

Inspection report for Oak Meadow Children's Centre

Local authority	Hampshire
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Linked school if applicable	N/a
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Growing Places

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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 twinned children's centre, Strawberry Meadow Children's Centre, was carried out at the same time as this inspection. 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 early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with centre users, managers and frontline staff, partners and a representative from the local authority. They also visited the linked early years provision provided by a third party, Growing Places, and observed the crèche and a number of groups and activities. Finally, they looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Oak Meadow Children's Centre was designated in November 2006. It is twinned with Strawberry Meadow Children's Centre which operates from the same premises with a joint management structure. It is also located on the same site as Oak Meadow Primary School. Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority and it is a Phase 2 centre which provides the full core offer, including childcare and early learning, health services, outreach and family support.

The centre provides services for families in its Notional Catchment Area (NCA) of Fareham North-West, Titchfield, Fareham West and Fareham North. This area is a very mixed area, with pockets of social and economic disadvantage, as well as areas of wealth. The vast majority of households in the reach area are of White British heritage, and there are several families of Eastern European background. The number of lone parent families, those in workless households, and with other issues such as suffering domestic abuse or drug or alcohol abuse is above the national average.

The linked early years provision is provided onsite by Growing Places, a third party. This setting is registered for 60 early years places, as well as 18 crèche places and 35 holiday play scheme places. In the centre's reach area, the number of children

who gain at least 78 Foundation Stage Profile points is 58.6%, which is slightly above the county average of 53.9%.

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

Oak Meadow is an outstanding children's centre. Families who use the centre are extremely positive about the immense impact it has on the quality of their lives and that of their children. For example, one parent said the centre, 'has turned my life around', and similar views are expressed by many users. Relationships with key partners are superb. All key partners are fully engaged in the centre on strategic and frontline levels and they enhance outcomes through delivery of an excellent range of groups and activities. The centre's joint partnership board has responsibility for both Oak Meadow and Strawberry Meadow centres. It is highly focused on the needs of the centre and is extremely well informed about the reach area and service provision. The board has already identified further development is needed by refreshing its membership so that it continues to reflect the users and partners of the centre accurately.

The management arrangements of Oak Meadow are exemplary. The management team oversees both Oak Meadow and Strawberry Meadow Children's Centres and contains an excellent mix of expertise that is highly pertinent to the work of the children's centre. The manager is inspirational in her leadership and works extremely well with the management team. The local authority provides a high level of challenge and support to enable the centre's successful onward development. The management team has an exceptionally clear strategic view of how well the services are meeting users' needs. Extensive evaluation is embedded throughout the centre's work at all levels to provide an exceptionally clear view of the impact of services. As a result, provision and outcomes are outstanding. Future development is planned meticulously using all evaluation and data available to the centre, so that services continue to improve and reach further into the catchment area. The capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding.

The centre puts the highest priority on safeguarding children's welfare. The centre's designated person is exceptionally experienced and knowledgeable in current procedures and employs exemplary inter-agency working to safeguard children's

welfare. The centre is especially welcoming to all; inclusive attitudes and practice are infused throughout all aspects of its provision. One parent commented on the friendly attitude of all staff by saying that she is given help 'no matter what your problems are'. In particular, the centre is highly focused on improving outcomes for those groups they have identified as key target groups, such as lone parents, teenage parents, and families living in workless households. Specialist outreach and group provision meets the needs of many of these families in the reach area very well. There are several families living in the reach area who have a minority ethnic background and a large majority of these families use the centre's services. Meticulous scrutiny of data demonstrates very good increase in the engagement of these groups in the centre and excellent improvement in their outcomes. Parents greatly value the exceptionally high level of respect shown to them at the centre, where users say, 'nobody is better or worse than anyone else'.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Enhance the strategic influence of the joint partnership board further by reviewing and refreshing the membership of the board, so that it continues to represent current partner involvement in the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Outcomes for children and adults who use the centre are outstanding in all areas. A wealth of case study evidence is corroborated by sophisticated analysis of reach and impact data and indicates the exceptional effect services have on families' well-being. Services and groups have a very high rate of attendance by families and include an extremely high number of users who have not traditionally engaged with their services. There is exceptionally good partnership working with health services to deliver an extensive range of universal and targeted services from the health suite within the centre premises which is used by almost all eligible families. Groups and services such as the Young Parents' Group, child health clinic, and the teenage midwife clinic have a highly positive impact on health and well-being.

Adults say they feel very safe when at the centre and that they can speak freely in a confidential environment. In a recent survey, 100% of parents said they felt the centre was a safe and supportive place to be. Children who are the subject of a child protection plan and those involved with the Common Assessment Framework process benefit from exemplary procedures to improve their safety and well-being. A particular strength is the provision for women subject to domestic abuse. The Power to Change course and domestic abuse support group are delivered by Family Aid in partnership with the centre and family support workers. These groups enable women to address difficult personal circumstances in a wholly safe and trusted environment. All who participate in this programme develop a greatly increased level of self-esteem and their emotional well-being is significantly enhanced. In a recent survey of users' views, 100% stated they felt either slightly or significantly better after following the programme. Children affected by domestic abuse are supported by the

'Helping Hands' programme to ensure all in the family are given a very high level of support. There is provision for those men subject to abuse delivered by the partner organisation at other locations.

Young children using centre services demonstrate exceptional enjoyment. In the crèche, those who attend over a period of weeks appear well settled and demonstrate very high levels of attachment to staff. For example, a young child was observed snuggling into a member of staff while playing with small world resources, and another contentedly explored the texture of paint, scrubbing her brush around the paint and on the paper. Children have significantly improved outcomes and identified gaps in achievement are addressed very well. The children's centre support teacher has provided a very high level of effective support to help improve the achievement of those groups of children who have been identified as performing less well. For example, the gap between achievement of boys and girls has narrowed significantly as a result of targeted support in early years provision, the impact of the popular fathers' groups and staff training in behaviour management strategies.

The centre's family learning programme is extremely successful in enabling adults to gain qualifications and skills through targeted and universal groups. A high number of users gain level 1 or level 2 qualifications and this achievement develops their self-confidence and supports their economic well-being very well. Many of the centre's Young Parent group have been very successful in accessing further education and employment as a result of the centre's provision. Excellent partnership working with Jobcentre Plus and Housing Services enables families to access employment, benefit and housing advice. Attendance at all groups and courses is very high and all adults demonstrate an exceptionally high level of satisfaction with the courses and groups that run at the centre. An example of this is the Tiny Talk group for parents and children up to the age of 18 months. Good communication is promoted through signing in a relaxed environment and parents say their children 'love it here'.

Positive relationships are wholly integrated throughout the centre. Staff are exemplary role models and all users and staff demonstrate the highest level of care, consideration and respect for one another. This creates a nurturing and enabling environment where families feel highly valued. Compassion and kindness are endemic throughout the centre, and are demonstrated by management, frontline staff and partners. Users are routinely engaged in the management of the centre. The 'Voices' parent forum is influential in implementing recommendations and initiatives raised by other users. For example, parents requested a toddler seat to be installed in the toilet to assist with nappy changing of younger siblings and this was quickly put in place. Parents are active members of the joint partnership board and represent users' views very well at strategic level. Many users progress to train as volunteers, delivering services and supporting their peers at the centre. Users' evaluation of groups and services is extremely thorough and has a demonstrable impact on the delivery of services, including amendment of content, location or timings, in order to better meet users' need.

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, 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 provision of the centre is outstanding in all aspects. The premises provide a spacious and extremely well-resourced environment which is used to capacity. The quality of outreach work is exemplary and is the key element in engaging vulnerable families in services which improve their lives. Family support workers engage exceptionally well with these families to encourage them in centre services which are completely tailored to individual needs. All groups that make up the community of the catchment area are successfully involved in the centre's provision. The centre's ethos is to provide a 'family around the family', and this is evident in the assessment of users' needs. Staff take exceptional care to get to know families and build a high level of trust to develop an excellent understanding of their needs. Users engaging with family learning programmes are successfully encouraged to have high aspirations about what they can achieve, and this bolsters their self-esteem and levels of achievement. Success is achieved because learning is tailored to the individual through detailed learning plans. Course content is frequently reviewed with learners to ensure it remains highly relevant to their needs. One course participant said, 'I've learned loads: the staff are always so willing to help.' Achievement is valued and celebrated, and users are very proud of their success.

The range of services is superb and is determined by extensive needs analyses and improvement in outcomes for users. The centre manager makes excellent and purposeful use of evaluation, consultation and outreach to monitor the appropriateness of services to ensure they are always pertinent to need. There is a wealth of data which gives detailed information about the reach area. This is used exceptionally well by the centre management team to determine the extent of the engagement of the community.

The quality of care, guidance and support is excellent. The centre provides a haven to which families readily turn in times of crisis for practical and emotional support. For example, parents have received immediate and individual emotional support

when disclosing abuse, have received funding for childcare places when ill or unable to look after their own children, and have received furniture, clothing and washing machines to help them manage their day-to-day life. The extremely high level of support empowers users to change their lives for the better, and many become sufficiently self-assured to focus on making life better for their children and the wider community. For example, a number of women have met with professionals, such as doctors and magistrates, to educate them on the circumstances and impact of domestic abuse so that they may be better informed on these issues in their work.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
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

The effectiveness of leadership of the centre is outstanding. Day-to-day management is rigorous and has users' well-being at its heart. The local authority provides an excellent framework of development and has an accurate overview of the centre. The joint partnership board fulfils its role extremely well. Members have a very clear view of the centre's purpose through frequent involvement and scrutiny of data. It offers a high level of challenge to the centre's management team to ensure that services are scrupulously measured and evaluated so that resources are used efficiently. Budgets are strictly monitored and additional funding is gathered through external lettings and successful grant applications. As a result, the centre provides outstanding value for money.

The centre constantly strives to engage more users and is successful in integrating different groups of users into its provision. This includes those families who speak English as an additional language. The fathers' group is very well attended each week, providing opportunities to experience a wide range of activities, and many say these sessions help develop a closer relationship with their child. Families of children with a disability benefit from the excellent partnership working and individual care which is offered to all families. The practitioner forum enables very rapid and effective communication with frontline services, such as those that provide a home-visiting service for pre-school children, to provide a package of support for these families.

The centre has excellent safeguarding procedures. All who work with children are subject to the most rigorous checking and monitoring process to ensure their

suitability. Staff, partners and volunteers receive frequent training to ensure they maintain a high level of awareness. The high quality of outreach and family support work facilitates early intervention in matters of child protection and this enhances its impact to promote the well-being of children and their families.

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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Oak Meadow Children's Centre on 30–31 March 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding in every aspect. This means it provides a top-quality service and is a superb example for other centres to follow.

We would like to thank those of you who took the time to meet with us and talk about the centre to help us with the inspection. It was very useful to hear how much you enjoy and value the excellent work of the centre, and the difference it has made to many of your lives. Our discussions with you also helped us to realise how many of you are involved in the running of the centre through being members of the 'Voices' group, and being volunteers, as well as those of you who sit on the joint partnership board. All of these roles help parents such as you to influence the work and decisions made in the centre, and your views are represented very well at Oak Meadow.

Your children's centre has so many excellent features it is not possible to list them all here. We thought that some of the particular strengths of Oak Meadow are how well children and families are kept safe and the high level of emotional support staff provide. Further strengths include the opportunities you have to learn and gain advice on jobs and benefits, and the very good links with the health service to provide child health clinic and antenatal services at the centre. Many of you told us that you feel the centre is a welcoming place to be and that all staff value you for who you are, and we agree. We found the centre to be extremely friendly and saw how well staff respect families who use its services, and they meet their needs very well.

The staff team are dedicated to making sure you receive the best possible services and, with other partner organisations, they deliver the outstanding range of groups and activities you enjoy. Many of the groups we saw while we were at the centre were really busy and of excellent quality, such as the Young Parents group. It was very clear to us that everyone enjoys these groups very much and gets a great deal of benefit from them.

We judged the leadership of the centre to be excellent. The manager and her team take great care to know the local area well to make sure that services meet the community's needs very well. The management team are very successful in evaluating the groups and courses to make sure they are well suited to your needs. They know exactly what to do to improve the centre even more. We have asked them to look at developing the joint partnership board to include more partners who are already involved with the centre. The joint partnership board had already thought of doing this in the future. We agree it would be a good next step to make sure the board is always representative of the users and services that are on offer.

Thank you again for the warm welcome you gave to us when we visited Oak Meadow. We would like to take this opportunity to wish you well for the future.

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