

Inspection report for Westhoughton Children's Centre

Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	366312
Inspection dates	2-3 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Janet Stacey HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Wendy Carson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Washacre Primary School
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.

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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, members of the senior leadership team, and members of the advisory board, users, and representatives from health services and the local college. They also met with two local authority officers linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work, looked at sessions in operation in the children's centre, and accompanied staff on outreach visits. They also looked at a range of documentation including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Westhoughton Children's Centre is co-located in Washacre Primary School which is based on the Washacre Estate. The centre was designated as a phase 2 centre in 2008. The centre became fully operational in January 2009 and provides health and family support services and employment advice. It is run, on behalf of the local authority, by a head of centre who has responsibility for two other centres in the district. Westhoughton is generally an area of social and economic advantage with few workless households or families on benefits. However, the Washacre Estate on which the centre is based and the nearby Pungle Estate are ranked amongst the 30% most deprived areas in the country. Social issues affecting these areas are a high number of lone parents and families on workless benefits. Whilst the remaining area may be seen as more affluent, emerging social issues are being reported, such as alcohol misuse, prescription drug dependency, domestic violence and isolation. All staff, apart from the information assistant and the centre assistant are based at Alexandra Children's Centre. The midwifery team are based in the centre. Health visitors are based at Westhoughton Health Centre. Social services are based at Washacre Family Centre.

There is low ethnic diversity in the area; most families are White British. The reach area is characterised by social and private housing. The centre takes referrals from

and supports families with children in four local schools. The centre does not provide day care but does signpost families to the Nursery in Washacre School and private childcare providers in the reach area. Children in the reach area enter childcare and early education with a varied range of knowledge and skills, with some children entering Nursery with similar or better skills than those typically expected and some entering Nursery with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age.

Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority in conjunction with an advisory board with representation from centre staff, housing, local college, health partners, local authority, the local primary school and partners involved in delivering services.

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 users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The centre makes a satisfactory contribution to improving outcomes for children, families and other users of its services. Most of the partnerships in the area are strong, such as those with health and social services. These staff work closely with the centre staff to improve the health and well-being of most of the families in the immediate reach area and families in the extended reach areas. The Bolton @ Home team is a real asset. They are proving to be a vital link to the centre in helping to identify families on the Washacre estate who are difficult to reach. Information and activities provided help some parents develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children free from harm. However, the quality and variety of the centre's services are variable, as is the level of involvement in these services. As a consequence, provision and outcomes for users are satisfactory.

The centre is a very welcoming environment. There is a good mix of consultation and training rooms and a children's library situated within the centre. The resources are of very good quality, particularly in the children's room. However, the majority of these services are used mainly by families in the more affluent areas. Families from the less advantaged areas do use the centre to visit the midwives but say they are

reluctant to access further services at the centre due to these sessions being led and attended by a 'bonded group of users'. Furthermore, even though the centre is co-located with the school, many parents of children starting in the Nursery have not used its facilities. Whilst a member of centre staff serves on the school's governing body and the Early Years Foundation Stage team leader has joined the advisory board, the potential to help children develop readiness for school and to raise their attainment on entry has yet to be fully explored between both partners.

High priority is given to safeguarding in the centre. All staff are appropriately vetted and recruitment procedures are robust. The head of centre has started to identify the barriers to help improve users' life chances and to ensure all families are safeguarded and has begun to implement systems to address this. For example, she has identified several satellite sites that will enable the centre to take training and support out to those families who are reluctant to use the centre.

The centre has only just been supplied with centre-specific data from the local authority and whilst there is some collection of local information and users' evaluations of activities it is not yet systematic or comprehensive. Jobcentre Plus, which is a key partner, is rarely visible in the centre and provides hardly any feedback as to whether adults are taking up employment or moving off benefits. Nevertheless, there is a clear understanding amongst the leadership and the staff of the centre's strengths and areas which require improvement. Appropriate priorities are included in the centre's development plan and systems are being put in place to secure more effective monitoring and evaluation of the service provided. As a result, the centre demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve.

The centre works closely with social and health services to protect children who may be at risk of harm. However, recent staff reductions have resulted in the centre reducing the range of activities it offers. Staff are struggling to meet demand and they have reached a stage where they are generally reacting in terms of crisis support. As a result some families are not always known to the centre and those that are known are not receiving the sufficient range of advice, support and training they may need to help them improve their family's life chances.

The governing body and relatively new advisory board fully support the centre. They know the key strengths and weaknesses of the reach area and are starting to challenge the leaders and the partners to tackle some of the key issues affecting the area and centre. The parent's forum gives users a voice in the centre. However, as yet parents are not represented on the advisory board therefore the views of some users are not heard at strategic level.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that a greater proportion of harder to reach groups across the reach area access the services on offer by:
 - improving the support required at the centre by key partners, such as

- Jobcentre Plus working closely with the local authority, in relation to the levels of funding, to ensure the centre is able to meet the high demands placed on it.
- Develop stronger partnerships with Washacre Primary School to look at ways of improving children's attainment when they join the nursery.
- Ensure that the user's voice from across the reach area is heard at a strategic level.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Outcomes for parents and families are satisfactory and improving in some areas. In the past the centre had provided a good range of activities which were developed well in partnership with other agencies and professionals. For example, the promotion of healthy lifestyles has been well supported through cookery sessions such as 'Big Cook' and 'Little Cook' where users realised the importance of portion control and the different food values. However, activities to build on this knowledge have ceased due to lack of staff availability to run the courses. Parents are still able to access some activities, particularly to promote their understanding of early communication such as 'Baby Babble' and 'Toddler Talk' but these activities are attended primarily by parents from the more affluent areas. Whilst these activities may well be beneficial to them and their children in helping to understand the basics of language, the Early Years Foundation Stage profile outcomes show that there is a decline, particularly in communication language and literacy in the Washacre area. The lack of attendance at these activities by families in Washacre, and the fact that activities to promote knowledge across all outcomes, including play and development, have ceased means that parents, particularly those from the less advantaged areas, have fewer opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills to help improve their own and their child's life chances.

Parents, particularly those from the more affluent areas, report how much they appreciate the centre and how it has helped them to deal with many social issues others may perceive do not affect them and their families, particularly issues such as isolation. 'I'd be lost without this centre, it's been a lifeline because I have always worked and I didn't know anyone when I had my baby' and 'it's kept me sane, everyone I know I know from the support group' were just some of the comments that typified the view of this group.

The majority of children are within the expected weight range for their age. There are strong links with the local health centre and breastfeeding support is starting to show some improvement in terms of the number of mother's breastfeeding from birth. A parent commented 'the support from the breastfeeding group has been really good. You realise that others are struggling as well, coming here I can just ask someone for advice'. However, the number of mothers that sustain breastfeeding

after six to eight weeks remains relatively low. A simple but very effective measure to improve dental hygiene has been the donation of dental hygiene packs by the health visitors at the six month and two year assessments to all families in the reach area, this has made a contribution to the falling incidence of tooth decay.

All users said they felt safe in the centre and secure with the community and family outreach staff. They report how much they appreciate the warm welcome they always receive from the information assistant, who is extremely vigilant in ensuring that no-one passes through into the centre until they have signed in. Parents also value the security of the 'Pram Shed' knowing that their equipment is safe while they are attending sessions in the centre.

Parents and children are well-informed on the benefits of taking regular exercise as an important part of leading a healthy lifestyle. They understand by taking part in the weekly pram push and swimming with their children at the toddler swim at Westhoughton Leisure Centre that exercise not only makes them physically fitter but also improves their mental health and general sense of well-being. Children attending the centre have access to the well-equipped Early Years Foundation Stage unit outdoor provision throughout the day regardless of the weather.

The centre has listened to the needs of local people and had pleasure in donating play equipment to the new 'Paper Tots' playgroup on the Pungle Estate. The parents' forum gives users a voice. Membership is generally good but representation does not reflect the whole reach area. As a result, some voices are not heard at a local or strategic level.

The 'Family Law Advice Scheme' which has been established by a local parent, offers a free mediation service by local solicitors. The scheme is well attended and offers practical advice for parents who are divorcing or separating on how to make it easier for the children. Some users are making a positive contribution to the community because they are taking part in a range of volunteering opportunities at the centre. The centre has some success in helping adults gain formal qualifications and has supported some volunteers in the community to gain funding to run their own activities. For example, a parent trained with the 'Get Active Team' to become a walk leader and a parent runs the 'Baby Babble' and 'Toddler Talk' groups. Westhoughton College has offered taster sessions in the centre, such as level 1 and 2 in hair and beauty, but has not provided the centre with data as to how successful these sessions have been.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
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 users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre provides effective assessment of needs once a family is known to them. However, they do not identify the full range of families that could benefit from the provision. The Bolton @ Home team is well respected in the area and is in the process of 'door knocking' every home on the Washacre Estate to inform families about the benefits the centre can offer them. The team are also working closely with the head of centre to help identify all families with young children in Washacre that the centre is not reaching.

Case study evidence indicates that families receive well-integrated and sensitive support in times of crisis. Well-established partnerships with Homestart have supported families through difficult times and enabled them to move forward with their lives. A comment from one parent following the help she received from the family support worker was 'when my baby was born I was dependant on drugs, before I had a family worker to help me I had no idea what I had to do to be a mum'. Partnership working with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and Bolton @ Home helps parents, in particular new mums, to understand how home safety equipment plays an important part in keeping their inquisitive children safe.

A dedicated home visiting education specialist helps with the early identification of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Support for parents and carers is good and means that children quickly get the provision they need. The centre has forged good links with the 'Children's Opportunity Group' (COG) to provide a stepping stone between home and nursery for children with a special educational need and/or disability. This gives the child the opportunity to play and learn alongside other children.

The centre has developed good relationships with local childminders who have attended training courses in the centre. Family support workers have helped many families receive benefits that they were not aware of and give them advice on how to manage their family finances.

The local primary schools' Ofsted reports show that children are starting school with varied levels of skills and abilities some of which, particularly at Washacre, are below national expectations. This aspect has rightly been identified by the centre leaders and the advisory board as an area where they can be instrumental in helping to raise standards and they have recognised the need to forge stronger partnerships with the

school in which the centre is based.

The centre has delivered courses to help to build bonds between parents and their children and learn about the impact of their actions on their children's lives. The centre now runs 'Friends and Family' which is a shorter course to help sustain interest. To ensure it is targeted at the right families places are now offered on a referral only basis.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leadership and management within the centre are secure and there is a clear focus held by managers, the local authority and the advisory board on improvement. Members of the centre's team work well together and management performance targets give clear direction and expectations within roles. Discussions with a wide range of people confirm the head of centre is highly respected by professionals and parents. A typical comment from one of the partners was 'she is very accommodating she will help wherever she can. We have very good relationships with this centre'.

The priority placed on continuous professional development is evident by the arrangements put in place for all staff to undertake regular training to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to deal with the changing social factors affecting the reach area. The centre's development plan suitably identifies local and area-wide priorities in order to improve the provision and outcomes for its uses, although it does not reflect the views of its users.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily and this is demonstrated through the clear policies and procedures which inform the centre's practice. The sensitive work and support for children and families with complex needs is one of the centre's key strengths. The centre's comprehensive policies and procedures are well embedded and applied routinely. Safeguarding arrangements are good and comply with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board requirements. Clear procedures are in place for reporting child protection issues and are fully understood and followed by all staff and key partners.

Partnership working with most partners is good. The centre is committed to the

concept of integrated service provision, building the team around the child. The centre hosts a bi-monthly, multi-agency planning and information meeting, where information and data from a range of agencies is shared and where service delivery is planned. However, whilst most key partners are fully committed to an integrated approach, the lack of meaningful support from Jobcentre Plus significantly impacts on the centre's ability to target support where it is most needed.

The head of centre shares plans, progress and financial information with the advisory board at quarterly meetings. These meetings provide helpful updates on centre activity and opportunities for key partners to discuss current issues, plan future developments and ensure the centre is offering value for money. However users are not board members; as a consequence, they are insufficiently engaged at a strategic level to influence the centre's work.

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	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

An inspection of Washacre 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).

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected Westhoughton Children's Centre on 2-3 February 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall with some good features.

Thank you to those of you who took the time to talk with us about the centre. It was helpful to get your points of view on how the centre helps and offers support. Those of you who use the centre confirmed that you enjoy good relationships with the staff and this helps you to feel completely safe when seeking advice and guidance or to share your concerns. It was really encouraging to hear that many of you feel less isolated in the community and have been able to socialise more by attending courses at the centre. However, we were also told that some of you do not use the facilities due to most sessions being attended by a 'close knit' group of users. We know the centre is aware that some of you feel this way and, whilst ideally they would like you all to use the activities they have to offer at the site, they are starting to look at venues outside of the centre area to ensure that all of you are able to access the activities and courses the staff have to offer.

The activities we visited were of good quality. You remarked that taking part in them has helped you to learn about the importance of finding new ways of communicating with your children and understanding their behaviour. You also told us how the centre helped you to make new friends and removed feelings of isolation. The children themselves hugely enjoyed their sessions and we were impressed by your willingness to join in, particularly during the 'Boogie Babies' session.

The managers know the community well and do their best to ensure that you are offered services that meet everyone's needs. They work well with other agencies, such as Bolton @ Home, health and social services and the local college. However, we found that Jobcentre Plus are not doing as much as they can to help some of you find work. We have also asked the centre staff and the headteacher at Washacre School to look at ways they can work together to help children in the Washacre area improve their skills, particularly in communication, language and literacy when they enter school. The leaders know they are not meeting and supporting as many of you as they would like to. We have asked them to look at how they can help the centre

overcome these barriers so that they are in a better position to help all of you and your children succeed in today's society.

The advisory board are involved in the management of the centre, but we feel that it could do better and make sure that more parents' views are included in centre decisions. We know the centre is keen for you to get more involved and we hope some of you take up this opportunity.

Thank you again for your help

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