

Inspection report for Oak Tree Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	367846
Inspection dates	21–22 June 2011
Reporting inspector	David Speakman

Centre governance	Nottinghamshire County Council
Centre leader	Susan Kent
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Oak Tree Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Cherubs Childcare East Midlands [EY320425]

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 one additional inspector and one early years' inspector.

The inspectors had meetings with the centre coordinator, the senior district coordinator and the interim team manager. Inspectors held discussions with the centre's staff, senior leadership team and representatives from the outcome groups. They met with a number of representatives of services who work through the children's centre. Inspectors spoke to groups of parents and carers and with the headteacher and Early Years Foundation Stage leader at Oak Tree Primary School. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Oak Tree Children's Centre is situated on the site of Oak Tree Primary School, Mansfield. The centre is purpose built and opened in April 2006. It serves the local area along with Oak Tree Primary, Wynndale Primary and St Patrick's Catholic Primary Schools. Oak Tree Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre which provides the full core offer.

Most recent estimates indicate that there are 432 children aged nought to five years living in the centre's reach area, of which 216 are classed as living in poverty. Most families are White British. There are 18 minority ethnic children living on the Oak Tree Lane Estate. Early years' provision is through Cherubs Childcare, the nursery at Oak Tree Primary School, Learning Ladder and 12 local childminders. Most children enter day care and early education with skills that are low in comparison to those expected for their age. Most other services operate from the children's centre but a few are held off-site in partnership with Oak Tree Primary & Nursery School, Cherubs & Learning Ladder Day-care, the Neighbourhood Management Team, Barrowhill Business Support and other local agencies

Oak Tree Estate is a Neighbourhood Element area, which means it has been recognised as one of the country's top three per cent of neighbourhoods in greatest need. Oak Tree has the fifth highest unemployment rate in Mansfield, with 25% of the working-age residents claiming benefits. The crime rate in the Oak Tree area is high. Just over a quarter of residents in the area live in social housing.

Oak Tree Children's Centre works in close partnership with Bellamy Children's Centre. The centre coordinator, who joined the staff in January, manages both centres and staff work across the two centres. Oak Tree Children's Centre is managed directly by Nottinghamshire County Council's Children, Families & Cultural Services.

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 Tree Children's Centre provides outstanding support for children and families. The excellent leadership and management at all levels are highly effective in ensuring outstanding provision and outstanding outcomes for the children and their families who use the centre.

Partnerships with partner agencies are exceptionally strong. Staff work closely with other professionals to ensure sessions are highly productive. Careful consideration is given to the planning of all activities, and staff pay great attention to detail to ensure sessions are highly effective in a range of outcome areas. Child health drop-in sessions exemplify this feature of the centre's work. Although this session is advertised as 'an opportunity to have your baby weighed and seek advice from the health visitor', the session provides much more than this. The centre teacher and a children's worker are present and provide highly valued play opportunities, while modelling positive behaviour management very effectively. Staff respond very well to parents' and carers' concerns and there is a room available for private discussion. Those attending value what is on offer. 'I always enjoy coming to the baby group to get my baby weighed, but it's always nice to see toys for the older children and there's always plenty of useful advice.' The centre would like to offer a similar high-quality service to pregnant mothers and their partners in order to overcome any pre-birth difficulties they may be experiencing and to prepare them for parenthood at an

early stage. Staff are aware that they do not manage to reach all pregnant parents and their partners.

A cornerstone of the centre's work is the excellent care, guidance and support it provides to all users, but especially to those who are vulnerable. Case study evidence shows that families have received exceptionally well integrated and sensitive support from family support workers in times of crisis. This is as a result of the carefully thought out programmes of support agreed with the family members after they have been referred to the centre. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their parents and carers receive very effective support from the centre teacher and the team, helping them make good and sometimes outstanding progress in their learning and in overcoming any difficulties, such as delayed speech or challenging behaviour patterns. The building is a very safe and secure environment for all users. There are excellent procedures in place to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of everyone who uses or works at the centre.

The centre meets its statutory responsibilities for the promotion of equality and celebration of diversity exceptionally well. It has been particularly successful in engaging specific groups of minority ethnic parents. A small number of users speak English as an additional language. They are being or have been supported and have access to a wide range of resources to extend their own and their children's language skills. The building is designed to allow full access to children and adults with mobility difficulties.

A full evaluation of the centre's work and its impact on users' lives was made by the centre's leaders before the coordinator took up post at the beginning of the current year. In this short time, she has managed to lead a strong team of staff with high levels of wide-ranging expertise. Inspection evidence shows recent and rapid improvement in many areas of the provision and outcomes. Leadership and management are excellent at all levels and so the capacity to improve is outstanding.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Explore ways of increasing the number of families registering with the centre during pregnancy, to enable early intervention and joint working with partner agencies to minimise pre-birth difficulties and prepare families for imminent changes.

1

How good are outcomes for users?

The centre is very effective in the way it encourages its users to adopt healthy lifestyles. This is reflected in the portfolio that the centre has put together to apply for Healthy Centre status, showing the very positive impact it is having on its users' lifestyles. The centre is very effective in raising parents' and carers' awareness of

how to feed a family a healthy diet on a limited budget. The outdoor area is used well to give children opportunities to be physically active and take exercise. Staff work diligently to make sure that children and adults routinely follow hygiene procedures, such as hand washing at appropriate times and cleanliness in food preparation. Staff set excellent role models by keeping to recommended procedures themselves. The centre provides healthy snacks for children and adults. Family support workers are having a positive impact on reducing drug and alcohol abuse in families through the individual support programmes designed to help families.

The safety of all the centre's users, including those who are most vulnerable, is a high priority for the staff team. Risk assessments are used routinely and identify potential hazards accurately. These include looking after the family support workers while working off site. The Common Assessment Framework is used very effectively to identify what type of support is needed at any particular time in individual focused cases. Case study evidence shows that vulnerable children and their families or adults at risk of domestic abuse are experiencing very positive outcomes as a result of the centre's work. Family support workers, the centre teacher and children's workers know the families and individuals they work with particularly well. As a result, early identification and prevention play a key role in the centre's work to reduce harm to children and adults. Centre workers have earned a great deal of trust from the community and are held in very high regard. As a result, parents and carers cooperate fully, even where a child protection plan is in place or to be actioned. One mother wrote, 'My children still experience difficulties but, as for me, I am totally different. Without all the different agencies involved through Sure Start, my family wouldn't be a family.' Case studies pay testimony to the success that centre staff and professional partners are having with managing difficult behaviour, overcoming speech difficulties and helping new mothers bond with their children where there have been problems at and after birth.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage really enjoy their time at the centre and this adds positively to their learning. As a result, children make good progress. Observations of sessions demonstrate that children learn to concentrate for considerable periods of time because staff have high expectations of them. The children's worker team carefully observe and evaluate children's learning in sessions. Inspection evidence shows that language skills are still low when children transfer to the school nursery but that progress is good. However, children who have benefited from the excellent transition arrangements set up by the centre teacher in conjunction with Oak Tree School's nursery show they are very well prepared, particularly in their social skills. The centre has records that show good successes for parents and carers. The centre has helped adults who speak English as an additional language master the language so they can succeed. Other parents and carers have improved their own language and literacy skills so that they can support the learning of their own children who are now at school.

Users' contributions to the centre's work have a highly positive impact. Parents and carers contribute their views about the effectiveness of the centre through the parents' forum. Users thoughtfully evaluate sessions they have attended with their

children and the centre takes positive action to modify or improve its services as a result. Two parent volunteers run the very successful 'Little Acorns' group. This is a toddler session within the centre. The community involvement worker and children's centre staff have consulted and supported this group, helping them with decision-making processes, planning and play ideas. The volunteer organisers have grown in confidence and have recently successfully planned and secured funding for an educational trip to Sea Life Centre at Skegness, with 27 children and their families attending. Another family outing is planned for this summer. MADOOT (Making a Difference on Oak Tree) is a parent-led group which has evolved and is now a constituted group. They secured the funding for and planned a summer community event on Oak Tree Primary School grounds, 'Healthy World, Healthy People'. The aim of this event was to provide awareness for families on healthy eating and lifestyles and to increase additional activities throughout the school holidays. The event offered the opportunity to experience activities and food that could improve the health and well-being of their families and encourage more involvement in the local community. Events such as these make a significant contribution to the centre's promotion of community cohesion through which it very successfully integrates parents from different age groups, backgrounds, faiths and cultures. For example, teenage parents who attended sessions at the centre expressed a preference to mix with different age groups rather than have activities specifically focused on them.

Parents are supported successfully in their building of skills which prepare them to get back into work. The centre's professional partners give invaluable advice, for example, on CV writing, and prepare adults for potential interviews when job seeking. Parents and carers have a good range of information, advice and guidance regarding childcare options at the centre and in the local area. Financial advice sessions are used well by parents to help them with budgeting and looking after a family on a limited budget.

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	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	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

1

Thorough assessment procedures are highly effective in making sure that the services provided are planned to meet the targeted needs of individual families and the community as a whole. The Common Assessment Framework model is often used to develop specific support plans for individual families. It is then used very effectively to monitor changing circumstances and adjust the programmes to match need at any particular time. Consequently, centre workers know service users and their needs very well. Partnership working across all the services provided by the centre is thought through very well. As a result, support for the most vulnerable families is highly effective. All children have access to good-quality day care and nursery education, which promote good achievement for children. Outcome groups, with representatives from a range of agencies who focus their monitoring on a particular area of the outcomes, such as being healthy and staying safe, meet regularly to discuss provision and outcomes. The group leader informs the senior leadership team at regular meetings to ensure services are meeting users' needs. The centre teacher and children's workers are skilled in the observation and assessment of children's learning. This means that the progress of all children who attend groups such as the crèche, 'Stay and Play' or 'Little Acorns' is rigorously assessed.

The needs of different community groups are met very well through careful assessment of local need, listening to the views of service users and the highly valued parents' forum. This means that learning for adults is purposeful and relevant to their situations. Mansfield district children's centres have set up a district group for fathers. This meets regularly and draws in a good number of fathers from different children's centres in the area. This provides an opportunity for fathers, some of whom may be living away from the family and visiting their children, to join in activities with their children. Adults who speak English as an additional language are helped to improve their English language skills. Parents who spoke to the inspectors were very positive about the centre and the impact their experiences have had on their lives and those of their families. They enjoy meeting other parents and socialising.

Parents and carers report very positively about the care, guidance and support that outreach work provides. Most of the centre workers are very well established, and a high level of trust in them and their work has built up over time. Parents and carers express confidence in what the centre does for them, whether helping family members overcome domestic violence, or helping them deal with a child's difficult behaviour. One parent reported, 'My child had difficulty coping with change and was easily upset by change. Through the support of our key worker and attending children's groups at the centre, he is now coping with life in the nursery.'

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	2
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 arrangements are excellent and there are challenging lines of accountability operating at different levels, holding centre leaders and those with responsibility accountable for their work. Managers at all levels are fully committed to improving outcomes for children and their families in the reach area. The centre coordinator ensures that the local advisory group is well informed about the services offered and the impact on the community. Improvement planning is secure and targets for development are challenging, but designed to be realistic and achievable. All staff and professional partners are fully involved in development planning through the outcome groups and the parents' forum. As a result of highly effective management and outstanding outcomes for users, value for money is excellent.

Centre workers are enthusiastic, and staff files show they have high levels of expertise in the areas of their work through regular and up-to-date training, including training on safeguarding and child protection. Morale is high and workers are proud of what they do. The headteacher of Oak Tree Primary school values highly how the centre overcomes barriers to engagement among the community. This makes the school's task of engaging parents and carers much more straightforward than it might otherwise be. The centre runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis, and the well-being of all users is a key priority. The centre coordinator and senior leadership team have developed robust systems and procedures to ensure that provision is fully integrated. The centre knows itself well and self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate. The team takes into account a wide range of views when self-evaluating and they know, for example, which user groups they wish to engage with further.

The centre meets all the requirements with regard to promoting equality, celebrating diversity and tackling discrimination extremely well. The centre gathers valuable information about the different user groups and evaluates their engagement. Case study evidence confirms very effective work with children and parents from minority ethnic groups. Children with disabilities are provided for well, both in the physical accessibility of the building and by access to appropriate professional support. The centre recognises that both male and female family members may be subject to abuse and is ready to support a wide range of community members experiencing difficulties in this area.

Safeguarding takes a high priority in the centre's work. The centre is well maintained

and health and safety issues are sorted out quickly. It keeps detailed files containing information on, for example, staff qualifications. Records indicate that all staff working at the centre have been subject to an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. Child protection procedures are very effective and workers strive to make sure that early intervention helps minimise risk. The centre works extremely effectively with its professional partners and multi-agency cooperation is very effective. The emotional health and well-being of its users are provided for exceptionally well.

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	2

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

The Early Years Inspections of Cherubs Childcare (17 November 2006) was not recent enough to be used to help inform the outcomes of this inspection. The aligned Section 5 Inspection at Oak Tree Primary School and Nursery was used to help inform the outcomes of this inspection. Some outcomes of this inspection, namely low attainment on entry to the nursery and leaders' views on the centre's highly effective links with parents were used to guide inspection outcomes for Oak Tree Children's Centre.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Oak Tree Sure Start Children's Centre on 21–22 June 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Thank you to those of you who spared the time to talk to us. Your views and comments were very useful in helping us make our judgements. We were very impressed by the level of trust and confidence that you show in the centre workers. This trust is exceptionally important and has been built up over time. Your safety and welfare and that of your children are given high priority. Centre workers have excellent relationships with professional organisations and use these connections really well to make sure packages of support are well targeted and that you get help quickly. This is having a very positive impact on your lives and those of your children. However, the help the centre provides could be even more effective for parents, carers and babies if the centre could make earlier contact with some of you, preferably before your babies are born. This would help minimise problems and help parents adjust to the imminent changes. We have asked the centre to look at ways of achieving this.

Through well-thought-out advice and guidance and effective role modelling provided by the centre, you and your families are developing a very good understanding of how to keep yourselves and your community safe and healthy. To recognise its success in this area, the centre has recently completed its portfolio to apply for Healthy Centre status.

Your centre is preparing your children for school very well. The Early Years Foundation Stage teacher at Oak Tree Nursery is very impressed with the way your children settle in once they have passed through the children's centre's transition programme. Your children are making good progress in their learning and it is clear that you all enjoy your time at the centre. Some of you told us how the centre has helped you to develop personally and educationally. Your centre helps many of you to develop your skills so that your future prospects of employment and ability to run your households are improved.

Your centre provides many opportunities for you to tell staff what you think about the centre and the services provided. Centre staff often talk to service users at the end of sessions and the parents' forum represents your views effectively. Initial assessments for those of you who have a family support worker, make sure you are involved in deciding what activities and services the centre needs to provide for you. Your centre is supporting many families who are vulnerable and need help. The

centre has registered a good proportion of all families in its area and this is a creditable achievement.

A good number of you confirm how well the centre has supported you, particularly in times of crisis. Those of you we spoke to, or those who have written testimonials, have very high regard for the impact of outreach work and the educational support given where needed. We agree that the quality of support provided by the centre is excellent. Centre staff, and the other professionals they work closely with, care a great deal about you and are committed to improving your lives. They constantly seek improvement in service provision and have your welfare at the heart of their work.

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