the children's centre service. Support and guidance is provided by the advisory board group which consists of the extended services cluster manager, the head teacher from the host school, a parent governor, representatives from partner agencies the children's centre manager and parents.

The majority of families are of White British heritage with 33% from minority ethnic groups, including Indian, Pakistani and Jewish communities. There is also a small number of asylum seeking families within the centre's reach area. Children enter childcare and early years education with a varying range of experiences and skills. Some are typical of those usually expected for their age and others are below.

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

The dedication of a small but committed staff team who are led by a well organised, enthusiastic manager has resulted in a significant improvement in the lives of families within the centre's reach area. Evidence from a range of data including case studies identifies that for a large majority outcomes are good and improving.

The outstanding care, guidance and support are empowering families to deal with a range of challenging circumstances in an effective and productive way. A vast array of easily accessible information gives advice for example, on smoking cessation, breastfeeding, sexual health and services and activities within the wider community. Parents, and particularly those that are most vulnerable, comment positively about the difference the centre has made to them and their lives. One parent said, 'All staff are very approachable' while others commented: 'The centre is fantastic, it has helped me so much, I know I can just pop in'. 'Sometimes you don't like what they say they tell you it as it is. I trust them so much'. These are typical of the comments shared with the inspectors.

Staff place an exceedingly high focus on keeping children and their families safe and are diligent in ensuring all safeguarding procedures are followed. They also use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) effectively to support families. Strong interagency working, particularly with colleagues in social care and cohesive systems enable these families to be identified quickly and given high levels of support.

Participation rates are increasing across the full range of the centre's activities. In just over two years it has secured regular engagement of 66.5% from families living in its lowest super output areas and over 38% engagement from families living in significantly higher super output areas. Universal and targeted services ensure there are activities available for all within its reach area. The centre has gained a worthy reputation across its area because of the quality of teamwork amongst staff, and the effective partnerships it has established in order to secure vital services for its families.

The centre provides a wide range of play and learning opportunities for children. It has worked successfully with its linked school, some childminders and a few childcare providers and schools within the area to ensure children are supported when they move from one provision to another. However, this practice is not established with all providers within the centre's reach area. There are many opportunities for parents to develop confidence, skills and knowledge. The centre has worked successfully with Jobcentre Plus, local voluntary training agencies and retail companies within the area. As a result, a few adults move into employment. However, too few centre users take part in volunteering or buddying. As a consequence they are not always able to develop and practise skills which would better prepare them for the world of work.

Senior management and the advisory board make good use of the data they collect to plan and deliver a wide range of services that are targeted effectively. However, evidence of the local authority's expectations through its target setting, annual conversation and support and challenge meetings is generally limited to the monitoring of local authority priorities. As a consequence, it is not fully monitoring the impact of the centre in meeting its own priorities. Discussions with representatives from the local authority show that they are aware of this and a review is taking place. Despite the areas for improvement, the centre has gone from strength to strength and in a short space of time there is a strong track record of progress. This is evidence of a good capacity for further improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should enhance its target setting so that the centre's progress can be monitored and measured more effectively through the annual conversation and support and challenge meetings.
- Further enable centre users to learn and practise work based skills by developing access to volunteering or buddying opportunities.

- Improve children's transition into early education and childcare by widening contact with childcare providers and schools within the centres' reach area.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The emotional health and well-being of the most vulnerable families are improving well as a result of the delivery of a range of universal and targeted services. These are coherently planned and take account of economic and cultural needs. Poor mental health affects a growing number of adults, but for some the weekly counselling service funded jointly by the children's centre and the extended services cluster has provided an opportunity for them to deal with issues in a reflective and supportive environment. In addition the self-confidence and self-esteem of children and adults is improved as staff work conscientiously by, for example, never missing the opportunity to celebrate a success or recognise progress. As one parent said 'The staff help me to get through difficult times and always tell me how far I have come, this makes me feel better about myself'. The number of mothers who initiate and sustain breastfeeding has seen a small decline over the last year but within the area it is still 10% above the local authority average. The take up of health checks and immunisation rates are good. Parents receive advice on weaning, healthy eating and take an active part in the 'Cook 4 Life' parenting programme with a large majority of participants stating they have changed how they feed their children as a result of the course. As a consequence, children's obesity levels in Reception Year of 8% are lower than local authority and national levels.

Parents report that they feel safe and consider their children to be safe whilst attending the centre. Parents' understanding of their responsibility to ensure their children are safe is improving through participation on parenting programmes and through the discussions with centre staff as they undertake safety assessment within the home. This, along with the advice and guidance from numerous agencies, including Leeds fire service, builds users' confidence and knowledge. Evidence from case studies demonstrates that they act appropriately when faced with emergency situations. The centre makes an outstanding contribution to the protection of vulnerable families and children and those subject to child protection plans. The needs of the child are paramount to all work that is undertaken. The recording of contact made with families is of an excellent quality. The CAF is used very effectively within the centre. This ensures that families are given the support and help that they need to prevent situations from reaching crisis point. Families who may be experiencing domestic violence are supported well and they receive timely advice on who to access for support and intervention.

Parents and children play, have fun and learn together during a wide range of activities. In addition, there is a wide range of good quality information and advice to parents which is helping them to understand how they can help their children. All adult learning is supported by making crèche facilities available. Adults are developing confidence and the skills required to embark on further education and employment as a result of the many learning opportunities. However, the centre does not provide opportunities for adults to take part in volunteering or buddying. There is a very effective relationship with the host primary school.

As a result, from their starting points children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Within the reach area 72% of children are achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The gap between the outcomes for the children most at risk of not achieving and others is narrowing year on year and is now at 14%, which is 6% below the local authority average.

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	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
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

The centre provides excellent care, guidance and support. The small team work relentlessly to make contact with all families. Their commitment to outreach work and leafleting has resulted in a significant increase in the number of families who access the centre. Lone parents, teenage mothers, fathers and families who have disabled young children are provided with good quality services and excellent information based on detailed assessment of need. The ongoing support, engagement of outside agencies, where appropriate, and advice have ensured children are exceptionally well safeguarded, and the families enabled to get the support they need. This includes highly personalised support for those in violent relationships. The mental health, confidence and self-esteem of adults are well promoted.

The opportunities for families to access a range of play and learning opportunities are good. There is a good take-up of activities such as, the 'Bumps and Babes', 'Music Bugs', 'Walkers and Talkers' and 'Learning through Play'. Comments from one parent evidence how valuable participants view these activities. 'They helped me to play with my children, we have a great time', another parent said: 'The staff and other parents share ideas they really help you to understand the benefits of play'. Childminders meet at the centre each week so they too become an effective layer of support for families and their children. The centre has implemented systems for supporting children as they move from the centre to school or other childcare. However, all children do not benefit from this practice as it is not yet established with all providers in the reach area. Families whose first language is not English

make good use of language classes and are pleased that their children's communication skills are developing very well as they join in activities with other children.

Jobcentre Plus and Childcare Information Service representatives regularly attend the centre and in partnership with the centre and a voluntary agency they are providing a range of activities and courses. Currently, the 'Want to Work' course is ongoing and is proving popular with participants. In planning this course the centre manager analysed the figures for job seeker benefit claims, which has resulted in it being targeted to the areas most in need.

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

An enthusiastic, visionary and energetic manager leads a knowledgeable staff team who are committed to improving the lives of families within its reach area. Aspirations for all families, including those whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable, are high. The centre manager is creative in the manner in which budgets are managed. In order to improve capacity in family outreach work and to spread the children's centre ethos and practice within children's social care agencies she actively engages with social work students. A strong commitment to partnership working is another factor in the key to this centre's success. They recognise the opportunities and strengths of a wide range of agencies to whom they signpost very effectively. The centre and their partners, particularly those involved in the extended services cluster share a common purpose in their pursuit to deliver a holistic service to families. Representatives from all partner agencies but particularly children's social care and health are unanimous in their praise. They can clearly evidence through case studies the impact the centre has on improving the lives of families.

A committed management team set themselves and the staff challenging targets. These are monitored effectively by the advisory board, the extended services cluster management, confident parents and the local authority. Local authority representatives are aware of the need to more clearly evidence their expectations so that the children's centre management can continue to build on the already good levels of service whilst ensuring their aims are fully consistent with those of the local authority's service plan. Supervision arrangements are good and family outreach workers and social work students talk positively about the support and guidance they receive.

The excellent safeguarding arrangements stem from a rigorous approach which is understood well and practiced by all staff. The importance of early intervention is embedded and centre staff play an important role in any multi-agency work. Weekly safeguarding meetings with the host school and a range of partners very effectively ensure that appropriate support is identified which prevents a number of cases moving into the child protection arena. It also allows for specific and personalised support to families where cases are being de-escalated and moving from child protection and into family support. Any necessary paperwork in relation to safeguarding is maintained and organised meticulously. Parents are very well informed of the centre's policy on protecting children and sharing information with relevant agencies. Risk assessments are detailed and are conducted for all activities within and beyond the centre. Safe recruitment practices are robust and follow Leeds Local Children's Safeguarding Board procedures. Evidence of Criminal Records Bureau checks are held in a single central file. Discussions with parents evidence that open and honest messages about safeguarding are given to them and they trust centre staff implicitly.

The views of users are routinely gathered through evaluations, the advisory board, the parent's discussion group and the suggestions box. Families confidently challenge the centre when they are unhappy about an element of service provision. In addition, comparisons between service provision and the progress families are making are undertaken by the centre manager. These comparisons enable the centre manager to monitor effectively the cost of services matched to output and then to take relevant action.

The growth in the number of families who consistently use the centre's services from a broad range of backgrounds, but particularly its target groups evidence the strong commitment this centre makes to inclusion. Effective outreach work is improving contact with a number of families from its minority ethnic communities. Families are signposted to interpreting services when needed and the 'Wise Owls' library within the centre provides a range of dual language books for use with young children. Fathers are regular attendees along with parents of disabled children and disabled parents as they consistently access a range of universal and targeted services.

As a result of the centre's work, outcomes for the large majority of families within the area are good and rapidly improving and Alwoodley Children's Centre offers good value for money.

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 secures 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

The lead inspector liaised with the lead inspector of the Allerton Church of England Primary School (URN 135210) inspection to share evidence relating to leadership and management and the Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the school.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Alwoodley Children's Centre on 29 February and 01 March 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you to those who came to speak with us. It was clear to see that the children's centre is a valuable part of your community' and it plays a vital role in supporting you and your families. We found it a very welcoming place to be. The staff put their hearts into the work of the centre and, supported by the strong leadership of the centre manager, they provide you with a range of high quality services that are tailored to meet your individual needs. You told inspectors how much you trust and respect the staff and how helpful they were. 'The centre is fantastic it has helped me so much, I know I can just pop in' and 'Sometimes you don't like what they say, they tell you it as it is but I like their honesty, it is really helpful'. These are typical of some of the comments made by you about the centre and its staff which demonstrate how valuable you consider it to be. We were impressed by the high numbers of you who visit the centre and take part in a wide range of activities on a regular basis. Health professionals, education, social care and community and voluntary agencies work really well together to make things better for you and to help you to improve your lives.

The centre is a calm and friendly place where staff deliver outstanding care, guidance and support especially when your circumstances are challenging. The centre provides a great deal of information particularly around the health and well-being of you and your family. We were impressed by the information about local services and the guidance provided to help you to help your children to play and learn. We could see how in times of crisis the centre offers you excellent support and guides you to make decisions which may be the right ones but are sometimes very difficult to make.

The manner in which you challenge the centre either through your activity evaluations, your comments to the centre staff, your contributions to the 'parents' discussion group' and your comments to the advisory board demonstrates your growing confidence. Your determination to ensure that the provision meets your families' needs and is as good as it can be is clearly evident. We were able to see that wherever possible the centre changes its priorities as your needs change to ensure that the services delivered are still the most appropriate ones for you. As a result of this, a large majority of you say you are satisfied with the services you receive and are glad that you came to the centre.

The centre places a high priority on encouraging you and your children to learn new skills and this is helping you all to develop in confidence. Children clearly enjoy the activities in the 'Learning through Play' 'Bumps to Babes' and 'Walkers and Talkers' groups. They are making good progress in their learning and are better prepared for the next stage in their learning than those who do not come to the centre. We heard how some of you and your children are supported as they make the transition from centre activities to other childcare and early education provision. In order to ensure that all children and parents are supported we have asked the centre to widen its contact and to set up arrangements with more of these providers. In addition to enhancing children's development, we saw that the centre is helping you to improve your skills and knowledge by supporting your attendance at a range of training and development events. We think the centre could do more by enabling you to develop work based skills so we have asked them to develop volunteering opportunities.

The local authority is responsible for setting the centre targets and monitoring the effectiveness of its work. We have asked them to improve this so that they can more easily measure the impact the centre is having on the lives of you and your families.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honest and open discussions helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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