

Inspection report for Oakwood Children's Centre

Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	367876
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Jane Chesterfield

Centre governance	The governing body of Gardners Lane Primary School
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Linked school if applicable	Oakwood Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Oakwood Nursery EY101784

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.

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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 registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre and the executive head, the senior management team, local authority officers, a range of children's centre partners, health professionals and front line staff. They met parents and carers and other centre users, observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

The centre is located on the site of Oakwood Primary School in a residential estate comprising social and privately rented housing on the outskirts of Cheltenham, and serves a mainly White British community. Many families have lived on the estate for generations. The ward in which the centre is located has a 30% level of deprivation. There are high levels of crime and domestic violence and unemployment is above the national average. About 10% of households have no working adult. The proportion of families known to be eligible for free school meals, housing benefits and income support is high.

Oakwood Children's Centre is run by the governing body of Gardners Lane Primary School. It was designated as a phase 1 children's centre in 2006 and is the strategic centre for the five children's centres which make up the local cluster. The cluster provides families and children with a range of services including childcare and education, family support, outreach and home visiting, community based health services, and advice on training, employability and benefits.

Oakwood offers the Early Years Foundation Stage in its childcare and crèche facilities. It is registered with Ofsted to provide 66 education and childcare places for children aged from birth to five years of age. Children may attend from 8.30am to 5.30pm five days per week for 50 weeks of the year. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision and Oakwood Primary School were inspected during the same week as the centre. Children's levels of development on entry to the pre-school provision for children aged 3–5 are below those expected for their age.

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

1

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of the centre is good. Oakwood Children's Centre successfully meets the needs of its community and is improving outcomes for its users. Thanks to the exceptional quality of its leaders and managers and governance, it has made rapid improvements in the last 18 months since the current leaders took over, after a period of instability and uncertainty. The quality of its provision is good and improving, and this is already having an impact on its outcomes.

The centre has significant strengths in its monitoring and evaluation processes. Systematic and careful analysis of data ensures that services are exceptionally well targeted to the needs of the community. An increased focus on highlighting the issue of domestic violence, for example, has resulted in a drop in the number of reported incidents in the area of over 50% in the last year. Users attending a recently introduced programme of workshops on the subject say it has restored their self-confidence and changed their lives. Staff give the highest priority to safeguarding all children and safe working practices are employed.

Despite the recent changes, including a staff restructuring which is currently underway, staff morale is very high, and frontline workers carry out their roles very competently. They too are skilled in assessing the needs of users. Staff running the drop-in baby club, for example, quickly identify whether new parents or their babies could benefit from other services offered by the centre and offer them access to whatever is most appropriate to them. Relationships between staff and users are very positive and help users feel welcome and relaxed at the centre.

The centre has established excellent partnerships with other agencies for the benefit of its users. The recent relocation of health visitors and midwives to the same site, for example, has enabled them to have much closer communication with centre workers and with one another, and to intervene more swiftly with families where needed. Childminders say that they travel considerable distances to the centre because of the quality of the facilities, resources and services, and that they frequently recommend it to other childminders.

The café run by the centre is widely appreciated by families and provides an excellent service for the community. The centre has identified that under-nourishment rather than obesity is a problem for the area, and so provides healthy meals at low cost for its nursery children and local families. A cooking club for parents and children helps them to learn healthy catering skills.

The centre's ongoing audit of its services has led it to identify that it is not currently offering sufficient services to children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families, particularly in offering them the chance to integrate with their peers. It has plans to develop this aspect of its work from September, when the adjacent primary school is due to move to a new site and a special school is scheduled to

move into their premises. Improved analysis of Early Years Foundation Stage data and observations of children in pre-school groups has shown that children's speaking skills are below expectations for their age. The staff are skilled in developing children's vocabulary and sentence structure, but recognise the need to intensify work done with parents and carers to help them support their children's language development.

The pace of the centre's improvement and development is down to the ambition and foresight of those who lead, manage and govern it. Their systems for organising and running the centre are highly efficient, their self-evaluation procedures are realistic and accurate, and they have built excellent relationships with staff and users in a short period of time. The centre is inclusive and demonstrates a clear commitment to equality and diversity and this strongly underpins its work. Consequently, the centre's capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with parents and carers to promote children's speaking skills.
- Develop opportunities for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to be involved in activities with their peers.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre is working well to improve outcomes for its users. Breastfeeding figures are above average for the town, ensuring that babies get a good start in life. Children are helped to have healthy, active lifestyles and are given healthy and nutritious meals. The centre is responsive to children's nutritional needs. The nursery has identified, for example, that children often need something to eat when they arrive, and so has reorganised its snack times to provide food at the beginning of the session. The centre is working with its user group to develop a community allotment, so that users can grow fresh produce for themselves.

Children are kept very safe in the centre, and show from their behaviour that they feel secure and settled. Babies, toddlers and pre-school children all form positive relationships with the adults working with them, and readily turn to them if they need help. Children who have a child protection plan, who are looked after, or who are subject to the Common Assessment Framework are well supported, thanks to the strengths in the centre's approach to multi-agency working.

Children learn and develop well at the centre. They are curious about their surroundings and keen to explore them. They make the most of the wide range of opportunities covering all areas of learning indoors and out. Skilled interventions by staff help to develop children's interest and promote their language acquisition, involving parents where possible. During a 'Stay and Play' session for parents and carers and their children, for example, one child excitedly drew attention to a worm

burrowing into the soil. Her mother and a family support worker then talked to her about why the worm was doing this and gave her words to describe the worm. Parents and carers are learning a range of skills to help them support their children. At the cooking club, for example, parents learn new recipes for healthy and inexpensive meals such as vegetable pizza, while children learn how to use cutlery and get to taste new foods such as peppers and mushrooms.

The centre plays a significant role in the life of the community, and members of the community using the centre respect one another and work positively together. Children show an awareness of others and their needs and make a contribution to the life of the centre. Staff systematically gather the views of children in the nursery about their activities, so that their preferences can be taken into account in future planning. The children are interested in the world around them and are developing the personal and social skills they need for moving on to school.

Parents and carers value the opportunities the centre offers them to improve their own education and increase their employability. Participation and achievement rates in basic skills courses such as literacy and numeracy are high. Centre users are also keen to learn other life skills and crafts, for example through the successful patchwork group, and are looking forward to developing more practical skills in the recently opened technology room (the Green room). Users are happy to contribute to centre development through informal suggestions or discussions and through the 'Have your Say' group, and some are formally involved in centre governance through the partnership board.

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	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and 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 and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

Excellent use of data means that the centre is able to assess needs and target services across the cluster very accurately. Regular collection and analysis of statistics ensures that services are available for users of all ages. As well as services

for young children and their families, the centre helps to meet the needs of primary age children. Its 'Chill and Chat' groups, for example, support pupils in the partner primary school who have been affected by bullying, while the Young Carers group works with older children and teenagers who have caring responsibilities. Recent figures highlighted a gap in provision for vulnerable young parents, and so work has been done to research their views and needs in order to offer more tailor-made ante- and post-natal services for this group.

Learning and development opportunities for children in the nursery are good. They are described in full in a separate report for the registered nursery provision. Recent improvements in assessment have indicated that the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest decreased significantly over the last year, thanks to closer links between the assessment of children's achievements and the planning of the next steps in their learning and development. The family room is well equipped to provide crèche facilities, and offers a full range of opportunities across all areas in learning for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Activities for adults are of a good quality and are popular with users. High standards were encouraged in the patchwork group taking place during the inspection, for example, so that participants could be proud of their work. The centre recognises the successes of those who take part in its courses and celebrates what they have achieved. Photos of those who have completed literacy and numeracy courses are displayed prominently in the centre, while those who finish the 15 week 'Pattern Changing' course on domestic violence will be treated to a party to mark their achievement.

The centre maintains a good balance of drop-in and targeted services, so that it can be accessed by all members of the community, irrespective of their backgrounds. It is very inclusive, enabling users from different socio-economic groups to mix and share their common experiences, such as parenting or adult learning. Home visits and similar outreach work support families effectively when they are unable to visit Oakwood. The centre provides a good range of services to offer guidance and support to its families, and also aims to compensate for gaps in other local care services. As there are no doctors' or dentists' surgeries nearby, the centre offers baby weighing by community nursery nurses at its baby club, for example, and an oral health professional is available to give advice on toothcare. The centre supports local community issues and is campaigning hard for a doctor's surgery to be established in the area.

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	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

2

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Leadership, management and governance for the children's centre are exceptionally well structured and, as a result, staff at all levels understand what is expected of them and feel confident in their roles. The partnership board works closely with the other children's centres in the town, and this means that common areas of need can be identified and resources shared. Some staff training, for example, takes place with children's centres in other clusters, thus cutting the cost for all concerned. There are clear distinctions between the strategic roles of the head of the centres in the cluster and the executive head of the two primary schools, and their deputies who run the sites on a daily basis. This enables the heads to focus on long-term priorities, while the deputies develop their leadership roles, and it works very effectively in practice.

The centre makes first class use of the data available from the local authority, and its business plan is well grounded in analysis of the needs of the area. This has meant that from the time the current leaders took over, they have been increasingly sure that they are targeting the right priorities. This is already having an impact on the area's most pressing needs and is evident in, for example, the drop in reported cases of domestic violence, and the decrease in the gap between the highest and lowest attaining children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Consequently, the centre provides good value for money.

Staff welfare and development are important, and staff morale is very high. There are good arrangements for performance management and a clear staff development plan. Staff receive regular supervision and are full of enthusiasm for their work and praise for the centre. Leaders make sure that responsibility is devolved through project work, and that staff are accountable for their work. In order to improve the service to young vulnerable parents, for example, a report on ante-natal services was produced by staff members, and this will now form the basis for future development.

Partners too appreciate the working environment and the quality of communication. 'The centre goes that extra mile in everything,' commented one partner. Users' views are routinely sought through course evaluations, the 'Have your Say' group and the partnership board, and they feel satisfied that these are heard and acted upon. They say that the centre has made a difference to their lives and well-being through the quality of the support it offers them.

Equality and diversity are well promoted. The centre is fully accessible to wheelchair users and welcoming to all. However, it has identified that it does not provide enough services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and has plans to extend these. There are few users from minority ethnic backgrounds, reflecting the ethnic mix of the community. The diverse nature of the wider community is, however, strongly represented in resources, toys and displays around

the centre. The centre encourages fathers as well as mothers to access its facilities, and runs activities designed to appeal to them, such as Saturday morning drop-in play sessions. There are plans to run courses on skills such as woodwork and tile-making in the newly opened Green Room.

Procedures for safeguarding are exemplary. Required recruitment checks have been carried out on all adults who have contact with children, and these are renewed every three years. All staff have undergone thorough training on safeguarding, and have a very clear understanding of the steps they must take if they have a concern. Records show that these are followed rigorously. Risk assessments are robust and liaison with other agencies to protect children is close and swift. Security procedures and the attentiveness of staff mean that children are kept very safe on site.

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	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	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	2

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

The inspection of the registered childcare provision in Oakwood Nursery on 6 June 2011 and the inspection of Oakwood Primary School on 8 and 9 June 2011.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Oakwood Children's Centre on 9 and 10 June 2011. We judged the centre to be good overall.

Many thanks to those of you who met with us during the inspection, agreed to let us sit in on your groups or courses, or spoke to us about the centre. We were very grateful for your help with the inspection and interested to hear your views.

We found that the centre offers you a good range of activities and services, and you told us how helpful and supportive the centre is, particularly if you are in difficulties. Staff at all levels are exceptionally good at finding out what the needs of the local community are, and are expanding and developing their range of services further to be of even greater use to the community. We know that you and your children especially like the café, and we found that this is an excellent facility for the community.

The centre gives you good access to health services in a convenient location, and it is successful in helping to improve the health of the local community. New parents are able to have their babies weighed regularly on site, for example, instead of having to travel some distance to a doctor's surgery. Parents and carers can also get advice about their children's teeth easily, from the oral health professional. The centre has excellent links with other agencies in the borough, so that it can provide all users with the health, social and support services they need.

The centre told us that they are trying to develop services for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families, and we have asked senior staff to develop these services further. If you belong to this group, they would be pleased to have your suggestions about the services you would find useful. Senior staff have also recognised the need to improve children's speaking skills in order to prepare them better for school life. The centre will be working closely with parents and carers in order to do this.

The senior staff do an outstanding job in the way they run the centre. They have created a bright, clean, well-resourced environment where all are welcome. They are particularly skilled in monitoring the work of the centre to see how it can be improved further. Procedures for safeguarding are excellent and all legal requirements for this are fully met.

You told us that you feel the centre values your views and ideas, and we know that some of you are very involved in the running of the centre, for example through the partnership board or by organising groups such as the 'Knit and Natter'. Many of you have gained new skills through the courses and groups run by the centre. We hope

that you will all continue to enjoy the benefits of what the centre offers you and your families, and take advantage of exciting new developments such as the opening of the Green Room.

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