

Inspection report for Oxford Grove Children's Centre

Local authority	Bolton
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not Applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY221830 Susan Isaacs Nursery School

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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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior leaders, front-line staff and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were also held with members of the advisory board, a wide range of partners, parents and carers, and service users. The inspectors observed the centre's work, accompanied staff on home visits, visited the linked maintained nursery school and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Oxford Grove Children's Centre is located in the Halliwell district of Bolton. The centre has developed from a Sure Start Local Programme and was designated as a phase one children's centre in July 2005. Governance arrangements are through an advisory board reporting to the local authority.

The area served by the centre includes some super output areas that are economically and socially disadvantaged, being ranked as in the top 10% of the most deprived areas in the country. In contrast, some of the other areas served by the centre are more affluent. The proportion of children aged under-four who are living in households where no one is working is 16.1 %. Just over 24% of families benefit from the Childcare Element of Working Tax Credit, with 4.8% of the population aged 16 to 64 years in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance. A high proportion of local families are from a White British background, with 31.9% of families from a range of minority ethnic groups.

The centre provides the full core purpose within purpose-built premises. Some staff work across three centres, others work across six centres. Since July 2010, childcare has been provided through a nearby maintained nursery school, Susan Isaacs Nursery School. The school and its childcare were last inspected in November 2008. Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with a much lower range of skills than that expected for their age.

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

This is a good children's centre which provides very effective support to children and families and is continuing to reshape the services on offer. A key strength is that the centre has grown through consultation with local families as a Sure Start Local Programme and now as a phase one children's centre. This is demonstrated by the high level of registered families and the good take-up of services, including by vulnerable groups. Parents are active on the advisory board and they help to review and steer the work of the centre. The advisory board is effectively led by a parent chairperson and complemented by good external support to the centre from a range of partners and by the local authority.

The purpose-built premises are modern, welcoming and comfortable. This includes an excellent, well-used garden with vegetable plots. Positive imagery of gender, ethnicity and disability permeates the whole building as do messages about safety, healthy living and learning. Together with the positive response to visitors at the reception and centre café, parents and carers using the centre feel valued and respected. As one said, 'This is such a worthwhile facility. It changes lives'. Another parent commented: 'They look after you, they care about you'. This is because of the commitment of centre staff to improving the life chances of each individual child and parent and their commitment to reaching out to the diverse range of families living within the local community.

The centre manager and staff team have demonstrated determination to improve the lives of local children and families at a time when changes to the centre's reach area and to available resources, including staffing levels, have been a challenge. In spite of these limitations, the centre delivers a good range of services, a very safe environment and high levels of care, support and advice to parents and children on a wide range of issues. Quality assurance and risk assessment systems for safeguarding are well established. Equality and diversity are strongly promoted, and children and parents with disabilities are supported particularly well.

Sensitively led by the centre manager, staff are reflective about the quality of their work and use local knowledge to improve their services. They review the evaluations that are undertaken across centre activities and are well informed about the views of parents and carers. They have a clear understanding of the strengths of the centre and where further improvement is still required. For example, they are aware that the reduction in obesity among young children is only recent and not yet improving securely. In addition, while the centre gives good support to individual parents who wish to improve their basic skills, as yet not enough parents access adult learning and subsequent employment. Nonetheless, other outcomes for children and families are good and improving, and senior leaders and staff are clear about priorities for further improvement. Along with the centre's other strengths, including good partnerships, its capacity to improve further is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with partners in health and in primary schools to reduce obesity in children by the age of five years.
- Develop more opportunities for users to undertake adult learning courses in order to improve their economic stability.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre places a strong emphasis on promoting the health and well-being of all users including those who are most vulnerable and it works very effectively to support families' emotional well-being. Contacts and engagement with all groups are increasing. Individualised support and detailed information effectively support parents and carers to engage with appropriate health services such as midwives. Parents increased understanding of leading a healthier lifestyle has led to improvements in children's oral health and levels of physical exercise. Breastfeeding at six to eight weeks has improved by 10% and parents consistently say how much the centre has built their personal confidence. The impact of the centre is starting to show in the slight decrease in levels of obesity for local Reception Year children. However, centre leaders are not complacent and recognise that there is room for closer working with partners in health and in schools aimed at improving the healthy weight of children by the age of five years.

Parents and carers feel confident to attend groups and to leave their children with centre workers because of the safe environment. Families feel able to share their concerns and seek support. Families are effectively supported with their individual needs, which range from parenting skills and emotional well-being to family breakdown, personal safety and social isolation. Families at risk of harm or those needing greater support are assessed effectively using a pre-Common Assessment Framework assessment and this is carefully reviewed at a Multi-Agency Referral Panel. Regular meetings between centre staff and other agencies mean that such families are closely monitored and supported to improve a wide range of child and adult needs. Consequently, children on child protection plans show good

evidence of improved outcomes. Support for child safety at home has included free equipment for targeted families and as one parent commented, 'The safety equipment has been really useful'. Because of this work, the number of hospital admissions for young children has declined over the past four years.

By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, children in the reach area make good progress from their starting points. For example, through the 'little explorers' sessions at the centre children build positive relationships and are better prepared for school. Centre children starting in the linked nursery school at three years old show good levels of communication, language and literacy in comparison to their peers because of initiatives to encourage speaking and listening. Through training and support from the centre in developing their skills, groups such as teenage parents, fathers and male carers have improved their support for children at home. For example this has been achieved through the 'You Make the Difference' course aimed at improving adult and child interaction.

Parents and carers keenly take up the many opportunities to make a positive contribution to the centre and the wider community. They run groups within the centre, become members of the parents' forum and are actively involved on the advisory board. They feel that their views are listened to and acted upon by staff through regular discussions, evaluations of activities and satisfaction surveys.

The centre has supported some parents with developing their job application skills and finding suitable employment. Staff have also helped provide financial advice and support for a number of parents to improve their economic stability. Partnership arrangements with Job Centre Plus have supported adults in the area in receipt of workless benefits. Centre leaders are aware that, as yet, the provision is only helping some families, including target groups, to undertake adult learning leading into employment.

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

Staff know the families who use the centre and they constantly strive to reach out and include others across the community. As a result, registrations and participation by local families, including those from target groups, are good and improving. For example, 89% of local disabled children are being reached through centre activities. Strong partnership working, for example through the Multi-Agency Referral Panel, means that assessment of child and family needs is comprehensive and used well. The centre routinely provides high quality information and signposting about a range of topics including parenting, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual health, adult training and breastfeeding. Families turn to the centre in times of crisis and feel well supported. For example, those experiencing domestic violence have been helped to find safety. Other families have found that centre staff have been very effective in supporting them with a wide range of needs including health, education, safety and finance. As one parent said, 'They support you with whatever you need'. Consequently, there is a positive impact upon the majority of outcomes for local children and families.

Commissioned childcare is provided through a local maintained nursery school. The school was inspected in November 2008 and judged to be outstanding. Excellent tracking of children's attainment by the school is enabling the centre to look more closely at the progress made by children who have accessed its services. As a result of clear leadership by the centre teacher, centre staff make very effective use of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework and guidance to provide good activities for children's learning and development. Families, including many from target groups, attend a range of courses at the centre. During the inspection, inspectors heard from parents and carers about how these opportunities have enabled them to develop new skills and confidence, for example in understanding their children's development or in communicating more with them. Parents also commented that they value the certificates that they have received for course attendance. Families have been supported to build on their achievements through helping others to attend courses and becoming course facilitators.

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 manager leads with clarity and determination and values the work of her staff. They in turn respect her support and advice and feel enthused, and this has been maintained through a recent and challenging period of local authority review of budgets and staffing. An integrated leadership team has recently developed with expertise from education, health and social care and they are already offering strong support to the manager. Regular staff meetings are used well as a forum for discussing current issues and the centre activities. Staff have a positive approach; they evaluate their work and value the opportunities to learn from one another, from parents and partners as an integrated team. Evaluation of the centre's effectiveness is good because there is systematic reflection on practice, gathering of parents' views and reviews by senior leaders. As one parent said, 'The centre is always trying to get better at what it does'.

Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood. The advisory board makes sure that the centre's resources are managed appropriately and that information is shared across partners. As a group, its members are increasingly confident to act where necessary to support improvements or to question proposals. Parents are involved in the board, including as chairperson, and this is helping the centre to be accountable to local families. This is complemented by good local authority support from the area management for children's centres.

Safeguarding is a high priority in the centre and procedures are very effective. For example, there is a clear procedure for checking visitors and nationally recommended quality assurance processes are in place. The premises are very secure and all rooms have keypad locks. All required systems and procedures are in place to check the suitability of staff, and senior staff are trained in safe recruitment. A wide range of training about safeguarding, for example safe sleeping, domestic violence and keeping disabled children safe has been undertaken by the staff team. Procedures for referrals and sharing information across agencies are clear and understood.

The inclusion of children, parents and carers is central to the centre's work. Consequently, gaps in attainment, such as that between girls' and boys' communication and language skills, are narrowing. Services for disabled children are well coordinated with local voluntary sector support groups meeting on site. Imagery used in display throughout the centre reflects diversity and this helps a wide range of people to feel valued and respected. For example, positive images about disability are highly visible throughout the centre. Community languages are also valued and promoted. Much work is being undertaken to help men to feel included in the centre and the dads club is popular and successful in engaging fathers with their children.

The centre provides good value for money and this has been consistently achieved through very effective use of staff expertise and space across the centre. On-site childcare proved to be unsustainable and best value is now being achieved by commissioning this from an

outstanding maintained nursery school in the local area. Space released within the centre has been effectively re-used and now more teams are moving to be co-located on site. Centre leaders are planning how these opportunities to integrate services can improve child and family outcomes further.

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

The commissioned childcare provision is provided by Susan Isaacs Nursery School. The school and childcare was last inspected in 2008 and judged outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Oxford Grove Children's Centre on 26 and 27 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. I am writing to say what we found out about the centre.

We spoke to several of you about the centre's work. We really enjoyed chatting with you during your activities, around the centre and in the centre cafe. You expressed your opinions very clearly and they were very helpful to us – thank you. We were delighted to hear your positive views about how approachable and understanding you find the staff.

You told us how much you value the activities on offer and that coming to the centre has given you more confidence and has helped you make new friends. We were pleased to hear that, as a result, many of you feel less isolated in the community and feel more confident as parents. We found that the centre is helping children to have better language and communication skills and is providing good opportunities for children's overall learning and development. We were pleased to find that parents are also benefiting from the groups being provided by the centre – learning about healthy eating, child development and much more.

The centre works extremely effectively with a wide range of partners including voluntary sector groups to make sure that services are well managed. We were pleased to find that the way that the centre keeps children, families and staff safe is good.

We judged that the advisory board that oversees the centre is very effective and it was very encouraging to find a parent is chairing the board meetings. We also felt that the opportunities for parents and local people to contribute to the centre such as in leading groups like 'Happy parent, happy child' were very positive.

We were encouraged to see how hard the centre is working to make sure that it is a place for the whole community. We know how much you appreciate the fact that staff go out of their way to get to know you and your families and visit you in your homes. We can see how the centre is making a positive difference to your lives.

The staff work really hard to make the centre as good as it can be. We particularly liked the comment from a parent who said, 'The centre is always trying to get better at what it does'.

To help the centre continue to develop, we have suggested that more work is done to improve some children's weight by the age of five. We have also asked the centre to provide more opportunities for adult learning so that more local people can then gain employment.

Thank you once again for your help.

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