

Inspection report for The Orchard Children's Centre

Local authority	Warrington
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY269371 Friends at Brook Acre

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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 co-located 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 one additional inspector and one early years inspector

The inspectors held meetings with the senior leadership team, staff members, advisory board members, partner agencies, users and local authority officers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The Orchard Children's centre is a phase one centre. It was designated in June 2009 and provides the full core offer of services. The centre operates from a purpose-built building on a campus on which there is also Brook Acre Community Primary School and Birch Grove Day Nursery. All three facilities share the use of a building (Little Acorns) which has a training room and an area designated as a sensory room. The centre covers the reach area of Poulton North in East Warrington and serves a population which includes 663 children under the age of five. Out of the seven super output areas that make up the reach area, two are in the 30% and three in the 10% most disadvantaged areas. The unemployment rate for the centre's reach area has decreased from 4.6% in 2009 to 4.3% in 2010, but is still higher than the average of the borough. At Brook Acre Primary School, 51% of the children are currently eligible for free school meals. The reach area has high levels of lone parents and teenage pregnancies. In addition, 22.7% of children living in the area served by the centre are in households dependent on workless benefits, which is slightly above the national average. The population of the area is mainly of White British heritage. Many children in the area enter Early Years provision with skills and knowledge below the levels expected for their age, especially in language and literacy.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The Orchard Children's Centre is a well-run centre providing good support and services. The centre manager gives clear leadership to the centre and is supported by a strong staff team. Management, staff and partner agencies share a strong commitment to meeting area needs and to improving outcomes for its users. The centre and the local authority service have recently had an extensive reorganisation, with many changes of staff and changes to centre activities, such as increasing the balance of targeted provision over more universal activities. One user commented that despite that, 'the centre staff have been totally professional and remained very focused on providing a welcome and a good service.' Morale at the centre is high and there is a strong commitment to improving the services provided to meet local needs and priorities.

The centre has good provision for teenage parents, and for most other target groups. There is good progress with partners in improving children's development and learning, such as with well-planned sessions to enhance speech and language, for which many staff have received additional training. Users of the centre trust the staff and value highly the help they receive. 'I would not know what I would have done without the care and friendship of staff here,' said one centre user. Family support work is very effective, including very extensive work in homes supported by sessions in the centre. However, the centre recognises that it has to extend what it offers for targeted groups and individuals, and is considering how best to extend outreach provision. The centre supports users' access to training and employability skills, although Jobcentre Plus is currently unable to provide tailored sessions in the centre. The centre contributes well to the improvement of most health outcomes.

The centre has a good capacity to improve, as it has a thorough process of reviewing its activities through systematic self-evaluation. This process has the very effective involvement of staff at all levels, of partners and of advisory board members, including parents who use the centre. The development plans are well-informed by these evaluations and by good local knowledge. They are starting to set specific targets for improvements.

There are some difficulties in the centre in accessing data that might better identify gaps in provision. Health partners are not able to share fully some of the work they do to support families, which makes it difficult for the centre to measure overall needs and effectiveness. Some of the local authority's early intervention work and other work by partners is recorded in different data bases, or relate to localities which do not coincide with the areas used by the centre in its work. This means that some of the data regarding numbers benefiting from support is under-recorded, so that measures to judge how well the centre is reaching its priority groups are not as robust as they could be. The local authority is conscious of this, and has identified ways to remedy this issue. The authority officers provide very thorough supervision of the centre and its staff, and ensure that improvement planning is robust and specific. The advisory board provides a very effective challenge for the work of the centre, and there is very good parental involvement. The information about development-planning provided to the staff and users of the centres is outstanding, and there is a clear display of targets and progress for users to see and comment upon.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the data available to the centre to inform target-setting and monitoring how the centre is meeting the needs of its area by:
 - better collection of data from partner organisations such as the health providers
 - producing data that includes work by the centre with priority users from outside the reach area, and the work at other locations which serve users from this centre's reach
 - collating data of all family support work, outreach activities, partner provision and centre programmes to give a better-informed review of the overall progress of the centre.
- Improve the rate of uptake of services provided including extended outreach provision.
- Monitor the quality of work to improve the economic stability of families in the area and access into training and education, and discuss with Jobcentre Plus ways to improve the service at the centre offered to lone parents and those seeking work in the area.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The users describe clearly how the centre provides a range of activities and support to improve their understanding and promote healthier lifestyles. Case studies clearly show how the provision is improving outcomes for some of the parents and children in its area. One parent stated 'I'm much less anxious as a parent, and I've learned how to use fresh ingredients in all the food I make for the baby.' There is good support in all the centre's activities to promote health, such as in the storytelling and children's library sessions, incorporating play, exercise and healthy eating. There are well-chosen and well-targeted sessions run with health visitors, such as 'Tiny Stars' which encourage play and health activities for parent and child, and 'Toddler Time' which promotes understanding of child development. Many of the local health activities are provided in local health clinics, but the centre provides additional sessions to complement this work, with community midwives and health visitors providing a wide range of advice sessions and drop-in activities. The centre provides very good support for parents to attend development and health clinics, and follows this up with supportive home visits, which lead to improvement in attendance.

Outcomes are achieved with very effective interagency working and particular close links with the Child Development Centre, youth and young parent services and specialist health provision. Smoking cessation projects are effective, and reduce the numbers who smoke during pregnancy. The Campus school and nursery jointly commission dental health initiatives with the centre, as the area has very high rates of oral health problems. There is some increase in registration with dentists, but it is still too early to see results. There is very good support for young parents, with targeted sessions to bring together support for their emotional and physical health, access to learning, raising aspirations and self-esteem, financial advice and sexual health advice. 'I find it much easier to come for antenatal advice in these sessions and my partner is also happy to come too. This has helped me with getting to college' one young mother explained.

The centre is safe and all activities use appropriate risk assessments. Families say that they and their children feel safe in the centre. They have guidance on how to improve home safety and many use the 'Safebuy' scheme at the centre to obtain home safety aids and equipment. Structured parenting programmes at the centre, such as the 'Webster Stratton for babies' supports parents, to improve skills and confidence, especially for those experiencing difficulties with children's behaviour.

The centre works well with the Early Years consultant and other providers in the area to identify priorities, and to plan very effective targeted work. Work in personal and social development and communication, language and literacy shows good progress, and the gap between the lowest-achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage is closing at a satisfactory rate, even though it's too early to see the full impact of current initiatives. The 'Learning Journeys' and feedback from partners show that 'Every Child a Talker' enables good progress in children's language development. Case studies also show improvements in the children's readiness to learn on entry to primary school. The centre gives very good

support for learners returning to education including advice, information and advocacy by employing an 'Learning Champion.' The centre provides tailored English and maths sessions for parents on site, with crèche support, and a wide range of skills and personal development courses. Jobcentre Plus supports the centre by providing information to the centre but currently does not provide help on site for lone parents or help in tackling joblessness. There are some local initiatives to increase the availability of jobs, but it is too early to see if the support offered through the centre will boost the prospects of the users.

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	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
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?

2

The centre offers effective support, guidance and care, and services that are of a good quality. Users express a high level of satisfaction with the centre's work, and the evaluations and 'Learning Journeys' demonstrate how their needs are met. The centre is very effective in giving information, and in signposting centre users to relevant sources of help. There is good partnership work with health and social care agencies with timely referrals to improve outcomes for families. Assessment of individual needs is very thorough and is monitored through well-run internal allocation meetings to establish the level of intervention needed.

There is good local knowledge, and the centre has regular contact with neighbourhood workers and community-based organisations to gather information about the wider community which does not access the centre's services. This is also used to develop outreach work. Local authority data further supports this, and in a current innovative pilot project, the authority's customer focus group are using profiles of non-participants in the area to identify ways of increasing the take-up of services and to identify any unmet needs. The centre recognises a need to increase the amount and range of outreach activities it offers, and has reorganised the centre support staff to help this, although improvements are too recent to see their effects. Targeted family support work also brings a wide range of resources and help into users' homes, and has strong outcomes on improving the lives of

families in the area. The achievements and progress children make is celebrated well in 'Learning Journeys' and photograph books.

The centre encourages breastfeeding, which has been particularly low in the area. Good peer support, the open access 'bosom buddies' sessions and advice from trained staff all improve the rates of mothers starting breastfeeding. There has been an even bigger rise in numbers who continue breastfeeding at six and eight weeks, and users of the centre praise the encouragement and advice they get. Parents and children are encouraged to drop in to use the outdoor play facilities, including an outdoor nature area and a courtyard equipped with musical play structures and screening to limit over-exposure to sun. Support for families of children with disabilities is improving, including joint work with 'Aiming High' and the authority's inclusion officer. The centre has consulted families about the best ways of supporting them, and as a result, is creating a new sensory room for the centre and campus partners.

Family Support Workers provide good targeted support for individual families and are valued and trusted by them. Some of the centre users who have experienced domestic abuse spoke of the particularly sensitive and caring support they had. An example, which they appreciated greatly, was that they could contact their support worker at any time of crisis by mobile phone. The centre works well with social care staff in supporting those on child protection plans, and there is good use of the Common Assessment Framework process to ensure safeguarding.

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	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The senior management team, local authority officers, partners and the advisory board have a very clear view of their roles and duties and how these all play a part in the centre's improvement. The centre's self-evaluation is very thorough, and staff, partners and centre users are actively involved in contributing towards it. It makes very full use of the data on national indicators, of evaluations of projects and activities which the centre promotes, and is supported by extensive case studies. The centre's development plans follow the national and local priorities for children's centres and also reflect local initiatives such as the strategies to tackle poverty and encourage neighbourhood regeneration. The annual conversation and well-conducted supervision sessions help in the setting of specific targets

and monitoring of progress. This is also supported by effective staff development and sharing of good practice.

The data regarding wider family support work, outreach, centre registrations and other early intervention work are not held in the same system, so there are some difficulties in getting an overview of all the support offered, which in turn affects monitoring and target-setting. The authority has recognised this, and is commissioning a new database intended to bring all this information together.

Safeguarding procedures are thorough and staff are well-prepared to support families experiencing domestic violence. The advisory board is well-informed and provides a very effective challenge. Outstanding support is given to parents to take a full part as members of the board, with additional briefing and capacity-building sessions. There is very close team working at all levels and between agencies to provide a service which is mostly well-integrated. The centre manager has provided outstanding management of change which followed from the recent reorganisation of the authority's services, and has worked well to deploy staff in the most appropriate way to meet the priority needs of the area. Induction of new members of staff is very thorough and underpins good professional practice. Morale of the centre is high and there is a strong and confident shared commitment to further improvements.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory, and centre's policies and practices promote inclusion for all. Performance monitoring is good, and the local authority's innovative approaches to commissioning services give additional tools to measure value for money, which is good. Users make a satisfactory contribution to offering their views on how the centre operates and feel that their opinions are valued. The centre manager and staff work hard to engage with the diverse users of the centre and give appropriate consideration to suggestions for improvement of the services that are provided.

Partnership working is very effective. A good range of partners successfully works together to support families and these are well coordinated. Services offered by partners help to increase the range of opportunities that the centre can offer to enable families improve their lives and enjoy activities at the centre. Partners such as the local schools, health services and community support bring a high level of expertise and experience to the centre. This contributes to the good-quality services such as health clinics and the Early Years learning that the centre offers. When crises arise in families, the response from the centre and its partners is prompt and effective in preventing problems from escalating.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use of ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2

The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
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	2
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

Brook Acre Community Primary School was inspected on 5 - 6 October 2011 and its findings were used to inform this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Orchard Children's Centre on 6 - 7 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us. We are also grateful that we could see how you are helped by the centre in the evaluations, case studies and 'Learning Journeys' that you've contributed to. We think that the Orchard Children's Centre is run well, and offers good support and good quality services to you. The centre manager and her staff team lead the centre well, and work hard with the centre's partner agencies so that they can do more to meet the needs of your area. We heard about recent changes in the centre and its services, and many of you commented on how well the centre has continued to cope. As one user told us 'the centre staff have been totally professional and remained very focused on providing a welcome and a good service.'

We heard how the centre is running more activities to help those families who have the greatest needs. We think that the sessions for teenage parents are good and provide lots of very useful help and advice. We also heard how the centre is reviewing better ways to reach many other groups and families who are not using the services of the centre as much, and we are encouraging the centre to do more outreach activities. We think the centre is good at responding to local needs and priorities, and that it will continue to make improvements in its services. We think that the advisory board of the centre is very good at helping those improvements and at reviewing how the centre operates. It was encouraging to hear how users' views are respected and how parent representatives on the advisory board play an important part in it. We hope that you can be part of the parents' forum and help with planning further developments in services. Many of you were able to talk to us about the priorities and improvements, and we thought that the information you have been given is very good.

You told us of many aspects of their work which we also think are good, such as helping you understand your child's development and how you can help improve their speech and language. We heard of progress in preparing your child to move on to nursery or school, and of a wide range of activities which will help improve your family's health, safety and well-being. We heard of successes in supporting breast-feeding, healthy eating and giving up smoking. Many of you told us of the help that you've had at times of crisis, and how that help is trusted and valued. 'I would not know what I would have done without the care and friendship of staff here,' as one centre user expressed it. We think that families are well-supported, both in the centre and through home visits. We heard how family support work makes a positive difference in many lives. We also heard of many successes in helping you find courses and training, and we hope you can build on this with better support for preparation for working and further learning.

Thank you for your help in forming a judgement on the centre's work, and we wish you every success in the future.

We have asked the local authority and the centre to make some improvements by:

- getting better information on how much the various agencies are doing, and bringing it together, so that it's easier to see how well your area's needs are being tackled
- making sure that there's more use of the centre's services by families who have the most needs, and this includes putting on more outreach activities
- looking at how the services at the centre can work closer with Jobcentre Plus and other training providers to help you into training and work.

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