

Inspection report for Westfield Children's Centre

Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	365869
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Sarah Quinn

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Mrs Ally Harvey
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	123951 Westfield Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY404728 Tiny Toez EY387881 Westfield Children's Centre Crèche

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 two additional inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with a range of users, staff, a range of partners, and representatives of the local authority linked to the centre. Inspectors observed the centre's work. They also looked at a range of documentation, including the centre's operational plans, evaluations, and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Westfield Children's Centre is a designated phase one centre and developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. The centre provides crèche and occasional care. Full day care is provided by Tiny Toez, a privately owned childcare provision which receives a separate inspection. The provision is registered to provide care for up to 57 children. The report for Tiny Toez is available on the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Crèche provision is offered by Westfield Children's Centre crèche which was registered in 2010. Also on site is Westfield Nursery School which also receives a separate inspection and the report is available on the Ofsted website. Children entering early years provision have skills and levels of development well below those expected for their age.

Overall, the centre serves a disadvantaged area when compared with other parts of Stoke-on-Trent. The centre serves communities that are both advantaged and significantly disadvantaged, with the reach area covering some areas within the 10% most disadvantaged in the country. The centre is placed within the heart of the Normacot community. Employment figures are relatively low, with many families having a variety of benefits as their main source of income. Qualification levels are low. In the north of the reach area there are families of mainly White British heritage with a diverse ethnic mix in the immediate locality, and a number of languages spoken.

The centre is governed by the local authority and is advised by the partnership board and the parent's forum.

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

Westfield Children's Centre provides satisfactory and improving support to children and families. Relationships with families are warm and caring and the centre rightly prides itself on the welcome it extends to all. Users speak very positively about what the centre provides and feel that it is a family; 'I walk in crying and leave laughing,' and, 'I can't imagine what my life would be like without the centre,' are typical comments from users.

The centre is seen as a 'one stop shop' by parents and carers where they can easily access a variety of health clinics, support, and advice in many areas including adult learning and child care. Partners work with the centre to address immediate issues with families on an informal basis. There is currently no clear system to identify desired outcomes for children and families and to tailor a programme of support. This makes it very difficult for the centre to track and monitor the progress of families and much documentation is completed retrospectively. A small-scale survey carried out in conjunction with a local school revealed that children attending the child care at the centre achieve as well, if not better than their peers at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, observations of children's progress are rarely made and used to effectively plan for their next steps in development. This means it is hard to say how much progress children have made from their starting points.

Children and families are safe at the centre and receive information and advice to keep their families safe at home. They enjoy 'cook and eat' classes and receive advice on healthy lifestyles. They have readily available access to health visitors along with support from outreach and family workers to help those most in need. Children enjoy playing outside in the newly completed outdoor area. Younger parents are positive about the support from the centre saying, 'I was isolated and lonely and now I have self-confidence.' Support has helped many of them to learn, develop and

gain qualifications. However, the centre does not always know the effectiveness of the support and advice that they put in place for each person, as long-term outcomes are not tracked.

The centre's evaluation is mainly accurate on a day-to-day basis and the staff react immediately to problems and support families as needed. However, long term self-evaluation is not yet securely based on sufficient data showing the trends over time. The local authority and centre governance have recognised that the centre is not using available data effectively and there are plans to address this through additional support. Session leaders and those that participate in courses and individual sessions occasionally evaluate these. However, the recording of the impact of the intervention programmes on individuals, particularly through the evaluations conducted by the centre and partner organisations, does not help the centre clearly demonstrate where outcomes are better than satisfactory. Lack of long-term evaluation means that the centre cannot demonstrate that its programme is evolved sufficiently to meet the needs of all users. Targets arising from self-evaluation are currently not sufficiently challenging, specific, measurable or focused sharply enough on improving outcomes.

Safeguarding responsibilities are clear; all staff are appropriately vetted and recruitment procedures are in place. The centre is inclusive and serves a diverse area although staff are finding it hard to engage and track the progress of hard-to-reach groups who may need specific support, for example, some of the minority ethnic groups. The centre has a partnership board, involving most partners of the centre and parents and carers, to help act as a critical friend for the future development and evaluation of the centre's impact. The local authority and centre leadership have experienced a protracted period of uncertainty, and necessary staff and service restructuring has led to a pause in the centre's ability to move forward at a greater pace. Until improved tracking and evaluation systems are firmly in place, the centre's capacity to improve is somewhat inhibited, although the recent developments clearly show that it is going in the right direction. Because of this, the centre's capacity for continuous improvement is currently satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- With support from the local authority, sharpen the approach to collecting, collating and analysing impact data, so that the centre is able to prove that it is meeting its national priority targets and improving outcomes for all users.
- Develop self-evaluation procedures that focus more clearly on the impact the centre is having on making a difference to its users, particularly in the long term, and ensure that future targets are challenging, specific and measurable and focused on improving outcomes.

- Develop measures to further engage hard-to-reach users, for example, minority groups, and evaluate the impact of engagement on outcomes for these families.
- Analyse the data and trends to adjust services as necessary to ensure that all groups in the community that require support are reached and that all users' needs are met.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Parents and carers report that they have improved outcomes for themselves and their families as a result of coming to the centre and accessing the variety of services on offer. However, the impact of these services on the users is not well evidenced by the centre for each outcome. Case studies and feedback immediately following some of the sessions and activities state that families are healthier. For example, one mother states that she now gives her children a healthy breakfast and another makes sure the children play out each day, contributing to their health and well-being. There is no long-term or ongoing tracking information that tells the centre how much impact its services have had on the families and groups. Given that the centre reach area includes over 1300 children aged under five, the anecdotal evidence, although useful and valuable, does not give a true picture of the extent of the centre's effectiveness.

Those parents who access health services appreciate the health visitor and midwife at the centre as they can drop in and seek support and advice. Indeed, a recent case study shows that this service can lead to medical conditions being quickly identified and treated. Courses to support parents and carers in cooking on a budget, or providing healthy meals, are popular and feedback from parents is positive with reported improvements in their knowledge and understanding. However, the long-term impact of these courses and services is unclear and therefore the full effectiveness of the programme is unknown. The centre can access some information relating to national priority targets from partners to support their delivery, but this is inconsistent and does not yet provide a clear and accurate picture of impact in the area.

Children feel safe and those using the centre activities show that they know how to keep themselves safe. They have confidence and join in, for example, they sing and dance during the 'busybodies' session. Parents and carers access free home safety packs and can buy subsidised safety equipment. They appreciate the visits and risk assessments completed by staff and also the fire brigade. They report that this helps them to keep their families safe. However, the centre does not follow up their contact in relation to safety, for example, by completing subsequent risk assessments in the home, and therefore the long term impact of the safety information is unknown. The Common Assessment Framework is used by the centre and partners to support the identification of children with needs and those on child protection

plans are sufficiently supported and tracked.

Users certainly enjoy their contact with the centre and they thoroughly enjoy coming to the sessions. Transition arrangements are in place to support the children moving into school, but not always to help parents support children in their education. It is difficult to track the progress users make in their learning and development as the centre does not make observations of children attending some of the child care sessions, and does not track the effectiveness of the adult learning sessions that it delivers. However, one of the centre's adult learning partners keeps accurate tracking information for those adults attending accredited training and those who move to employment, which gives the centre an insight into which families may achieve educationally and in turn have improved economic prospects.

Children's behaviour is positive and they play together and learn to share and to tidy up during and after sessions. There is obvious respect throughout the centre between users and staff and, as a consequence, there is a positive and vibrant atmosphere throughout the public areas, such as in the café. Parents and carers are proud to be part of the parents' forum, and feel as though their voice is heard. They contribute to the partnership board but, as yet, sit on the board more as observers until their role and confidence develops. Volunteers are welcome in the centre but, at present, the programme of recruiting, inducting and training volunteers is very informal.

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	3
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 staff at the centre work with partners to assess the immediate needs of those using the centre, or referred to the centre. This assessment is currently informal and there is little traceable evidence of support workers working with families to identify desired outcomes and devising a programme of support to meet their needs. That is

not to say that this is not happening, but the local authority have identified that there are gaps in the system used by the centre and have arranged immediate help to strengthen this area.

Sessions to promote play and learning for children are mostly effective with the 'Ready Steady Go' sessions, run by the qualified teacher, providing more personalised learning and focus on children's progress in preparation for school. Other sessions are variable with children showing obvious enjoyment but with no clear focus on individualised learning. Adults attend adult learning sessions, which they enjoy, and some go on to further qualification and employment.

Services offered are appreciated by the parents and carers. There are some specialised and well thought out activities for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities delivered through 'Fleetkins', a partner specialising in this kind of support. The exciting sensory room is used by this group and children can access the sessions at the weekend also. Holiday activities help parents and carers to support their child's learning and development during breaks from school and many fathers enjoy attending the Saturday 'stay and play' sessions. The centre is effective in enabling those parents and carers with younger children to attend sessions by providing crèche facilities. However, as the centre does not sufficiently track and monitor the impact of the services provided, it is unclear whether the programme of services offered fully meets the needs of all users. The centre has identified hard-to-reach geographical areas as a priority and has begun a programme of outreach work to engage these families; for example, by attending schools and community buildings with popular sessions like 'singing'. However, some hard-to-reach groups in the immediate locality are not sufficiently engaged.

Staff are passionate about their responsibilities and are fully committed to the families that they serve. They care deeply for the families that they work with. This is very noticeable and users have trusting relationships with staff. Staff work well as a team and support each other. Lack of focus and monitoring means that, while staff are committed and work hard for families, support is on a reactive basis and few families have clear, outcomes-based programmes to follow. This is because new systems, identified by the local authority as priorities, have not yet been implemented by the centre.

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	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre's arrangements for safeguarding children and families meet requirements. Checks have been made on all adults who work as part of the centre and a record is maintained of the suitability of all staff. Criminal Records Bureau checks are completed on a three-year cycle and staff supervision also addresses suitability issues. Health and safety checks and risk assessments are appropriately carried out. The environment is inclusive and includes accessibility via ramps, as well as signs and symbols and the celebration of different groups. The building is well used and maintained. Careful thought is put into the use of each room and whether the most effective use is gained from the building. The outdoor area has been recently refurbished in consultation with parents and children and now provides a natural and exciting area for children to play.

The centre benefits from an enthusiastic and dedicated staff team who are wholly focused on the families they support. Day-to-day management arrangements are in place and informal partnership with health services and other partners lead to immediate issues being addressed and families in need being identified and supported. The partnership board and parents forum act as critical friends to the children's centre and support and advise where necessary. Current self-evaluation is limited and action plans set by the local authority have not yet been implemented. The centre has been through a significant period of rapid change in terms of staffing and service delivery and, as a consequence, the centre has not fully embraced positive changes implemented in other centres. The local authority, leaders and managers, recognise that there are issues that must be addressed at the centre and have a programme of support in place. Leaders and managers are motivated and enthusiastic to improve the centre and are focussing their efforts on identified priorities. The current capacity of the centre to continually move forward is limited but, with the support measures now in place, are on track to improve.

Monitoring and evaluation are at the early stages of development for this centre. Consequently, the centre cannot yet provide sufficiently robust evidence of the positive outcomes of all interventions and show how well they adapt provision to meet all users' needs. It cannot demonstrate how hard-to-reach groups are engaging, and the effectiveness of this engagement. The centre provides satisfactory 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	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider	3

community	
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	3
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

Westfield Nursery School was inspected in May 2010 and received an outstanding judgement overall. The report is available on the Ofsted website at 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 the Westfield Children's Centre on 8-9 February 2011. We judged the children's centre as satisfactory overall and identified it provides improving support to you and your families. We talked with parents, staff, partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

You say that the centre helps you to socialise and to feel less isolated. You also tell us that your children have made friends and are learning to share and take turns. We saw that the centre is a busy and vibrant place in the community to meet and the café and play area are certainly popular. Your children are supported in their

sessions and most feel ready to start school. You also enjoy accessing the adult learning opportunities that the centre offers. Some of you take part in the running of the centre through the parents' forum and occasionally on the partnership board. The centre welcomes you if you choose to volunteer.

Many things that the centre does are informal and in reaction to your requests or to support you in times of crisis. This may not always be the best way to support some of you as the centre does not yet have long term plans and visions for you and your families. It was very good to speak to some of you and to gain an understanding of what the centre has done for you. It was also interesting to read some of the case studies that the centre is really proud of. However, because the centre do not always monitor how well some of their courses have worked in giving you knowledge and understanding, or how well your children are doing in the childcare, it is hard to know the full impact the centre has had on all of your lives.

It is good to know that a lot of the sessions and activities are popular and that some of you attend the centre every day. We were pleased to hear that the Saturday sessions are popular with dads and that the centre provides activities for children in the holidays. The centre has also started to try to take some of the sessions out into the harder-to-reach areas, like the north of the reach area, to make sure everyone has a fair chance to join in. But there are groups of people living in the area who do not access the activities and they may need as much support as you have received.

To develop further the work of the centre we have asked the centre and the local authority to improve the way they monitor and evaluate the work done through the centre. If they do this, they should be able to tailor some of the sessions even more to meet your needs. We have asked that they track the progress that you are making as a result of attending the centre. Then they will be able to see clearly who is healthier, safer, enjoying and achieving educationally, and giving their families better prospects for the future. We have also asked them to carefully monitor the community around the centre and to try to encourage other families to use the centre.

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 thoroughly enjoyed spending time at you 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.