

Inspection report for Treetops Children's Centre

Local authority	Gloucestershire County Council
Inspection number	383562
Inspection dates	9–10 November 2011
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Centre leader	Sarah Birch
Date <input type="checkbox"/> of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Dursley Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Treetops Nursery

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, members of the governing body, professionals involved in the delivery of services, and with parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Treetops is a Phase 1 children's centre which was designated in 2006. The main centre is on a school site and is not situated geographically in the heart of its community. Many of the services are delivered at different locations across the reach area. Public transport is not regular; therefore, the centre provides transportation to enable families to access services.

The centre incorporates a 90-place childcare nursery which provides full day care and sessional care, including provision for children with special educational needs. This provision has been inspected separately by Ofsted in the current cycle of early years inspections. Children's levels on entry to early years education are below age-related expectations.

The centre works alongside playgroups, toddler groups, childminders, the GL11 Community Project and statutory partners. The reach area is semi-rural and includes some isolated rural areas. The reach area is one of the 70% most deprived in Gloucestershire. Data show that in July 2011 2% of the children in the reach area lived in workless households and were dependent on benefits.

The majority of the families living in the locality are of White British origin with a few families of mixed heritage. Almost all of the families speak English as a first language.

Governance of the centre is provided through the governing body of Dursley Primary School. Three governors act as link governors between the main governing body and the children’s centre. The headteacher line manages the centre manager and represents the school on the partnership advisory board. The governing body of Dursley Primary School is commissioned by Gloucestershire County Council through a service level agreement.

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

Treetops is a good children’s centre which is becoming increasingly effective in meeting the needs of families in its reach area. A steady increase in the number of families accessing the centre has been brought about by the strong leadership of the centre manager and her stable team of skilled and passionate staff. They have a full understanding of the diverse needs of the families in the community and target services appropriately so that a majority of families living in the reach area now use the centre.

The centre takes an active role in developing and implementing a variety of partnerships with different providers from the statutory, private and voluntary sectors in order to meet its core purpose. This approach to partnership working has significantly contributed to good and improved outcomes for the children and families that it serves. For example, 89% of mothers who attend ‘Mothers Offering Breastfeeding Support’ sustain breastfeeding after six to eight weeks, which is well above the local authority target and national average.

The partnership board and the link governors play an active role in the centre’s work. However, due to the changes in membership of the board of governors, some are not fully participating in the monitoring and evaluation of outcomes, which limits their input into shaping the strategic direction of the centre. Despite this, the centre

has effective procedures for self-evaluation and an active partnership board that contributes to the centre's good capacity for sustained improvement.

The centre gives high priority to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and families, who feel safe and confident to share concerns with staff. Effective training, support and information are provided to the most vulnerable families and they develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe. The centre actively promotes equality and diversity. For example, over the past three years, the percentage of children achieving 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage has increased to 62% and the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and their peers has narrowed.

The views of families are routinely sought at the end of activity sessions and actively used to shape services so they are correctly matched to their needs. The centre and its partners ensure that services are delivered throughout the reach area and the centre provides transport and childcare facilities for those families that need them. As a result, the centre has increased the number of families from target groups and those most in need of support who regularly access services.

Children benefit from the centre's speech and language therapist who helps to develop their communication and literacy skills. 'New for Twos', a funded pilot project, is targeted at more vulnerable families with children aged two so that they are able to attend the centre's nursery. These children's needs are assessed well and a community family worker is allocated to them to ensure early support is provided to help them develop their personal and social skills.

Adult learners benefit from high levels of support, encouragement and celebrations of achievement helping them to raise their aspirations and confidence levels to go on to higher education and improve job prospects. The centre has set up systems to record and track data that inform them of the number of times the different families use their services. However, they do not yet use this information rigorously enough to set increasingly ambitious and challenging targets for the centre and its key partners in order to secure even greater improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Make increasingly effective use of the information gathered from the centre's data and tracking systems to set even more specific and challenging targets for the centre and its key partners.
- Strengthen governance so that the whole governing body is fully involved in monitoring and evaluating the centre's performance and contributing to strategic plans for the centre's improvement.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre's services are successful in getting families and their children to develop healthy lifestyles. The midwives offer an antenatal drop-in session every week at the centre giving extra support and advice to mothers who are pregnant. At these sessions, mothers have the opportunity to share concerns and seek information and advice. New topics are set on a rolling programme, such as exploring the benefits of breastfeeding. This is their opportunity to meet the midwives and raises their confidence levels as new mothers. The number of low birthweight babies is well below the average for the local authority. Baby weaning and cooking courses give advice on how to prepare healthy meals for young children. The centre promotes healthy living by providing activities such 'wake and shake' and 'brain gym'. The centre is reaching the majority of teenage mothers through a 'young and pregnant parents' group. At this group, parents get the chance to socialise and gain support from staff and each other.

'Dursley Active Dads' operate on the first Saturday of each month, providing mainly sports activities, such as roller-booting for fathers and their children. This is becoming increasingly popular and is helping to strengthen bonds between fathers and their children.

Children using the services of the centre behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. Centre staff help them to understand how to keep themselves safe through traditional stories such as *'Goldilocks and The Three Bears'* and *'Little Red Riding Hood'*. This approach helps the children to think through the consequences of dangerous situations such as knocking on the doors of strangers and going with someone they do not know. Families who have experienced challenge or difficulties express their confidence and demonstrate improved parenting skills. One of the parents said, 'The centre has helped me to make my home safer by giving me safety equipment such as locks and gates. I now have a better awareness of how to keep my children safer at home.' Families express how they trust and are confident with staff, and state that they will always share any concerns with them.

The centre's effective work in using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes have given families in vulnerable and challenging circumstances enhanced support from a range of agencies. A parent said, 'The centre provides early intervention and I don't feel isolated after using the CAF. It has stopped me losing my children.' The centre is leading on supporting children subject to a child protection plan by undertaking a parenting assessment in the family home and writing a report to the social services team.

The centre helps to prepare children well for starting school and this is helping to raise their achievement levels in the Early years Foundation Stage. Children with special educational needs make good progress because of the good provision provided by the special educational needs coordinator in the 'Treehouse', which is well resourced and supervised.

The centre refers adults to local partners such as the GL11 Community Project and Stroud and Dursley colleges, whose courses help them to develop skills for employment. At the request of the parents, the centre provides short and practical courses that help them to develop their parenting skills. Feedback from families shows that they thoroughly enjoy these courses. Parents make a good contribution to shaping services. Some parents become volunteers and run the toy library that is available for all families in the reach area, for example. A few parents support the 'Young and Pregnant Parents' group as volunteers, helping with the decision making and shaping the service. Parents enjoy participating in the community-based projects, such as taking part in the local carnival.

The centre gives priority to improving economic stability for families. Family support staff help parents to set budgets through the use of the Citizens Advice pack. Case studies show how well parents are helped to complete all types of paperwork including with access to grants and different types of funding. The centre ran a 'Back to Learning and Work Club', which helped to build the parents' confidence and self-esteem and, in one case, managed to help a parent gain paid employment. In addition to this, parents benefit from saving with the Stroud credit union, which offers families a responsible and reliable way to save and manage their money more effectively.

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 reaches the large majority of the families living in its reach area. It works in partnership with other organisations to deliver services with good effect. For example, health services ensure 100% contact with new mothers and the centre builds effectively on this early contact to engage families in its wider services.

Good quality care, guidance and tailored support are provided to families across the reach area. Outreach work is a major element of the good effectiveness of the centre's work. Staff are successful at signposting families to services. For example, vulnerable families are often referred to the different types of parenting courses where they are given support to help them talk and play with their children and guidance on how to provide a healthy meal. Staff quickly form trusting relationships and get to know and assess families' needs well. They work very closely with them and ensure that they complete personal action plans and targets. These plans are reviewed and assessed with support workers. Parents report that staff are always there for them or at the other end of the telephone to give advice.

Participation rates on courses are increasing as the centre responds quickly to feedback from the adults and adapts the courses to their changing needs. The first aid course is exceptionally well attended as families see it as a stepping stone to further learning. The 'Freedom Programme' for victims of domestic abuse is effective at supporting parents who have been abused.

The centre celebrates the adults' achievements and helps to raise the aspirations of both children and parents. When parents and carers attend a course, their achievements are acknowledged and they are given a certificate. Parents who become volunteers are rewarded with different types of certificates, depending on the number of hours they have completed.

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's leadership team values all staff members and, as a result, staff morale is high. The detailed self-evaluation is largely accurate, as leaders and managers regularly re-evaluate the services offered in relation to the needs of the families. However, information obtained from the data and tracking systems, which are still

developing, is not fully used to set specific and increasingly challenging targets in order to tailor services even more effectively to the needs of particular groups. The effective use of resources linked to good outcomes shows that the centre provides good value for money.

Effective safeguarding arrangements are in place and ensure that all who use the centre are well protected. Staff awareness about child protection matters is good and all staff have up-to-date safeguarding and child protection training. Systems for staff recruitment checks and vetting procedures meet all requirements. Risk assessments are undertaken regularly and are thorough. The Common Assessment Framework processes and parenting assessments tools are used well with individual families when needed and ensure that parents and children receive early support and intervention.

The promotion of equality and diversity, including the promotion of inclusive practice, especially for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is at the forefront of the centre's vision. There is a full-time special educational needs coordinator who works with children with identified needs. Other key partners, such as the occupational therapist, speech and language therapist, and portage workers, are based on site and provide valuable support for those families that need them. They offer specialist guidance and equipment, and their input helps children to overcome barriers to learning and to make good progress at an early age. Case studies show the positive impact of the centre's work with adults who have learning disabilities, particularly in providing emotional and financial support.

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	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	2

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

The inspectors took account of the findings from the concurrent section 5 inspection of Dursley Primary School.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Treetops Children's Centre on 9–10 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank everybody who spoke to us or who made a contribution in other ways. The things you have told us have been very important in helping us to reach our judgements.

You told us how much the centre has helped you to develop your confidence and for some of you it has helped to turn your life around. It has provided you with childcare so that you could attend courses or go to work and this has helped to improve your situation. You told us how the nursery helps to prepare your children to settle into school quickly. We found that this is helping them to make better progress once they start school, especially those who find learning more difficult.

We very much enjoyed observing the drop-in sessions. It was great listening to how your children know how to keep themselves safe and behave well. More of you are attending the drop-in sessions offered by the midwives. This helps you to gain a better understanding of how to wean your babies onto solid foods and provide a healthy meal for your children. We found that you enjoy the 'Dursley Active Dads' group and activities such as roller-booting.

You told us how the centre has helped you to keep your homes safer for you and your children. For example, some of you have received some of the safety equipment, such as locks and gates, after asking for your home to be assessed. Some of you also told us that you feel very confident in expressing your trust and confidence with the staff. We also found that the centre's use of the Common Assessment Framework processes has helped to provide some of you with valuable additional support.

The centre ensures that you are able to participate in any of the services offered by providing transport for you, and running courses and sessions throughout the area where you live. The 'Freedom Programme' and courses at the local Dursley and

Stroud colleges are very effective in helping to build your confidence and self-esteem.

We found that many of you make a good contribution to the running of the centre by becoming volunteers and, for example, helping to run a toy library. We like the way the centre acknowledges your achievements by giving you specific certificates according to the amount of hours that you completed.

Staff at the centre work very well together to ensure they provide services that meet your needs. They ensure that systems are in place to keep you and your family safe when you use the services. We have asked the centre to strengthen the involvement of the governing body so that all of the governors play a key role in checking how well the centre is performing and in identifying ways to make it even better. The centre has set up systems to collect data about how many families use its services and to evaluate the effectiveness of services that are offered to you. We have also asked the centre to use this information to set even more challenging targets for itself and the other key agencies who are its partners in order to make sure services keep improving.

Thank you for your help.

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