

Inspection report for Whitley Children's Centre

Local authority	Reading Borough Council
Inspection number	383726
Inspection dates	8–9 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Mann HMI

Centre leader	Michelle Williams
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Whitley Children's Centre

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.

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 an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with parents, partners, managers and the local authority. They observed the centre's work, looking at groups and early years provision. They also looked at a range of relevant documentation, including evaluations of services, policies, risk assessments and data.

Information about the centre

Whitley Children's Centre was designated in 2005 as a phase one centre. It is located within the community and offers many of its services through outreach in a number of local community buildings. There is a nursery situated in the same building as the centre and this provides early years provision for families using the centre. Governance for the centre is provided by the local authority, and there is also an advisory board in place.

The centre serves an area in which there are pockets of severe deprivation and a third of children are deemed to live in poverty. The housing stock provides densely populated accommodation in houses and flats from private, local authority and housing association providers. There are an increasing number of families from minority ethnic backgrounds living in the catchment area. However, most of the families are of White British backgrounds.

There is a large percentage of families who are dependent on workless benefits who live in the centre's area, and many of these are lone parent families. The proportion of children living in the wider area surrounding the centre who are obese in Reception Year is twice the average within the local authority. Levels of learning and development on entry to early years education 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Whitley Children’s Centre serves its local area well and provides a good level of effectiveness. Leaders have a clear overview of the priorities of the area. They know its community and target groups well. They are diligent in providing quality services to an increasing number of families, especially those most in need. Services are of high quality and are popular with the large number of families who use the centre. Managers make good use of data to track the engagement of those living within the centre’s reach to give a view of who is using the services. Efforts to engage many families, including fathers and those families with Black or minority ethnic backgrounds, have been very successful and there is now a high level of attendance for these families. The engagement of other groups in the community, such as those living in areas of defined deprivation, is good and steadily increasing; leaders are very aware this is a priority for the centre and strategies are in place to achieve further engagement for families in need.

The quality of self-evaluation is good. The local authority gives a good level of support and challenge to ensure continuous improvement. They provide relevant information, good quality data and robust evaluation. The manager, leadership team and partners have a cohesive view of the ethos and aims of the centre. They put the needs of their most vulnerable families at the heart of development planning. Processes to evaluate services are well embedded and include all relevant parties, including parents and children. Staff are keen to measure the impact of services, and evaluation and data show outcomes for families are good or better in all areas. As a result, the centre’s capacity for sustained improvement is good.

The advisory board fulfils the requirements of its role well. Many parents now attend meetings and a number of partner organisations are represented on the board. At present, the board has an acting chairperson. The board has an action plan to appoint a parent chair in the next few months, but this has yet to be implemented.

Families benefit from a broad range of well-coordinated services because partnership working is outstanding. All key agencies are fully involved and processes are exceptionally well streamlined to ensure services are accurately matched to the

needs of families. Partnership working with health services is exemplary at all levels. Mutually beneficial initiatives have been introduced and more are imminent. For example, the delivery of two-year health checks was relocated to the centre in September 2011. Following this, the number of children being brought for their check increased by 13% in three months, enabling more health assessment and introducing new families to the centre and its services. The innovative partnership working between the centre and health services is exemplified by the Family Visiting Team. This team has a combined line management of centre and health and provides a high level of support through a coordinated referral system to families most in need.

Procedures to ensure the safety and well-being of children are outstanding. The centre gives the highest priority to safeguarding children's welfare and exemplary practice is in place. Outcomes for staying safe are outstanding. The impact of early intervention strategies, such as the 'Triple P' parent education programme and home safety visits protect those children who are most vulnerable very well.

The provision for learning and development and the outcomes for enjoying and achieving are outstanding. The on-site nursery is fully involved in the centre. The manager is part of the senior leadership team. Curriculum planning is linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage and is shared throughout the centre so children and parents enjoy a consistent approach to children's learning. Provision for adults and children is of exceptional quality. Learning is very well matched to learners' needs whether they are adults or children. As a result, children make outstanding progress towards the Early Learning Goals, and a high proportion of adults who attend the centre complete starter courses and gain academic or vocational qualifications.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Implement further strategies to continue the successful engagement of all groups who live in the centre's catchment area so that overall outcomes for local families become outstanding in the future.
- Enhance the organisation of the advisory board by consolidating the role of parents and appointing a chairperson.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The work of the centre has a positive impact on the lives of families, and outcomes are good. One parent summed up the views of many saying, 'I can get help with any problems. The staff are amazing: flexible and helpful.'

Initiatives to promote better health are prevalent at the centre and case study evidence indicates a strong level of success in many areas. There is an increasingly good range of reliable data made available by health services, and staff are now using this to measure improvement in outcomes more rigorously. High levels of childhood obesity are being tackled by promoting exercise through swimming

vouchers, for example, and through healthy eating programmes as exemplified in the centre's recipe book 'Charlotte's Recipes'. Locally, the proportion of smokers who have stopped is highest in the centre's area, as result of targeted support and information. Adult mental health improves as a result of the work of the Family Visiting Team and the community psychiatric nurse. Teenage parents receive ante- and post-natal support, which means they can return to school where appropriate and gain the qualifications needed to find work or move onto further studies.

All staff wholly respect families and persevere to gain the best outcomes. As a result, adults and children trust staff completely. Those facing the most challenging of circumstances see the centre as a haven of safety for themselves and their children. This is the case for those living in temporary accommodation who can spend their days at the centre, or those who need a safe place to share their worries and gain practical help.

As a result of very strong partnership working with external agencies, children on child protection plans make exceptional progress and their safety is rigorously monitored. The use of the Common Assessment Framework is wholly embedded throughout the centre and supports those most in need very well.

Children make outstanding progress in the nursery, crèche and groups. Children's learning is tracked through frequent observation and assessment. This demonstrates rates of progress that greatly exceed national averages. Analysis of how well children do at the end of Reception year indicates children from Whitley exceed local expectations significantly. In particular, data indicate that the percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is significantly better than the local average, showing that this gap is narrowing very well.

Parents have a strong voice at the centre. They are developing their role on the advisory board and are actively involved in decision making through ongoing evaluation of services, where their views are taken seriously by centre management. The outcomes of this have been positive, with parents feeling more confident about giving their opinions and using their skills. A recent example of this is the opening of the 'Ladybirds Café' – a coffee shop organised and run by parents to provide a safe environment for parents to meet and socialise. The Innovations project brings together a large number of volunteers who support the centre's work in many ways, including assisting those working in the field. Volunteers make a significant contribution to the running of the centre, and they also gain personal development as a result. One commented about the Innovations programme, 'It builds my confidence whilst in a safe environment with support.'

The extent to which children and adults are developing economic stability is good and many of those on workless benefits are engaged with the centre. Adults are helped to improve their economic position. For example, several families in need have recently improved their circumstances after receiving legal advice on workless and disability benefit eligibility. Many adults have accessed training in childcare, gained experience at the centre and achieved qualifications for future employment.

Partnership working with local agency New Directions has resulted in a number of adults successfully completing adult education courses in a range of subjects, including literacy and mathematics. This has prepared them better for future employment and improved their self-esteem.

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	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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 range of services is good. There is a wide range of data available which indicates the make-up of the centre's catchment and how many families from each group are using services. Staff have a good deal of local knowledge which provides useful additional information about needs. Strong outreach work gives good support to those who do not yet attend the centre. The quality of care for families is good. Support is tailored to individual needs and partner working enhances the breadth of available services. As a result, adults living in the centre's catchment area say they feel well supported by the centre and are empowered to take positive steps towards improving their outcomes.

The provision for learning and development is outstanding for all who use the centre. Activities for children and adults are of exceptional quality and are delivered by highly knowledgeable and encouraging staff. Learning is rigorously assessed so that children and adults are constantly building on their prior knowledge to develop new skills and learning. For example, children's 'Busy Books' indicate their next steps of learning at regular intervals and these are attained through play-based learning. Staff pace groups such as the 'Mellow Parenting' group very well to ensure all participants learn what is needed.

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	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management focus well on the needs of the most vulnerable families in the area. The majority of these families living in the catchment already use the centre and there are good strategies in place to reach more. As a result, an increasing number of families from target groups are enjoying sustained engagement with centre services. The centre manager fosters a collaborative attitude towards provision of services, which permeates all partnerships, ensuring relevant services are sourced for those in need. The senior leadership team includes representation from the nursery, health services, and education and so provides well-informed leadership that supports rigorous evaluation and planning processes well. The advisory board has recently undergone some revision: the parent group was amalgamated into the board and the chair position is vacant. However, the members of the board are working well with the centre's leadership to embed the board's terms of reference.

The centre works extremely well with partners and with a nearby children's centre to make sure services are not duplicated. As a result, Whitley Children's Centre offers good value for money. Parents enjoy excellent communication with the centre in a wide variety of ways. Some prefer email contact about events, some prefer to come into the centre to collect a timetable, and others will look at the centre's social networking information site.

Families with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given a good level of support. Children are supported well with their learning and development and with transition to school. For example, the early years advisory teacher and the speech and language therapist oversee early intervention to help children make rapid progress.

All staff and volunteers have received highly relevant training in how to safeguard children's well-being and they receive regular updates at meetings. Recruitment and induction procedures ensure that the suitability of staff and volunteers is properly checked. Referral processes are very well established to ensure a rapid response and excellent partnership working with Children's Services and health supports successful case management very well. Adults trust staff, and feel they and their families are extremely safe at the centre. Parents using the centre are well informed of the centre's responsibilities and procedures with regards to child protection through information that is posted throughout the centre. Risk assessments are thorough to

ensure safe practices and environment for all, including those with disabilities. Home visits and services such as 'Baby talk, baby play' and 'Summer Club' support families in times of great need. These early interventions support parents to enjoy playing and spending time with their children. As a result, parents feel more confident in their roles and able to cope. Children benefit from having a strong start to early learning experiences.

The centre gives high regard to meeting the needs of individuals and adjusting to their circumstances so events are accessible to all. For example, the advisory board has polled its members to determine the most convenient meeting times. Inclusive practice is evident throughout all aspects of centre life and it is evident adults and children respect one another. The centre uses sophisticated evaluation and data analysis to monitor the use of services by individual groups. This allows the development of further engagement of those families most in need, which in turn promotes improved outcomes for these families.

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	1
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	1
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 onsite nursery was inspected in October 2010 and received a judgement of good overall, with several elements that were outstanding. The inspection highlighted partnerships with other organisations and with parents as two particularly strong aspects, and graded them as outstanding. Other outstanding aspects were how well

the nursery promoted equality and diversity, and also how well children enjoy and achieve in their learning.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Whitley Children's Centre on 8–9 December 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your children's centre. We enjoyed meeting with you and seeing the range of services the centre provides.

We have judged your centre as good overall, with several areas that are outstanding. The outstanding areas are shown below:

- Partnership working is excellent. Communication with parents and carers is very good, and the centre makes superb use of email and the social networking page as well as face-to-face contact and newsletters, so most of you always know what is going on. The Innovations volunteers are good ambassadors for the work of the centre. The centre works very well with staff from other agencies, such as health and the family Visiting Team, Children's Services, New Directions and education to provide a wide range of groups and services for you and your families.
- The quality of learning and development is extremely good for children and adults. As a result, outcomes for enjoying and achieving are also outstanding. Children in the nursery, the crèche and at groups enjoy excellent activities which support their learning and development very well. They make rapid progress and are ready to learn more when they go to school. Many of you take courses and examinations as a result of going to the centre, and the majority of you do very well indeed.
- Many of you told us you feel you and your children are safe at the centre, and that you learn how to be safe at home. We also think that procedures to protect those children who may be at risk of harm are excellent, and staff are dedicated to making sure children are safe.

We have asked the centre to improve two areas of its work. The leaders of the centre have already identified that these need further work.

- The first is to make sure everyone who lives in the centre's area who might benefit knows about the centre and uses some of its services.

- The second is to make sure the advisory board appoints a chairperson and makes the role of parents stronger on the board, so you can represent your community's needs even more.

We enjoyed our visit to Whitley Children's Centre, and wish you all well for the future.

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