

Inspection report for Oak Trees Children's Centre

Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	367847
Inspection dates	22–23 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Anna Coyle

Centre governance	Redditch Borough Council
Centre leader	Judith Willis
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Oak Hill First School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Sneakers Day Care

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.

An inspection of the maintained first school and nursery 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, senior staff, outreach workers, health workers, family support workers and representatives from the local authority and the advisory board. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Oak Trees Children's Centre is a phase two centre, which is on the same site as Oak Hill First School. It was designated as a children's centre in 2007 and provides the full core offer in collaboration with the YMCA. The centre is part of a cluster of six children's centres. It serves an area in which the proportion of families on benefits and the levels of worklessness are high. Most families are from White British backgrounds. Children's knowledge, skills and abilities on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is below that expected for their age.

The centre is overseen by Redditch Borough Council. Governance of the centre has been delegated to the governing body of Oak Hill First School. It works closely with the advisory board, and both contribute to the centre's strategic management and direction. Outreach services include activities which are held at St Luke's First School.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

The centre serves users effectively in its reach area and the wider community. It is led and managed exceedingly well by the centre leader and operational leader who have very high expectations. They work closely with senior leaders to provide an outstanding sense of ambition and drive. Together with the staff, governing body and advisory board, they ensure very clear strategic direction and vision for the centre. Self-evaluation outstanding and challenging targets are set. Because of these very strong features and the centre's excellent track record of improvement since it opened in 2008, its capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding.

A key strength is the excellent quality of care, guidance and support provided for users. This is reflected in the centre's warm, welcoming and friendly environment. Staff have detailed knowledge of the reach area, its families and their needs, which is enhanced by good multi-agency partnerships. This helps them to identify families who are potentially vulnerable and tailor services to users' individual needs. Diversity is celebrated well and users of all backgrounds are fully included in activities.

Outcomes are good. Users achieve well and enjoy the activities provided for them. They make good progress in their personal and social development. Children behave well and form good relationships with adults and their peers. Parents, carers and children say that they feel safe. They appreciate the centre's commitment to providing a secure, attractive environment and to meeting their needs. Safeguarding is a priority. Good steps are taken to assess the risk of activities and procedures are well known by all staff. Parental comments confirm that, 'It is always very clean here and toys are of good quality' and, 'During Baby Time, guest speakers come to talk about first aid and safety in the home.'

Leaders monitor the centre's work carefully and make good use of data to help them keep a check on the impact of the centre's activities and outreach services. All staff work well to promote positive outcomes for children and their families. Users say that they feel their views are valued and taken into account through regular surveys. The centre has a parents' forum but this only meets infrequently. Thus, parents and carers do not have sufficient opportunities to contribute to the decision-making and

governance of the centre. The engagement of users who are potentially vulnerable because of their circumstances is monitored closely. Those who are hard to reach are identified and good steps are taken to increase their involvement, but the take-up of integrated services among some groups, especially fathers, is limited but increasing steadily.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Provide more opportunities for users to contribute to decision-making and governance through the parents' forum and the advisory board.
- Encourage hard-to-reach groups, especially fathers, to make greater use of the centre's services.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Health outcomes are good because the centre staff promote this aspect of provision well. Users have good access to activities that improve their health and that of their children. The proportion of mothers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding is above average and immunisation rates are high. Antenatal and paediatric clinics help them to care for themselves before and after the birth of their babies. Children have regular access to the attractive outdoor area and they eat healthy fruit for snack, such as strawberries, melon and pineapple. All users, including families with children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, benefit from integrated services. They participate in regular events, including 'Yoga for pregnancy', 'Baby Yoga' and the 'Baby Time' programme, which promote healthy lifestyles.

Parents and carers say that the centre is a 'safe, secure and supportive environment' in which they are confident to approach practitioners and discuss different issues. They benefit from the staff's good knowledge of health and safety, and their good supervision during activities. Families whose circumstances make them vulnerable are assessed carefully through the Common Assessment Framework and there are good links with various agencies to support children who have child protection plans. 'Child safety week' contributes to parents' and carers' good understanding of how to stay safe, and good steps are taken to promote safety in the home. Families are signposted effectively to the most suitable support when they most need it. Valuable support is offered to users who experience domestic violence through the 'Freedom Programme' and courses that focus on building self-esteem. Records known as 'Family Journeys' demonstrate the effectiveness of the centre's intervention and the very positive impact it has had upon the lives of parents, carers and children.

Users say that they and their children enjoy attending activities: 'The centre is convenient and accessible. Services are inclusive and staff are non-judgemental. I feel really comfortable here.' Users improve their personal and social development and confidence through 'My Time Counselling' and other activities such as 'Stay and Play'. The centre's data show that when children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage their knowledge and skills are below those expected for their age. The gap is

closing between the lowest-achieving children and their peers, and children achieve well during their time at the centre.

Children behave well and develop positive relationships with each other and with adults. They enjoy learning and play happily together when expressing themselves in creative activities. They develop skills for the future successfully as they socialise and interact with others and share stories with the librarian. Parents and carers contribute to the centre through regular surveys and questionnaires. However, there are insufficient opportunities for them to contribute to decision-making and the governance of the centre through the parents' forum or advisory board.

The centre has encouraged a good number of users to train as volunteers. Many have remained as volunteers at the centre or moved into further training or employment. Good links with organisations such as Jobcentre Plus have helped to facilitate this and given users the opportunity to improve their independence.

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, 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	2

How good is the provision?

2

Users express satisfaction that the centre does all it can to assess and meet their needs. 'Family Voice' sheets enable parents and carers to share their own observations of their children and have a valuable input into the centre's tracking of children's progress. Accurate assessments of users' needs are made by collating an increasing amount of information provided by health professionals, external agencies and the local authority. These lead to an individualised approach and good signposting of users to outreach services that meet their needs most effectively.

The centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment exceedingly well because staff have a secure understanding of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They use their knowledge very effectively to help children build on their limited skills on entry. As a result, children learn well and make good progress, although they have a lot of ground to make up: 58% of children who

accessed the centre's services last year attained at least 78 points across the six areas of learning.

A good range of services is provided that meets the needs of users and the wider community. Staff have successfully increased the involvement of teenage parents, lone parents and families from workless households. The centre also targets groups of users who would benefit from particular activities, such as 'One-to-One Additional Needs Support' and the 'Quit Smoking' drop-in session, and participation rates are good. The centre promotes users' understanding of the wider community effectively and celebrates cultural events such as Diwali and Christmas.

Outstanding care, guidance and support are major features of the centre's provision. Excellent support for families in crisis has led to striking examples of where the centre has made significant contributions to the welfare of parents, carers and children. Sensitive advice and guidance are provided through helpful leaflets and displays as well as regular 'My Time Counselling' sessions. Individual advice on accessing benefits or seeking employment is very well targeted and the centre uses external services exceptionally well. This means that users often overcome barriers to their learning and personal development.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
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	2
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?

2

The centre leader has high expectations of herself and of those around her. She works very effectively with the operational manager and YMCA family services manager to provide efficient day-to-day management and professional supervision. Highly accurate self-evaluation is underpinned by a strong understanding of the reach area. Well-qualified staff are committed to fulfilling the centre's aims and priorities. Their roles are clearly defined and there is a strong sense of teamwork, ambition and drive. This leads to an integrated and cohesive approach to providing services for adults and children. The governing body provides good strategic direction for the centre and holds leaders to account through regular evaluations and target setting. It works well with the advisory board which is representative of the local community, although there are too few parents or carers to represent users' views.

Safeguarding is given paramount importance and arrangements are well managed.

Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are conducted to ensure the suitability of the adults who work with the children and records are updated regularly. Staff are well trained in child protection awareness and are qualified in administering first aid. They are vigilant about fire safety and make careful checks of any potential risks presented by activities.

Partnership work is effective and makes a strong contribution to improving outcomes for users. The centre is one of a cluster of four in the reach area, plus two other centres that are run by the YMCA. It has strong and effective links with all of the centres that benefit users considerably. The centre provides good value for money and ensures that staff promote equality and celebrate diversity well. Plentiful resources are easily accessible and cover a variety of cultures. Parents and carers say that they feel fully included and there have been successful attempts to engage hard-to-reach groups, although a few are more difficult to engage, especially fathers.

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	2
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	2
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	2
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 private day-care provision, known as 'Sneakers' was inspected recently and judged to be outstanding. The inspection of Oak Hill First school took place at the same time as the inspection of the 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 Trees Children's Centre on 22–23 June 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us. All of you were positive about your experiences at the centre and you told us that you feel happy and safe there. We could see for ourselves how much your children enjoy using the attractive and colourful toys during 'Baby Time' and 'Stay and Play'! The activities that the staff provide are exceedingly well planned and of good quality and they provide a good range of sessions and programmes. As a result, children are prepared well for the next stages of their learning and development. The centre is good at helping you to train as volunteers or go on to further education and employment with the help of representatives from Jobcentre Plus.

The centre has some excellent features. It provides outstanding care, guidance and support for you and your children and it promotes excellent learning, development and enjoyment. As a result, your children make good progress in their learning and achieve well. The centre leader is very effective and instils an excellent sense of ambition and drive among senior leaders and staff. Self-evaluation is highly accurate. This means that everyone at the centre works together as a good team to provide the best that they can for you and point you in the right direction to outreach services. You told us that you appreciate all that they do for you and your children, including the 'My Time Counselling' sessions and one-to-one support. The brand new building at St Luke's School is to be used for more outreach services.

The centre staff take good steps to protect you and your children and make sure that the safeguarding arrangements are secure. All of the staff have been vetted to ensure that they are suitable to work with children and staff are well qualified in health and safety and in administering first aid. The governing body checks on the

centre's work effectively and helps it to improve. Even though your centre is good, the leaders and staff are determined to make it even better. We have asked them to do two things. We want them to provide more opportunities for you to contribute to decision-making and governance through the parents' forum and the advisory board. We also want the staff to encourage more groups, especially fathers, to make greater use of the centre's services.

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