

Inspection report for Whitmore Reans Children's Centre

Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	366436
Inspection dates	24–25 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Graham Sims

Centre governance	Management board of Whitmore Reans Children's Centre
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	West Park Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Whitmore Reans Children's Centre – EY331791

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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 primary school and its maintained nursery was carried out two weeks prior to the inspection of the children's centre. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector. Childcare provision located at the children's centre was inspected at the same time as the work of the children's centre.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, the senior leadership team, other staff who work at the centre, members of the management board, users of the centre, and a wide range of professionals and other partners who work with the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Whitmore Reans Children's Centre is a phase one children's centre which designated in January 2006 to provide the full core offer. The centre occupies purpose-built facilities which are located within the grounds of West Park Primary School. The children's centre is a registered company limited by guarantee and is commissioned by the local authority to deliver children's centre services. The local authority has delegated responsibility for governance of the children's centre to the company's management board. The board comprises five directors, representatives from various partners who work with the centre and users of the centre. A senior management team, comprising the centre manager, the early years coordinator and the family support team leader, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the centre and the supervision of a large team of early years practitioners, family support practitioners and administrative staff.

The centre acts as the hub for a very wide range of services. Some services are run at a number of other venues within the reach area. The community midwifery team is based at the centre. The centre provides day care for children aged four months to

three years. It also offers nursery education for a group of two-year-olds under the government's pilot scheme. The centre has an allocation of places at West Park School's nursery for three- and four-year-olds, and manages the before- and after-school care for the nursery.

Much of the centre's catchment lies in areas of significant deprivation where unemployment and the proportion of families who are dependent on workless benefits are above average. Within the area, there is a large stock of private housing, which is let on a short-term basis, and other temporary housing, such as hostels and supported housing units. There is, therefore, a great deal of mobility within the area and many of the new arrivals, such as asylum seekers, refugees and young parents, lack social networks of support. The area is culturally diverse and people come from a very wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Evidence indicates that the skills and knowledge with which many children enter the local Early Years Foundation Stage settings are well below those expected nationally for their age.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

'I cannot speak highly enough of this centre.' 'It is just fantastic. I am really happy with everything the centre does.' 'The development my child gets here is quite brilliant.' These eulogies from three parents echo the findings of the inspection team. The centre's provision for those who live in its reach area is quite outstanding. As a result, the centre has a huge impact on improving outcomes for children and their families. The local authority's farsightedness in enabling the centre manager to be fully involved in the design and commissioning of the centre has ensured a centre which is not only fit for purpose but provides an extremely attractive environment for young children, parents and carers. At the core of the centre's work are outstanding leadership, meticulous management, excellent partnership arrangements and a dedicated, caring and highly professional staff who provide outstanding care, guidance and support.

Despite the high mobility within the area, the centre goes to great lengths in its attempts to reach every single family with young children in its area and to ensure equality of opportunity for all. Family support practitioners visit the great majority of families shortly after the birth of a child. They maintain detailed records which enable them to assess needs and provide the most appropriate level of service and support for each family. Support for the most vulnerable families is exceptional; it often involves many home visits, liaison with and referrals to a wide range of other agencies, and highly tailored programmes to meet their needs. Users speak very highly indeed of the support provided. A number of parents referred to the centre as a part of their family, such is the patient, loving, resourceful care provided by the staff.

Children who attend day-care sessions make exceptional progress. Many start with low levels of skill but quickly develop confidence, learn how to keep themselves healthy and safe, and make very good progress indeed in their personal and social development. They really enjoy their time in the centre and are very well prepared to start nursery in stark contrast to many children who do not have the benefit of the

centre's regular input before the age of three. Many parents and carers testify to the enormous difference which the centre has made to their lives, helping them to develop healthier lifestyles, to understand their children's developmental needs and to develop skills which help them improve their economic stability. The centre is working exceptionally well to safeguard all who have contact with the centre. As a result of the centre's input, many families improve their understanding of safety issues affecting their children. The centre's work with children on the child protection register, those involved with Common Assessment Framework processes and looked-after children is meticulous and highly successful in helping to improve the circumstances of these children.

The centre is led, managed and governed extremely well. The centre manager exudes a passion for helping children and their families to improve their life chances. Her quiet, infectious enthusiasm communicates the highest expectations to the rest of the staff. Constant feedback from users and thoughtful reflection from the staff ensure that all of the centre's activities are evaluated regularly and rigorously. Staff take note of their evaluations and adapt and improve services as necessary to suit the needs of the users. Although there are many opportunities for users to make their views known to the staff and half of the members of the management board are users of the centre, there is, currently, no other formal mechanism for users to meet together to voice their views about the centre and contribute their ideas for the centre's development. The establishment of a forum for parents and carers is high on the agenda for future development. The centre has excellent working relationships with a very wide range of professionals who greatly enhance the range of services provided by the centre. The extremely high quality of the services provided, the excellent impact on outcomes for users and the exceptional drive of the centre manager and her team indicate that the centre has an outstanding capacity to maintain this level of service in the future.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Establish a users' forum to provide a more formal mechanism for gathering the views of users and enabling them to contribute their ideas on the development of the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Children thoroughly enjoy their involvement with the children's centre. Many parents commented on what tremendous progress their children have made as a result of the centre's input, whether it be through the day-care sessions, the two-year-old nursery pilot provision or 'Stay-and-Play' sessions at various venues. Children's health improves markedly because of the emphasis on healthy diet and plenty of vigorous activity. As a result of the centre's input, immunisation rates for children are far higher than the national average and the proportion of obese children is well below the national and regional averages. Children behave well, learn to socialise and develop curiosity and interest in the world around them. Assessments show that children who attend day-care sessions at the centre are significantly better prepared

to enter nursery than the majority of children who have not attended the centre. Outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in feeder schools have improved markedly over the last year reflecting the positive impact which the centre has had on young children's education.

The centre is particularly good at reaching those who are hard to engage and has a major impact on the health and safety of parents and carers. Antenatal and postnatal support is excellent. The proportion of mothers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding is close to the national average but significantly above average for the region. Parents appreciate being able to see a midwife or health visitor at the centre. The wide range of courses helps parents to understand how they can meet their children's developmental and emotional needs. Highly supportive home visits ensure that parents are aware of hazards in the home, and parents appreciate being able to obtain safety equipment through the centre more cheaply than elsewhere. The visits also inform new parents of the opportunities available to them, such as the 'New Beginnings' sessions, 'Stay and Play' activities, the early years clinic and baby massage. Parents who are experiencing change or difficult circumstances show significant improvement in their confidence and parenting skills as a result of the centre's input. The centre is pro-active and tenacious in calling together other agencies to assess children's needs under the Common Assessment Framework and then providing whatever support is required to improve circumstances for the child. Because of the high level of support provided through home visits, the centre has been conspicuously successful in improving outcomes for children on child protection plans and helping families to develop greater stability.

In addition to the excellent progress made by children, adults also make excellent progress in developing their parenting skills and learning new skills that will help them in the future. The centre is skilful at maximising the benefit from every training course. For example, staff have found that adults are generally willing to undertake courses in first aid or food hygiene. Successful completion of these courses boosts their confidence to try other training opportunities which they had previously declined to attend. More informal learning opportunities are provided for a large number of adults who are not yet ready to attend a training course. Individual case studies show how wide-ranging and effective the centre's support has been. For example, one family has regularly accessed day care, attended almost 40 sessions at eight different activities and received almost 40 home visits. The centre's unstinting support has resulted in the child being removed from the child protection register, improvements in the child's emotional well-being and development, access to training, eventual employment for the parent, and much greater stability in home life.

Children make huge strides in developing positive relationships and exceptionally good behaviour. The management board has good representation of users who contribute to the governance of the centre. Although there is no forum at present for users to share their views with each other or to discuss ideas for the future development of the centre, parents and carers say they are always being asked by staff for their views and feedback. They appreciate that the centre takes note of

what they say and adapts services in the light of their comments. For example, a session for teenage parents was poorly attended, so staff canvassed the views of potential participants. As a result, the session is now held at the hostel for teenage parents, is well attended and is having a significant impact on the lives of these young mothers. Staff are extremely skilful in helping those who lack confidence to communicate their views and to take responsibility for their actions. The composition of many of the groups run by the centre is ethnically diverse. Participants treat each other with great respect and their mutual support contributes strongly to community cohesion. The centre encourages users to act as volunteers. For example, two young parents who participated in the 'Parenting Puzzle' programme valued the new skills they had gained so much, that they volunteered to help facilitate future delivery of the programme to other parents.

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	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	1

How good is the provision?

1

The accurate, thorough and sensitive assessment of users' needs lies at the core of the centre's work and drives the centre's programme of activities. Many families refer themselves to the centre for support and others are referred by external agencies. Home visits also play a crucial role in identifying needs, and the centre aims to put support in place as early as possible when this is necessary. Staff provide a holistic assessment taking into account mental health, emotional well-being, physical environment, social and environmental circumstances before arriving at an individualised package of support. The centre makes excellent use of data provided by the local authority, information on new births provided by the health authorities and its own records to ensure it engages with the most vulnerable groups and those who are hard to reach. For example, the centre recently undertook an analysis of the two super output areas with the highest levels of deprivation to check how many families were accessing the centre's services. Family support workers then visited every family not using the centre's services regularly in order to make contact, update the centre's records, inform families of the centre's services and assess their needs. A significant number started attending activities organised by the centre as a

result. Attendance at activities is analysed to determine which areas participants come from. The results show that around two thirds of users attending the centre's activities are from the areas of greatest deprivation. The centre's many partners report that there is excellent two-way communication with the centre which further strengthens the centre's knowledge of the families in its area.

Provision to help children to learn and develop, and the quality and range of services offered are outstanding. Day-care arrangements are excellent. Children move from the room with the youngest children when they are ready developmentally, not when they reach a particular age. Every area of the centre has been thoughtfully developed. For example, the large open space in one of the rooms has been divided into smaller themed areas because staff observed that children were more settled and concentrated better on their learning in such an environment. An alcove has been turned into a sensory area for use with children who are upset and need close individual attention. Day-care sessions are well planned, well staffed, well resourced and of high quality, with the result that children quickly become absorbed in their learning and make excellent progress. Great attention is paid to each individual. For example, staff noted that one child was particularly interested in the buses which pass by. He is allowed to stand on top of the little hill outside where he watches the traffic with rapt excitement as a member of staff uses the occasion to help him develop his emerging speaking skills.

Adults are signposted to the most relevant services for them. These may include any combination of: parenting programmes, 'Stay and Play' sessions, breastfeeding support, music and movement sessions, support for victims of domestic violence, housing support, training courses and learning taster sessions hosted by a local college. In addition, support is available from midwives, health visitors, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, social workers and other professionals. Teenage parents are supported in their own home environment. Lone parents are introduced to group activities. The centre liaises with various agencies to support refugees and asylum seekers. The achievements of children and adults are celebrated at every opportunity, which helps to build confidence and raise aspirations.

The quality of care, guidance and support is exceptional. Parents cannot speak too highly of the support provided in the day-care sessions and the two-year nursery pilot. Parents and carers respond equally positively to the support they receive either through specifically targeted courses or one-to-one support. Relationships between users and the family support workers are excellent. Families are undoubtedly supported extremely well in times of crisis. 'I could not have managed without the support of the centre,' said one parent, speaking with obvious affection and admiration for her family support worker.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
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The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
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?

1

Governance and accountability arrangements are very well established, and the responsibilities delegated by the supportive local authority to the management board are clear. The management board, which includes five directors from the local community, key stakeholders, parents and representatives from partner agencies, ensures clear strategic direction and accountability for the quality of the service provided. Service level agreements with various partner agencies work well and ensure high-quality integrated provision which is highly responsive to local needs. The senior management team is highly professional, has an extremely good knowledge of the local area and provides excellent supervision for a very committed team of staff.

Self-evaluation is rigorous and highly reflective. Case studies analyse the centre's effectiveness in dealing with specific cases, and some of them provide an individual cost analysis to see how effectively the centre's resources have been used. The centre has commissioned an independent researcher to produce a number of users' life stories, which leaders will analyse to identify where best they can target support in the future. Ways of approaching families in crisis are informed by analysis of what has worked well in previous similar cases. Staff who support vulnerable families have a fortnightly session facilitated by a mental health worker to reflect on the approaches they have used, to learn from each other and to identify the most effective practice. The centre's annual action plan is entirely focused on meeting the needs of families in the local community, particularly the most vulnerable groups. Rigorous financial monitoring, cost-benefit analyses, strong prioritisation on the needs of the most vulnerable, the wide influence of the centre and the very high quality of its services indicate that the centre provides excellent value for money.

The centre is recognised as a leader of inclusive practice, which includes supporting children with complex needs. Staff work extremely hard to help those in vulnerable circumstances to gain stability and become fully integrated members of society. The centre has worked with a large number of migrant families to help them access early years education, childcare and health services. The centre created a non-accredited programme to develop the role of fathers as mentors. This raised the awareness of staff and parents of the importance of fathers in their children's lives. The centre is proactive in removing barriers, identifying and dealing with inequalities and working to achieve community cohesion.

The centre exemplifies high-quality practice for safeguarding. It provides a safe and

secure environment for children and adults, where safety in every aspect is a priority. Risk assessments are rigorous. Recruitment practices and safety checks on all who come into regular contact with children are meticulous. The centre provides a very quick response to any referrals by partner agencies. Safeguarding training is undertaken far more frequently than the minimum recommendation, and staff have an excellent understanding of safeguarding issues. Parents and carers say they have the utmost confidence in the centre's staff who respect their privacy and do so much to promote their welfare and safety.

The level of partnership working is outstanding. To illustrate the strength of these partnerships, a very large group of partners met with the inspection team, including a social worker, a health visitor, a public health infant-nutrition manager, the community midwife team leader, and representatives from a local family centre, the special educational needs and/or disabilities early years service, children's learning disability team, the local multi-agency support team, and a scheme for teenage parents. All commented on how good their partnerships with the centre are, with one saying, for example, 'The centre acts as a really good bridge between health and social services.' Another commented, 'The centre is willing to take on new challenges and always looking at ways to improve.' The network spreads even further, encompassing a local neighbourhood partnership, the employability team, the local library, faith groups and the Citizens' Advice Bureau. Staff from the centre attend schools' parents' evenings to motivate parents and carers to take up learning opportunities for themselves and make positive changes in lifestyles. Each family support worker acts as the centre's main contact with one or more organisations to ensure that there is always a known contact and to facilitate communication.

Above all, the centre seeks to engage with the local community and to provide the highest possible level of support for those in need. It goes to extraordinary lengths to engage those who are not accessing its services in order to identify and meet their needs. It provides continuing, generous, sacrificial support for those who come for help. It is truly a highly effective force for good within the community and rightly deserves the high regard in which it is held by all who work with it or use its services.

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	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1

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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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	1

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

None. The results of the inspection of West Park Primary School has not been published at the time of the children’s centre’s inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Whitmore Reans Children's Centre on 24–25 March 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We greatly appreciated the opportunity to talk to a number of you at the activities we visited during the inspection and would like to thank those of you who gave up your time to come in to the centre to talk to us. We came away with an overwhelming impression that you really appreciate the work of the centre. One of you said, 'The centre is like family to us,' expressing how much you value the support and care of the staff. Those to whom we spoke said that the day-care provision is 'second to none'. Others said they really enjoyed the 'Stay and Play' sessions, while others learnt a great deal from courses such as 'Parenting Puzzle'. For some of you, the centre has been a real lifeline, helping you to improve your circumstances at home and giving you invaluable support in times of crisis.

Everything we saw, everything we read and everything we heard convinced us that your children's centre is truly outstanding. Staff go to great lengths to get to know as many children and families in your area as possible. They do their very best to find out how they can help you as families and then provide as much support as they can within the resources available to them. Because they work so well with many other organisations, the level of help they provide is very wide ranging. Excellent day care for children aged four months to three years, and well-run nursery sessions for some two-year-old children really help your children to develop well. There are many activities for adults, such as the parenting courses which help you to understand your children's developmental needs, and 'Stay and Play' sessions which give you the opportunity to meet other parents, to have fun with your children and learn new parenting skills.

The centre provides you with an outstanding level of care, guidance and support, particularly for those of you who are going through difficult times. We were truly impressed with how much the staff have done to help some families improve their home circumstances, mend broken relationships, undertake training and get back into employment. Some of you we spoke to are very grateful indeed for the help you have been given. Staff are constantly on the lookout for families who are new to the area and those who have not yet come across the centre, as they want everyone in the area to be able to benefit from the services on offer. We learnt that many of you appreciate the fact that midwives are now based at the centre, and the centre helps to put you in touch with other health professionals. The centre places a very high priority on helping you and your children to pay attention to your health and safety.

We found that the centre manager is doing an excellent job in running the centre, and she is extremely well supported by a team of dedicated and caring staff. There is a great determination among all the staff and those on the management team who oversee the running of the centre to provide you with the best possible service. The staff look very carefully at the activities they have provided to identify if they can improve future activities in any way. They greatly value the feedback which you give

to them. However, although some of you are involved on the management board, there is no opportunity for the rest of you to meet together to let the centre know what you think of its services or to offer suggestions as to how the centre might develop. The centre already has plans to establish a users' forum to accomplish this and we agree that this would be a good future development.

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