

Inspection report for TEN4 Willow Tree Children's Centre

Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	362597
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Susan Smith HMI

Centre governance	The Guinness Trust
Centre leader	Suzanne Page
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Willow Tree Day Nursery Limited URN 650008

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.

An inspection of the registered childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. 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 an additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, representatives from professional partnerships and the local authority, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Willow Tree Children's Centre was designated in March 2006. It reached full core offer in March 2009 and is a phase one children's centre. Childcare is provided through Willow Tree Nursery which is privately owned and has been in operation for over 20 years. Additional funding via Essex County Council in 2006 supported the nursery to extend their provision and include a number of rooms for the use of the children's centre.

The centre is governed by the Guinness Trust on behalf of the local authority. The centre manager is the area manager for three children's centres in the Tendring district. The centre works in cooperation with all local centres to provide services that complement each other and to share resources and staff. Surrounding the centre venue there has been built, in recent years, a number of social housing developments. The Willow Tree reach area also includes the small village populations of Holland on Sea, Weeley and Little Clacton. Many of these villages are situated in rural areas.

The centre serves a community that is mainly of White British heritage and experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage. The area is made up of mixed housing where 23% of households with dependent children have no adults

working. Most children enter early education and care with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age.

Linked sites used for the delivery of services in the Willow Tree Children's Centre area include Weeley Village Hall and Cann Hall Primary.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Willow Tree Children's Centre makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for users through the effective support it provides families. This is because both staff and managers show high levels of commitment to improving the lives of users. They work well as a team and with outside agencies in order to provide good quality, cohesive services.

Users experience outstanding care, guidance and support. High-quality outreach work and effective one-to-one support, often in families' homes, are making a positive contribution to breaking down barriers. This is particularly the case for families who are hesitant to use the centre and who may be harder to engage. Case study evidence indicates that families have received well-integrated and sensitive support in times of crisis. Families benefit from a good range of services which promote well their health and their family's well-being.

The centre collects a large amount of data from a number of sources such as health services and the local authority. It also gathers data about the attendance at groups, events and activities offered by the centre. This information is increasingly being used to good effect to target its services to those most in need of them. Centre leaders are constantly adapting provision and seeking to improve the centre's practice. The recent introduction of a comprehensive performance management system is enabling centre staff to evaluate the impact of their work. However, this is at an early stage and currently they are unable to evaluate the longer-term impact of the centre on improving outcomes for children and adults, including those from vulnerable groups. The centre is totally committed to safeguarding users of the

service and its staff. Robust systems are in place to protect everyone that comes into contact with the centre.

The centre effectively meets its statutory responsibilities for the promotion of equality and diversity. Staff are aware that fathers need to be more engaged in the centre. They are currently working with other centres in the area to provide a range of activities, such as football on Saturdays. The aim being to encourage fathers and male carers to get more involved, not only within the work of the centre but also to develop and build bonds with their children.

Local authority data show the percentage of five-year-olds achieving the early learning goals in the reach area has improved year on year but is still below the average for Essex. The local authority provides limited data to the centre with regard to the Early Years Foundation Stage profile results. A detailed breakdown into the six areas of learning is currently not available and the results are only compared to the Essex average and not the national average. This hampers the centre's ability to identify if there are any particular areas of learning that the children are not performing well in and their ability to look at ways of enhancing their service to improve children's outcomes in the particular area.

Parents contribute much to what the centre offers and to the impact of its work. They readily share ideas about how activities should be developed, either as individuals or through the Parents' Voice forum, even expressing their disapproval where they feel it is warranted. For some, these opportunities have been particularly empowering.

Morale is exceptionally high among all staff and their views, like those of centre users and service providers, are highly valued. Action planning is effective. Given the good outcomes and the progress it has made to date, the centre has good capacity to build on its good provision and further improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Review and revise systems to evaluate the long term impact of the provision on improving outcomes for children and adults.
- The Local Authority to provide data on the Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores with regard to the six area's of learning and the national average scores.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre offers a good range of child and family services which effectively promote children's, parents' and carers' emotional well-being, physical health and understanding of how to adopt healthy lifestyles. Parental surveys and discussions with users show that satisfaction levels are very high and that parents benefit well

from the range of services on offer. Staff provide strong role models that successfully support children's positive behaviour and a culture of respect is evident throughout the centre. The practical support that the centre offers in relation to everything from form-filling to managing crisis points is viewed as a lifeline by many.

A range of information leaflets and reference books are easily available to parents and cover a variety of topics such as healthy eating and child development. These help parents and carers meet the physical, emotional and nutritional needs of their children.

Health visitors effectively signpost every new mother to the services available to her and her family through the centre. They hold weekly weighing sessions and monthly developmental check clinics which support mothers with young babies and encourage them into the centre. Negotiations are currently in place with the midwifery service to provide ante-natal clinics. Mothers report that they have valued guidance and gained a greater confidence when breast feeding.

Parents talk positively about the physical benefits they and their children have received due to the vouchers offered by the centre which enable them to access reduced price swimming sessions. They freely expressed their enjoyment of the 'forest school initiative' with comments such as 'fantastic, I think it should be compulsory even with the gnat bites'. Children in the nursery have direct access to the extremely well resourced outdoor area in all weathers.

Outcomes for staying safe are good. Users feel extremely safe at the centre and the staff give parents good advice on health and safety in the home and outdoors. The processes for the Common Assessment Framework are well established and there are good links with other agencies, this enables staff at the centre to provide positive support for the emotional well-being of individual vulnerable families when they have been identified.

Children make very good progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage at the nursery which is highly valued by parents. They enjoy their interaction with staff and have fun playing with resources that are well suited to their stage of development. Some children's centre staff and staff at the nursery have attended training in order to support the early identification of children with developmental delay and have direct access to a local Speech and Language Therapist for advice, support, training and resources. As a result, more children are being referred to speech and language therapy so that they are receiving the support they require to improve their communication skills.

The centre staff build good relationships with the parents, who report that they find the staff to be friendly and approachable. The centre staff are knowledgeable about the range of services and provision in the area, they guide parents and carers to other providers for courses to improve employability and workplace skills. This is helping parents build better lives for their children as several of these individuals have moved into paid employment and some are attending further education

courses. An increasing number of users are embarking upon the well thought out programme for community volunteers.

Parents report that they feel very involved in the centre and their views are sought and acted upon. The Parents' Voice forum is used well as a means of sharing ideas and influencing what is offered at the centre.

These are the grades for the outcomes for user

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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 users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

All provision is of good quality and helping to improve outcomes for children, parents and carers who come to the centre. A good range of services and activities are delivered by the centre or on their behalf, to ensure there is a good balance of universal and targeted services provided to meet the needs of the community.

A range of case study evidence demonstrates how the centre has supported many families facing a range of issues. The centre works well in partnership with other agencies to ensure it assesses the needs of users effectively. Such accurate assessment enables the centre to provide appropriate services and support, particularly for those with the greatest need. Centre staff are sensitive to the needs of families and parents express the view that 'they often go the extra mile' to support them. Assessment systems for recording children's early development are very good and used well by staff in the day-care setting to capture achievements and plan for the next steps in learning. These strengths mean that the centre very effectively promotes the learning and personal development of children.

Outreach work is very good at engaging the most vulnerable or isolated groups. The mobile toy library is helping parents to offer a wider range of toys and resources to their children at home to promote their learning. It also offers additional resources to early years providers in the area to enhance the learning environment they are able to offer to the children who attend.

The centre has developed excellent working relationships with organisations such as Adult Learning and Extra Support for Families which has resulted in a good range of opportunities for adults to learn and enhance their personal development. Aligned crèche provision means that parents can access these courses without worrying about having to arrange childcare. Participation rates are monitored and demonstrate an increasing level of user engagement.

There is a good range of activities to support learning and development. Sessions such as 'stay and play' are well planned and beginning to be linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage showing clear learning objectives and covering all areas of learning.

The qualified teacher provides guidance and support to the centre and nursery and works with them to ensure consistency and to improve services. The excellent links between the centre and nursery mean that issues can be identified early and support and interventions put in place. These interventions may involve centre staff, parents, other agencies working with the family and the nursery.

The centre is promoted effectively within the community by health visitors and community volunteers. Staff from the centre take every opportunity to talk about the centre's work and encourage people to come. They organise community events which provide information and signpost services. This has contributed to the increased participation in the centre by parents and children benefiting from the centre's activities.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre leadership team have high expectations of the staff team and service partners. Together, they demonstrate genuine commitment, dedication and determination to improving outcomes for all children and their families. Relationships are good and staff are enthusiastic and positive about the work they do. They are proud of the impact they have on the lives of the children and families who attend. Leadership and management at all levels are good.

Governance is good and systems to ensure accountability are secure. There are clear lines of responsibility within the staffing of the centre and in decision making processes. The centre provides detailed monthly management reports to the partnership board which is involved in the evaluation of services and the centre's work. The board oversees all nine centres in the Tendring area. It includes representation from all key partners; however, the parent representative has proved hard to fill on a permanent basis. The Parents' Voice forum, which has representation for three children centres provides an effective link between the parents and the locality board which feeds into the partnership board. This enables users to be involved in decision making. Currently, the centre is working with the users of the centre in reviewing the effectiveness of the Parents' Voice forum and is exploring the possibility of forming a group solely for the users of Willow Tree centre.

Resources are managed well to provide services for those who need them. The centre makes clear distinctions between some activities that are for all, and some that are specifically for targeted groups who will benefit most from attending. The centre staff have a strong commitment to providing an inclusive environment and removing barriers. For example, transport is provided for families who have poor transport links to the centre and 'stay and play' sessions are provided in premises located in the more rural parts of the centre's reach area.

Rigorous checks ensure that all who work or volunteer in the centre are suitable to work with children and vulnerable adults. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are good. Staff are well trained with regard to safeguarding and all place a very high priority on ensuring confidentiality. The accommodation, inside and out, is well maintained and staff conduct regular checks to assess safety. A broad range of services is in place to support those families where either the adults or the children have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The centre provides good value for money because activities are thoughtfully planned.

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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider	2

community	
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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	2

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

The inspection of the childcare at Willow Tree Day Nursery Limited was carried out the day before the children's centre inspection and judgements informed the outcomes and provision judgements for the children's centre.

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 the TEN4 Willow Tree Children's Centre on 8–9 December 2010. We judged the centre as good overall. To help us make our judgements we observed activities, looked at documentation and spoke with a large number of service providers, professionals and parents and carers. Thank you very much indeed to all of you who helped us to understand the quality of services provided by staff.

All staff place the upmost importance on you and your families and always provide a listening ear for you. They are passionate about creating a welcoming environment where you feel at home and are able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you value the centre, which means you have no hesitation in using the services regularly.

Centre users have a voice in service development through represented on the Parents' Voice forum. Currently, this has representation from three children's centres in the Tendring area, not just the Willow Tree centre. Staff are working with you to explore if you would prefer to have a Parents' Voice forum solely for your centre users to attend.

The centre offers a good range of services and activities for all families in the area, these are led by skilled and dedicated professionals. All centre staff are good at guiding you and referring you and your children to other activities and services they believe you would also benefit from and enjoy. You told us over and over again that coming to the centre had increased your confidence and self-esteem. This is because centre staff and professionals from different agencies work closely with you and with each other to find out exactly what help and support you and your family need and making sure this is provided. An outstanding feature of the centre is care, guidance and support the centre provides to you.

You told us that you think that the centre is a safe place for parents and their children. Inspectors agree with this view and think that staff work very well to ensure the health and safety of all who use the centre. Together, you, the nursery staff and centre staff enable your children to make good progress in their skills development, so that they are well prepared for starting school.

At the moment the centre leaders are in the early stages of collecting information about the centre's success and using this to help develop further services. We have asked them to monitor the longer-term impact that the centre has on adults and children. However, they have a good understanding of your needs and a great determination to keep on improving. In addition, we have asked the local authority to provide more detail information on the Early Years Foundation Stage profiles scores and data on the national scores. This will enable the centre to identify any areas of learning that your children need to be supported in and provide this support.

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 with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future.

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