

Inspection report for West Thurrock Children's Centre P1-4

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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's managers and staff, representatives from the locality, members of the advisory board, parents, representatives from the health service, social care team and a range of other partner organisations that work with the centre.

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

Information about the centre

West Thurrock Children's Centre is a phase one centre that was designated in 2005. It operates from two sites in Purfleet and West Thurrock. The centre uses a building in West Thurrock which is part owned by a church and the NHS. It has shared use of a local authority owned building in Purfleet. The centre is situated within the Lakeside locality in Thurrock. General oversight of the centre is the responsibility of a locality manager but operational management is the responsibility of a deputy coordinator. The centre provides the full core offer of services which includes health services, access to family support, links to Jobcentre Plus, childminder network links and outreach support.

The centre serves a community of about 714 children under five and is located in one of the most 20% disadvantaged areas in the country. Around 29% of families in West Thurrock live in poverty compared to the Thurrock average of 19.8%. Social deprivation and domestic violence are significant social issues within the reach area. Unemployment rates are high and the number of adults with no qualifications is higher than the national average. Most families are of White British heritage but some families of Black African and Polish backgrounds are represented within the community.

Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early provision are below those 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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

West Thurrock Children's Centre offers a satisfactory service to families. As a result of restructuring at local authority level and within children's centres across the borough, the centre has been in a period of transition since April 2011. At the time of the inspection, decisions were being finalised about the future of all children's centres within the borough. Uncertainty about the future has meant that the centre has had to delay making major decisions about changes to provision. However, staff have remained committed to improving outcomes for families and as a result outcomes are satisfactory overall.

Centre staff have a satisfactory knowledge of the local community. They use a range of partnership arrangements and data to monitor social trends and identify needs within the community. Previously, greater engagement with the community through consultation surveys has enabled the centre to assess the needs of the wider community. The centre managers recognise the need to resume this aspect of their work. Although self-evaluation does not yet take sufficient account of partners' views and the views of families, leaders and managers know the centre's key strengths and weaknesses. They also focus provision on key target groups and know what action needs to be taken to improve the quality of provision and improve outcomes for families. For this reason and because leadership and management are satisfactory, the capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory.

The quality of data available to the centre is variable. Data on Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes and child protection are good and detailed. However there are still gaps in the provision of up-to-date and reach level data for some national indicators, particularly relating to health. The lack of detailed reach area data also limits the centre's ability to monitor the impact of provision against measureable targets. Consultation with the wider community through annual surveys has in previous years been used to assess needs but due to changes in local authority priorities since April 2011, consultation with the community has been delayed.

Unemployment rates are high in the area and the centre recognises that the working

relationship with Jobcentre Plus is not productive enough. Funding has been secured to reinstate programmes which were previously available and which will help parents develop skills and knowledge that will increase their chances of employment.

One of the key strengths of the centre is the good quality care and support provided to families. Staff work well with a range of partner organisations to provide early intervention and support for the most vulnerable families. The centre's arrangements to protect children and vulnerable adults are also a key strength. The response from the centre to the high incidence of domestic violence in the reach area and the associated child protection issues is effective. Centre staff attend multi-agency meetings on a regular basis and are well informed about safeguarding issues that affect families in the reach area.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority in implementing reliable data collection systems to ensure greater use of local level data to assess needs and monitor impact of provision.
- Improve opportunities for adults to develop workplace skills and strengthen links with Jobcentre Plus, to reduce barriers to employment and promote progression to education and training.
- Improve the self-evaluation process to ensure it incorporates views of partners and those who use the centre.
- Increase levels of engagement with the wider community to assess needs.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre uses information and data about health needs satisfactorily, to provide services to improve the health of families from different target groups. At 11.5%, obesity rates for children in Reception Year are higher than the national average of 9.8%. The centre has responded by offering programmes which help families improve their understanding of nutrition and also provides opportunities for them to engage in physical activities. Breastfeeding rates are low in the area and in conjunction with a programme to raise parents' awareness of the benefits of continuing breastfeeding, the centre provides effective support sessions to promote this. The ability to use detailed and up-to-date reach level health data remains a challenge for the centre.

Safety of families is promoted well. Welfare concerns are identified early and appropriate actions taken to safeguard the most vulnerable families, particularly those living with domestic violence which is a priority target group for the centre.

Data show that the number of child protection cases in the area is high compared to the rest of England but is reducing. Data and information has also revealed a link between the number of domestic violence incident related child protection referrals. In response, the centre provides targeted, good support for families affected by domestic violence. Staff also use the Common Assessment Framework effectively to identify needs and promote learning about safeguarding through good quality parenting training.

The centre actively contributes to the local strategy to improve the educational achievement of children, particularly in areas such as communication, language and literacy. The average Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores for schools in Thurrock has increased from below the national average in 2009 to above in 2011. The gap between the number of children in the lowest 20% and the rest in the area is also narrowing. Through attendance at sessions such as 'Let's Explore', parents from different target groups develop their understanding of how to use play to develop their children's learning. One parent said 'I've learnt new things like nursery rhymes and songs and am always looking them up on Google now so that I can learn the words.'

Parents make satisfactory progress in improving their personal and social skills through their participation in parenting, behaviour management and other programmes. Individual guidance and support that parents particularly those from the most vulnerable groups, receive from parent outreach workers, also promotes their personal development. Adult learning opportunities are currently limited but funding has been secured to increase the range of provision.

'It's been brilliant, my child's language has got better and is learning to share more', was a comment typical of those from one parent which reflects the impact of the centre's work with children. As a result of their parents' improved parenting skills, children's behaviour is improving. The centre provides a satisfactory range of opportunities for children to develop skills for the future. For parents, guidance and information about employment and benefits are satisfactory as is the centre's work with Jobcentre Plus. However, there are not enough opportunities for adults to access training to increase their employability and economic independence.

Through representation on the advisory board, the involvement of parents in decision making and governance is satisfactory. Some parents are involved in other aspects of volunteering and are making a positive contribution to the work of the centre. A new Parents Forum has been established to provide more scope for the centre to involve parents in decision making.

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

How good is the provision?

3

Centre staff use data and information satisfactorily to assess needs. Where there are gaps in up-to-date reach level data, the centre uses its links with partners, borough wide data and local intelligence to assess needs within the community. The centre has limited space and resources at both its locations but uses its work with partners effectively to extend the range of provision that can be offered in a range of venues.

Attendance rates are satisfactory and case studies, evaluations from parents and from partners demonstrate that provision meets families' needs and makes a positive difference to their lives. Sessions such as the 'Young Parents Lunch Group' and 'Baby Massage' have been successful in engaging key target groups such as young parents and the most hard-to-reach vulnerable groups. Through work with the local social care team and the home visit work of the parent outreach workers, the needs of the most vulnerable families are effectively and sensitively assessed.

Provision to promote children's learning and development is purposeful and informed by the local strategy to promote achievement across all aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Provision to support parents' learning is satisfactory. Programmes such as the 'Mellow Parenting' programme offer them many opportunities for reflective learning. It incorporates video observation and assessment in the home which is used by practitioners to help parents identify and improve their parenting skills.

'Without the centre's help, I wouldn't cope with my kids – the staff taught me how to let go of the past and move forward.' This comment from a parent reflects the view of many who have received good quality care and support from the centre and its partners. Through partnership work with the charity MIND, the centre offers specialised counselling support for parents. The centre also works effectively with partners from social care to provide tailored and good support to meet the sometimes complex needs of families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Arrangements for accountability are satisfactory and staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They have demonstrated resilience during a period of great uncertainty and change. The overarching strategy to improve the life chances of families in the reach area is well understood. Though not well informed by detailed data or the views of parents and professional partners, the self-evaluation report is fairly accurate in outlining the strengths and weakness of the centre. The report is linked to the delivery plan which identifies actions that need to be taken to improve the quality of provision.

Both accommodation and staffing resources are limited but managers are skilled at deploying staff to ensure service levels are maintained. Staff have also been trained to drive a minibus that is used to provide transport for hard-to-reach families or to transport families to other centres within the locality, where services not offered by West Thurrock centre are available. Value for money is satisfactory and the centre can demonstrate that it has a positive impact on outcomes for families in different target groups, particularly the most vulnerable.

Partnership arrangements are satisfactory and used to ensure the needs of different target groups are met. The centre has established good relationships with a wide range of partners from the voluntary, private and statutory sectors such as nurseries, health services, schools, churches and charities. The profile of the community is changing with an increasing number of minority ethnic groups and Eastern European families moving into the area. Equality for these and all families is actively promoted. The centre has also contributed to the narrowing of the gap across the borough. The gap between the number of pupils in the lowest achieving 20% for Early Years Foundation Stage scores and the rest in the local area has reduced from 60 children in 2009 to 38 children in 2011. Practice is inclusive to ensure the needs of families with children who have additional needs or disabilities are met.

Safeguarding practice is a high priority for the centre. Recruitment and vetting checks for volunteers and prospective staff are rigorous and signposting and referral arrangements are effective in minimising the risk of harm to families. Staff training in different aspects of safeguarding practice is appropriate and at regular intervals. Procedures to ensure families are safe and that staff are safe in the centre and when lone working on home visits are rigorous.

The centre has been instrumental in developing the knowledge and skills of partners

and other centres in relation to work with victims of domestic violence. For example, staff from the centre led a well received conference on domestic violence for partners and staff from other centres. Staff are regularly involved in multi-agency panel meetings with social care teams and other agencies where safeguarding issues that affect families and the wider community are discussed and where actions to safeguard families are agreed and monitored.

Through the representation of parents on the advisory board, the centre is able to collect views from parents and use these to inform the development of provision. User engagement and outreach work are satisfactory. Evaluations of activities, sessions and services are used to collect and monitor parents' views.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the West Thurrock Children's Centre P1-4 on 10–11 November 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time to speak to us during the inspection. You told us how much you enjoy attending the centre and from observing some of the activities at there, your enjoyment was obvious. We could also see how much the children enjoyed playing and learning during sessions. We know from reading through some of your evaluations that the centre has helped you in very specific ways to do things better for your families. For example, as a result of what you have learnt, some of you now manage the behaviour of your children much better than before you started attending the centre.

We know that you feel cared for and supported by staff at the centre and we think this is one of the centre's key strengths. Some of the services that are available to you such as the counselling service, the minibus that can take you to different centres or out on trips, demonstrate to us just how much centre staff want to support you. The centre is also good at making sure everyone feels safe at there – not just families but also the staff. This is something else they do really well. Staff work with lots of different people to make sure families are safe at home and at the centre.

From looking at statistics and talking to staff at the centre and within the local authority we know that unemployment rates are high in the area. We would therefore like the centre to do more to help those of you looking for work develop your skills and perhaps gain qualifications that will help you be better equipped to find a job. We know that courses for adults have been organised by the centre in the past and this is another area that we would like them to look at again.

Staff at the centre and in the local authority have a good knowledge of your community and are aware of the sometimes difficult issues that affect families. We know they are committed to doing their very best for you and we believe they could do much more for families if they are able to obtain more statistics about what's happening in the community. We have therefore asked them to explore ways of gathering more information about the community not only through statistics but also by going out into the community to find out what families want from the centre. We also want the staff to make sure that when they review the performance of the centre, they include your views and the views of the organisations that work with the centre.

Once again, many thanks for your time during the inspection and we wish you and your families all the best for the future.

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