

Inspection report for The Oasis Children's Centre

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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY381650 Oasis Nursery

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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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, representatives of centre users, parents and carers, and the Chair of the Advisory Board. They met with representatives of the local authority and visited the linked early years provision, Oasis Nursery. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Oasis Children's Centre is a phase one children's centre providing the full core offer to a community which is in one of the 30% most-deprived wards in the country. It is managed by the local authority and was designated in September 2006. The centre shares a site with the Oasis Community Centre. The community centre is managed by a community trust. There are 789 children aged under five years living in the centre's reach area. The majority of the children in the reach area live in the Waterlees ward within the Fenland district of Cambridgeshire, which encompasses areas with high levels of deprivation, low educational outcomes and low aspirations. There is a high number of workless families dependant on state benefits. Housing consists primarily of local authority homes and rented accommodation. On entry to school children's range of skills and knowledge are below those expected for their age.

A high proportion of families in the community are White British, with an increasing population from minority ethnic groups. In recent times the area has seen a significant number of families from eastern European countries, that were previously transient, settling in the area. There is also a very small Traveller community. A small but increasing proportion of users speak English as an additional language.

Full day care provision, for children aged from six weeks to five years, is delivered by Oasis Nursery which is based in the centre and is open from 8.00am to 6.00pm

throughout the year. The staff team has been through a period of significant change since the centre opened, but there is now an established staff team and clear management. The advisory board includes representatives from a number of community partners.

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 families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The centre’s overall effectiveness is satisfactory. It provides a caring and safe environment for all families and children who access it. Users of the centre who spoke to inspectors expressed that they think ‘the centre does a good job’. The centre has had to overcome a number of barriers in order to establish itself within the local community. There have been a significant number of managers since it opened which has lead to staff having to cope with different leadership styles and approaches to service delivery. In addition, there have been organisational changes within the local authority and the constraints caused by cross-border partnerships. However, the centre now has a stable staff team and clear management is given by the current centre manager.

The advisory body provides satisfactory governance for the centre in conjunction with the local authority. The centre staff work well to ensure that the day-to-day running of the centre is smooth and efficient. There is a concerted effort to increase engagement of families in the reach area. The centre has started to identify strategies for making contact with the harder to reach families, but these are at a very early stage of implementation, therefore it is too soon to measure the impact they are having. However, case study evidence indicates that those vulnerable adults and their families and carers who are accessing the centre are experiencing positive outcomes as a result of the centre’s work. The centre is especially effective at supporting families when they turn to the centre at times of crisis.

Although parents have access to a range of services to support them back into employment, the centre does not offer courses in literacy, numeracy or information and communication technology. The centre does signpost to other appropriate

organisations which offer such courses. A range of parenting courses is offered through the locality team such as 'Raising children' and '123 magic'. However, the centre does not collect robust data to track and monitor the progress of these learners and the numbers of referrals made are very small. Therefore, insufficient adults are receiving services to support them gain the skills and knowledge to support their children's development and to gain qualifications or employment.

The centre's provision is satisfactory and is inclusive and equally welcoming to all. Planning of activities and events is thorough and sometimes includes clear objectives and increasingly using a common format. Staff are sensitive to the needs of parents and carers and they work diligently to ensure that all groups of adults and children are made to feel welcome. The centre is able to refer parents to the day-care provision which is located within the same building as the children's centre and which was judged to be good when last inspected.

On the whole, partnerships are sound and users benefit from a sufficient range of activities that take place within the centre. The centre works effectively with health visitor services both in an outreach capacity and through operating a baby clinic to promote improved outcomes for some families. Involvement by the midwife services are improving but currently the centre's ability to engage pregnant mothers is limited. Similarly, partnerships with some organisations, such as, the community centre and local primary school are not yet operating sufficiently well. However, the centre has plans in place to build upon the sound relationships it has with these organisations to ensure that they continue to work together for the benefit of families in the community.

Protecting children is embedded in the centre's practice; good safeguarding arrangements ensure the safety and well-being of children and all service users. Risks are assessed and minimised thoroughly. Staff receive regular training and updates on safeguarding and child protection to ensure that they are confident to carry out their duties to protect children.

Self-evaluation is reasonably accurate because the centre manager is beginning to analyse data more precisely. However, the centre has yet to develop effective mechanisms for measuring precisely the impact its services have on outcomes for users. The centre also recognises that more needs to be done to ensure all potential users are reached. The centre manager has a very clear understanding of what the centre needs to do to improve further. Realistic plans have been developed which take account of these areas and link to a clear vision for the future direction of the centre.

Given satisfactory outcomes overall and the current range of provision, the centre demonstrates satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve liaison with the adjacent community centre and primary school.
- Improve further monitoring and evaluation systems at the centre to clearly show the impact of the children's centre's work on outcomes for children and families.
- Provide more opportunities for users to attend parenting classes and adult education classes and monitor the numbers of user who attend these classes.
- Extend outreach work to meet a wider range of needs in the local area.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre offers a satisfactory range of child and family services which effectively promote children's, parents' and carers' emotional well-being, physical health and understanding of how to adopt healthy lifestyles. Effective partnership working with health services, and in particular with health visitors, helps some families to have a healthy lifestyle. It also enables efficient referrals for those who require this, including young parents. There has been some success in helping adults stop smoking by provision of information and individual support.

Children attending the centre are encouraged to behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. Users say they feel safe at the centre and are building trusting relationships with the staff. Consequently, parents and carers are confident to share any concerns with centre staff. There is a strong commitment to multi-agency working to establish arrangements to support families' safety. Child protection arrangements are widely publicised and clearly understood. Families gain sound knowledge about improving their own safety through the centre's involvement in initiatives such as 'National Safety Week'. Despite this, emergency admissions to hospital for children in the area remain high. External agencies report that the centre uses the Common Assessment Framework sensibly and its use is embedded in the centres assessment practice. As a result, families receive appropriate support when they need it most.

'Stay and Play' sessions held at the centre are valued by users and seen by parent and carers as somewhere to have fun with their children and socialise with other adults. Topics such as healthy eating are incorporated to promote children's health. Parents comment that they find the groups are 'friendly' and many attended on a regular basis. Parents are encouraged and supported in becoming involved in their

children's play-based learning.

The library service provide weekly 'Rhyme time' sessions at the centre. The centre is seen as a satellite of the library and parent and carers are able to borrow books. This encourages parents and carers to enjoy singing and reading with their children in the centre and at home they can share stories with their children. A multi-lingual support worker attends these sessions which has encouraged a few families who speak English as an additional language to attend.

The centre is becoming more established in the community, and more families are accessing its services. Adults using the centre are respectful of one another and of staff. Users are able to communicate their views about the services offered by the centre through evaluations and questionnaires. A parents' group is attended by a few users and allows those who attend to give feedback on the activities offered by the centre. It is recognised by the centre that a greater attendance is required to improve users involvement in the decision making process at the centre. In addition, evaluation systems are yet to be fully embedded; subsequently, there is insufficient evidence to establish the strengths of all outcomes. Nevertheless, families are given useful information and opportunities to help improve outcomes for themselves and their families.

Staff from Jobcentre Plus regularly attend activities such as 'Stay and Play' at the centre to offer advice and support to parents and carers on learning and employment opportunities. Positive interventions from centre staff have led to increased economic stability for some. Case studies report increased access to relevant benefits, re-housing and purposeful advice about employment opportunities; however, the impact of centre users' engagement with Jobcentre Plus is also unknown because information is not sought or provided.

A few parents provided strong testimonies to the inspectors, which demonstrate how the centres support has raised aspirations and encouraged them to attend training to develop skills. Some express how their confidence has been raised through attending programmes offered by the centre and through support from the senior family intervention workers. However, the centre does not provide sufficient opportunities for centre users to undertake a range of volunteering roles. For the few who are successfully signposted to courses such as English classes and numeracy courses, the centre does not pursue information and data from training providers to confirm successes or achievements, so outcomes are unknown.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal	3

and social development	
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre engages with some groups in the community and meets the needs of these families reasonably well. The centre has a clear view of the needs of those who do use the centre and provides a sound range of services. The centre has a less secure picture of the percentage of families who are not registered or accessing services. This is partly due to a recent transition to a new information management system. Although the centre has a sound understanding of the vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups within the community, they have yet to make contact with a significant number of them. However, this has been identified within current action plans.

The centre promotes purposeful learning and development for adults and children who attend the provision. For example, the 'Stay and Play' sessions provide many learning opportunities as well as providing a good social forum for children and adults. Staff are skilled and they work hard to meet individual needs. The activities provided are presented and resourced well so they are enjoyable and satisfying for all users. However, the centre does not provide sufficient opportunity for parents to attend parenting courses and accredited training courses.

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to young children, parents and other users of the centre is a strong feature of Oasis. Families receive a high level of support and they are well supported in times of personal difficulty. All staff are trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework. It is testament to their skills that colleagues in social care have commented that centre staff 'go the extra mile' and 'are offering a very valuable service to families when they most need it.' Families approach staff with confidence and recognise the centre as a place of safety. The satisfactory range of services supports users' emotional as well as physical well-being. Parents comment that, 'The reassurance is priceless.'

The centre has developed relationships with local childminders who use the centre to hold weekly activities. The centre is beginning to form closer working relationships with the primary schools but this is in a very early stage. The centre links with the community centre which is in the same building as the children's centre for activities such as celebrating 'National Playday' and 'National Safety Week'. However, the children's centre recognises that more could be done to improve the relationships.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Governance and accountability arrangements and clear roles and responsibilities at all levels of leadership and management are becoming established and understood . Sound partnership working ensures an integrated approach to service delivery is forming and therefore services are continuing to improve and reaching out to more families within the community. For example, the centre was involved in the 'Waterlee's Project' with the Locality team over the summer holidays. This resulted in a few hard-to-reach families registering at the centre. In addition, it has lead to further collaborative outreach work being planned.

The centre has actively encouraged partners, such as health visitors, to deliver their services on-site. This has improved information sharing and partnership working, particularly in relation to early intervention and prevention work. However, difficulties in the recruitment of health visitors to vacant post in the area have had a detrimental effect on this. All agencies are aware of this difficulty and working hard to overcome it. The centre provides regular management reports to the advisory board which is involved in the evaluation of services and is beginning to provide sufficient challenge to the centre. The advisory board includes an appropriate range of user representatives from partner services. At the last meeting it did have representation from parents and carers. A few parents are involved with the parents' group to provide ideas and feedback about the centre. For example, the time of the 'Stay and Play' session was changed at the request of the group and a suggestion box has been made available to seek the views of all users of the centre. However, parents' contributions to decision-making and shaping of services is limited, despite the centre's efforts to encourage them to attend.

Inspectors observed strong mutual relationships between parents and centre staff. Centre staff work well together and show a strong commitment to making a difference to the families with which they work. Staff feel valued and are confident that their voice will be heard. They have access to a range of training courses, ensuring they are well qualified and up to date. A high priority is given to safeguarding families in the centre. Stringent safe recruitment procedures are followed and all relevant checks are made to ensure that staff are suitable and safe to work with children. Health and safety checks and risk assessments are appropriately carried out. High regard is given to inter-agency working to promote

and safeguard children's welfare, and these processes are effective. Child protection processes are thorough and robust.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. Staff try hard to remove barriers for all users to the activities and services on offer; for example, by providing crèche facilities for parents and carers to attend the parents' group. In addition, work with Traveller families has resulted in a significant increase in the number of Traveller families registered with the centre. The centre has offered a successful weekly session for dads. However, interest has declined and the centre is exploring ways to re-launch this session. In addition, staff are aware that, currently, children and their families with special educational needs and/or disabilities are not targeted effectively for support.

The centre manager is influential in developing the provision to meet local need and she leads an enthusiastic and dedicated staff team. For example, in response to an increasing number of reported cases of domestic violence, a member of the staff team is receiving training so they can offer the 'Freedom Programme' to support victims of domestic violence. The centre is collecting a wide range of data to help it develop its services but there is a general lack of evidence to show the impact of the centre's work on outcomes. The introduction of performance management systems is at a very early stage and, currently, staff are unable to evaluate the longer-term impact of the centre on improving outcomes for children and adults, including those from target groups.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money because they have developed services adequately according to the needs of those accessing the centre and are now beginning to reach out into the wider community for their views to shape services. They have a number of new projects starting, however, it is too early to evaluate the impact of some of these new projects but a strong sense of forward planning is clear.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

Inspectors took into account the inspection report relating to the Oasis Nursery which was completed in December 2009. This inspection report judged the childcare provision to be good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the The Oasis Children's Centre on 28–29 September 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The inspection team were made aware that the centre has had a number of different managers since it first opened. Consequently, the centre has not been as effective as it could have been. However, it now has a stable staff team that is committed to improving the lives of families in the community especially those of you who are in most need. The centre is a happy and welcoming place for adults and their children and strives to meet the needs expressed by those who use it.

Some of you told us you feel you and your families are safe at the centre and we agree. Safeguarding you and your children is given a high priority. The centre manager and staff team provide a friendly atmosphere and you trust them to give you support and help when you need it. There is sound partnership working to deliver a better range of services, with organisations such as health services, Jobcentre Plus, Oasis Nursery and the library service. However, we have asked the centre to build stronger relationships with the community centre and the primary school to enhance further the services it provides to you.

The quality of learning and development opportunities for you and your children are satisfactory. You told us that you and your children enjoy the 'Stay and Play' sessions. It gives you somewhere to go to meet other parents and carers and to get ideas on how to play with your children. Some of you have gained confidence through programmes offered by the centre. However, the centre does not give you enough opportunities to improve your parenting skills and to attend accredited

courses. We have asked the centre to provide more opportunities for adults to attend accredited courses to further improve skills that will help with employability and more parenting classes to help you support your children's development. In addition, we have asked the centre to track and monitor the progress of learners more closely especially those who they signpost to other organisation to obtain qualifications. This will assist the centre to monitor more closely the difference it is making for families in the area and target more closely to meet needs.

Some families who live in the centre's area use it regularly, but many families do not. We have also asked the centre to increase the outreach work it is currently doing so that it can reach out to families, who are for what every reason, not attending the centre.

The centre is considering ways in which it can offer you the opportunity to volunteer to help at the centre and to get more of you involved with making decisions about how the centre is run through being on the advisory board. We are aware that some of you have brought about changes to the centre such as changing the times of the 'Stay and Play' session through your attendance at the parents' group. We would like more of you to join this group and offer more suggestions on how to improve the centre.

Finally, We have also asked the centre to improve its monitoring and evaluation systems, including commissioned services, to clearly show the impact of its work on outcomes for children and families. The leadership team has appropriate plans in place to address this issue and we have every confidence that it will be successful.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honesty and openness helped us immensely during the inspection. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future.

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