

Inspection report for Woodlands Children's Centre

Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	383574
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	135136 Woodlands Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY398639 S4YC Out of School
	EY341001 Meadow Farm Play bus & Woodlands 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.

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 newly appointed manager of the centre and with the previous manager, with local authority officers, staff from the centre and from other partner organisations, with the headteacher of the neighbouring primary school, with members of the current advisory board and with parents and carers who use the services of the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Woodlands Children's Centre was designated in August 2008. It is a phase two centre co-located with Woodlands Primary School and gives users access to a range of services, including family support, early education and child-development sessions, health services, outreach sessions, home visiting, employment, adult education and training and advice sessions. The accommodation has one multi-purpose room, a consulting room and a waiting area. The reception area is shared with the attached primary school, in which it is located, and provides information, signposting and business support to the centre and its partner services. The centre also makes use of schools and community venues in the area for its provision, and encourages users to access appropriate services in larger children's centres close to the centre's reach area. The local authority provides the governance of the centre and it has an advisory board including representatives of partner organisations and of the parents' forum. The reach of the centre serves just over 900 children aged under five years.

Around a quarter of children live in the 30% most deprived areas and a similar proportion of children in these areas are defined as living in poverty. There is a mixture of rented and owner occupied housing. Within the reach of the centre, 20% of families with children are eligible for free school meals. Most families are of White British heritage, with a small number of Traveller families in the area. Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with a narrower range of skills and experience than might be expected for their age. Woodlands Children's Centre has been very recently reorganised and now is being managed by a new manager from a neighbouring phase one centre, which will act as its hub.

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

Woodlands Children's Centre provides families with a wide range of well-integrated services through good partnerships with statutory and community-based partner organisations. The centre has recently concentrated more on providing a targeted service for families who are more vulnerable and in areas of high deprivation. There is good support for teenagers who are parents or who are about to become parents, for families experiencing domestic abuse, for male parents and for families of children defined as being in need. The super output areas with the highest rates of deprivation are furthest from Woodlands, so provision is planned flexibly to encourage users to access other centres, local schools and community venues. Many users in these areas previously have not readily engaged with services provided. In response the centre has planned well to extend outreach provision to them, but there is scope for this to be further developed. The parents' forum and advisory board members describe good local consultation and effective involvement in decision making. The centre responded to requests for sessions just for fathers, including for some whose access to their children is supervised, or whose attendance is a result of court orders. Case studies show how the sessions enable fathers still to be involved in contributing to their children's development. As one parent stated 'It has changed me, changed my relationship; both me and my partner are on the same page, now.'. Care and support are good, and the staff develop strong relationships where families feel confident to share their concerns and value the help enormously in times of crisis. Support for parenting is provided through both courses, such as 'Webster-Stratton' and by home visits, and is very effective in helping

parents and children make informed choices. As one user described it, 'My behaviour has changed and my way of thinking; I feel more confident as a parent.'

The management of the centre and advisory board have a clear view of priorities and the local authority has good supervision, thorough training and staff development and well-planned quality assurance processes to ensure accountability. Very effective reviews of the systems used to record and monitor assessments and outcomes ensure that families are protected and feel safe. Safeguarding is very thorough in the centre and is well supported by dedicated lead officers and staff training.

The recent reorganisation has linked some children's centres together with main centres acting as hubs for others in their area. Managers have appropriately recognised a need to amalgamate some of the advisory boards for these centres. Any changes in these boards need to continue to encourage a high level of participation by users of this centre. Data is well used by the centre and the authority has well established protocols for sharing a very full set of data between partners. Self-evaluation is used effectively to discuss evaluative judgements and set out areas for improvement. It has a good view of the centres strengths and areas for sustained improvement. However, the documentation of analyses and measurable targets is insufficiently precise and needs to be better set out to be effective in recording progress. The centre has demonstrated improvements in health outcomes for families, in social and personal development and in closing the gap between the lowest performing groups and the median in achieving outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage. It is very responsive to partner organisations and user feedback, so has good capacity for further improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the centre's outreach work to engage with families more effectively in the areas of highest deprivation.
- Strengthen the self-evaluation and development planning to give clearer presentation of analyses of data and more precisely measurable targets for improvement.
- Develop the advisory board so that it unites the various children's centres which work together, but still reflects adequately the needs and wishes of local users of each centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre is supporting good and improving outcomes for families' health. Health workers describe how well the multi-agency work consistently promotes healthy lifestyles stating how there are, 'A lot of passionate people with shared vision who include support for health in all their other work.' Parents and carers mention how exceptionally approachable and responsive centre staff are, 'You only have to mention it, and someone will come out and

give expert help with health or parenting'. Good promotion and support for users has made significant changes in the numbers both starting to breastfeed, and also in numbers continuing when children reach six months of age. The 'Bosom Buddies' initiative has encouraged the training of volunteers and gives very effective peer support. This is especially successful with younger parents and together with sessions on weaning and on healthy eating, is starting to make some progress in tackling the problem of obesity in the area.

The children's centre also refers families to a healthy living centre and sets up cookery sessions in response to demand, including some specifically for fathers to attend. Health partners describe as 'absolutely wonderful' the improvement on the take-up of immunisation over the last three years as a result of additional support by centre staff. Good improvements in oral health have taken place, including all children being registered with dentists by six months of age. In addition, good take-up of dental packs for families have followed visits by dental health workers, home visits by nursery nurses and regular fun days and informal sessions to promote families' awareness of better dental care. All staff have learned how to support and encourage smoking cessation. Many users of the services attend a neighbouring centre where an allotment project encourages healthy exercise and the use of fresh produce.

Children and their families feel safe in the provision, and they recognise how the centre gives very high priority to their safeguarding. Safeguarding policies and practices are thorough and well understood by staff and families. Staff in partner agencies understand and follow set procedures consistently for reporting concerns. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) procedure is well used to ensure the safety of families, with checks and reviews to make sure that concerns are followed up and that the services offered are suitable. Children on child protection plans are well supported by the centre. There are appropriate checks on the suitability of staff and volunteers to ensure protection of children and potentially vulnerable adults. The centre development plan recognises hospital admissions for accidental and non-accidental injury in the area are much higher than the average incidence. The response has been the extension of the ROSPA safety scheme beyond the initial pilot period, with very effective home safety visits from family support workers and advice on a wide range of topics which have been identified as concerns, such as burns and scalds. Joint visits with neighbourhood workers have looked at issues of safety in flats, and have led to landlords agreeing to safety and security improvements for families.

Case studies show how users have made good progress with their learning and personal development, and how they have been better able to understand and support their child's development and transition to school. Many have been supported through well-managed volunteering to enhance their employability and confidence. One user said 'I am so happy to give something back after the help I've received and my skills and self-esteem have been stretched in organising events and speaking in public for the first time.' Parents and carers say their views are respected and listened to, and they identify improvements that have come about as a result. There have been good discussions with users of the centre about the centre's self-evaluation, and many were able to describe fully its priorities for the future. One learner described how her involvement in the parents' forum has enabled her to be

more active in her community, including becoming a school governor. Timely advice about budgeting, benefit entitlement and a wide range of resources and advice, such as local credit unions have helped some families become more economically stable.

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	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 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.	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre's range of services is good, with partners working hard to ensure that the needs of target groups are fully identified, especially in those areas with families that are hard to reach. Users and partners praise the information and signposting to agencies, which the centre offers. The neighbouring primary school describes how much the centre has helped parents and carers make good use of family information services. This has helped provide the school with good local knowledge to deal with issues of concern and to make speedy and well-informed referrals. There is good support, advice and guidance for learning provided by a family learning co-ordinator, appointed jointly by the local authority and the local college. Her work is valued highly by learners, many of whom describe building on their achievements and making good progress in gaining key skills and accreditation for skills that increase their employability. Case studies and comments made by users show how much they and their children enjoy their learning, which both stretches and challenges them.

Midwives and health visitors offer a series of clinic sessions alongside play and learning opportunities, such as 'Stay and Play,' provided by early learning professionals, contributing to improved parenting skills and better understanding of children's development. This inspires confidence for parents and carers over a wide range of issues. One parent described how she was helped to create sleep-plans for her child, which made it easier to cope and regain her confidence as a parent. Parents and carers described how support through 'Every Child a Talker' is improving children's speech and language development, and how crèche provision is both giving them respite and helping them take up training opportunities. The centre has reflected on the take-up of activities, and has moved some provision to provide

more activities for areas and families with the greatest needs. The centre has had some success in promoting its services, such as collaboration with projects in the area's market to promote participation in and awareness of localism. Further development of outreach activity is needed to ensure that the impact of targeted provision is maximised.

Assessments are carried out well and are monitored consistently for quality and accuracy. Case allocation and oversight is managed very well by joint meetings between the centre manager and her counterpart in a third sector organisation commissioned to provide family support for children of an older age group. Review is thorough and makes use of additional professional opinions, ensuring that support for families with children of different ages is well coordinated. The local authority and partners provide very full data about the area and its issues and this shows that the centre is increasing well its registrations and the numbers from targeted groups who are accessing the centre's services. A very effective system of case management ensures that outcomes are well recorded, monitored and reviewed at every level and the authority is identifying additional improvements in data systems to work more closely with data from other departments and agencies. Integrated multi-agency work is supported by good local knowledge and sharing information between partners. The care, guidance and support given to users are consistently good and care in times of crisis is trusted and greatly appreciated.

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 centre is welcoming and inclusive, promoting diversity and equality well. The centre contributes to improving community cohesion, for example, by working patiently and sensitively with the wider community, many of whom were initially reluctant to accept Traveller families who use its services. The centre is well managed and the current arrangements for governance and accountability are clear. The service provision at the centre links well to strategic planning and service priorities. The local authority and the advisory board hold the centre to account, and users' views are well respected and incorporated into decision making. Self-evaluation is well considered, as is service planning, but the analysis of data is not sufficiently clearly documented and measures for improvement are not sufficiently precise. Evaluation of activities is good and informs the planning of provision.

The centre ensures that a wide range of partners and other agencies are very effectively utilised to provide a good range of services that allows the centre to meet its core purpose. This cooperative and planned working allows for services to be well directed to meet the needs of those families requiring additional or specialist support.

Senior managers communicate well to both staff and users and have successfully managed the changes in centre organisation and staffing. Despite a period of uncertainty, managers ensured that service provision has been very effectively managed during that period. Good senior management has maintained high morale at the centre and belief in the centre's success

Safeguarding arrangements are thorough, with the greatest priority given for children to be well protected. All legislative requirements are met, and strong policies and procedures are supported by good training and support. Very effective quality control arrangements are used to ensure that there is a timely response to requests and referrals, and that families are well advised and supported. Supervision of staff is consistent and very effective, with robust systems of review and quality audit of cases. Common Assessment Framework and 'Team around the Family' procedures are used well to create a common multi-agency approach to share information. The centre and partners offer sensitive support for families who have experienced domestic violence and work closely with women's' refuges in the area, including some very positive work to identify training and learning opportunities. 'Gateway' sessions help to empower families to protect themselves against further abuse, and lead to improved confidence. The centre and the wider service have had an extensive reorganisation and current provision is planned to provide the most sustainable combination of resources and strengths. The centre makes very good use of shared facilities and premises to suit both the activities and the needs of target groups, and so gives good value for money.

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 in setting 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	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 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.	2

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

Evidence has been used from the inspection of the Woodlands Primary School which took place during the same week as the inspection of the children's centre.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Woodlands Children's Centre on 12 -13 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who were able to tell us of your views of the services provided by the Woodlands Children's Centre. We heard of the good partnerships that the centre has with health and education services and the effective links the centre has made to refer you on to the agencies that can best help when you have difficulties. You told us that services in the centre are good and are well integrated and we agree. Many of you described how the centre was planning the best ways to help families in the greatest needs and many of you have helped with suggestions on this. We have heard both of concerns that the recent reorganisation would have a disruptive effect, but also how the staff held the service together, with confidence and professionalism. We feel that you have confidence in your centre continuing to offer a good service and that it will do this with good partnerships with all the other organisations. We thought that the support, the advice, the guidance and the learning at the centre are all of good quality. We saw the case studies and 'Learning Journeys' which many of you have completed, to show the progress you have made in learning about your child's development. We also saw the comments made about the improvements in your families' health as a result of what you have learned and experienced in the sessions. The projects combine a great deal of good ideas with a great deal of enjoyment and the photo books and case studies showed us how these sessions were of value to you and your family.

Many of you told us of special support for very young parents and how this has given them particular confidence. We heard of good projects that help dads to play a useful part in their children's progress, and as one parent put it, 'It's changed me, changed my relationship, me and my partner are both on the same page, now'. We heard how the centre has supported some families who have experienced domestic abuse and how they have been encouraged to gain more skills and learn more about staying safe.

The centre does a great deal to support safety in the home and in all their activities in the centres as well, we are aware that your safety is a priority. In your area there was a high rate of children going to hospital after accidents in the home and we heard how safety kits and good advice provided by the centre is starting to make a difference. We looked at the needs of many families in the area who have not been involved in the centre and its work. We have advised that the centre develops more outreach work, both in homes and in other places where it's easier for some families to get to.

We were told of how parents and carers are confident that they will get a helpful answer if they ask for advice and ideas in coping with a wide range of problems. You told us that the care and support you get is good, and we agree. We visited some of the sessions, such as the 'Webster-Stratton', which help with the skills you need as a parent. There is great help in times of crisis and many of you described how you gained confidence and independence through contact with the centre. Many of you have been involved with the parents' forum or the advisory board and we hope you can continue to help shape the improvements in the centre, support it and make sure it meets your needs. We saw how the management of the centre and advisory board looks well at the centre's priorities, and how the local authority supervises the centre well, with training and staff development and well-planned quality assurance processes to ensure the centre is held to account. We saw how the systems for the provision of information make sure that needs are picked up and that families get quick responses to queries and requests. We found that the way in which these systems are used is good and how they keep track of progress, so that the families involved are protected and feel safe. The centre and the local authority take safeguarding very seriously. The centre has shown it is making an impact on the health of families in your area and helping children make progress into school and nursery. We think the centre is very responsive to partner organisations and what users say, so it has good capacity for making further improvements.

We have recommended that the centre continues to develop the outreach activities in the areas of greatest needs. We have also recommended, when any changes are made to amalgamate advisory boards of several children's centres that users of the centre are still able to contribute to the decisions of the new advisory board. We have finally recommended that it improves the way it sets out the information and judgements it uses to set out areas for improvement.

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