

Inspection report for The Family Tree Children's Centre (Branches)

Local authority	Gloucester
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Reporting inspector	Joy Law HMI

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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Family Tree Children's Centre (EY422255)

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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, partner agencies and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

Information about the centre

The Family Tree Children's Centre (Branches) is located close to the centre of the rural market town of Newent. The centre operates from an independent building located within the grounds of Picklenash Junior School and Glebe Infants School. The centre is one of a cluster of three centres, the other two being Coleford (Leaves) and Mitcheldean (Twigs). The reach area of the centre spans over 100 square miles across the north of the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire.

The centre was designated as a phase two children's centre in 2008. Within the reach area, there are small pockets of deprivation and disadvantage among relatively more advantaged areas. The area is served by a number of local amenities such as a health centre, library, schools and shops. There are 15 early years providers, 18 registered childminders and 14 primary schools within the reach area.

The Branches' reach area is made up of a population of 13,000 people of which the centre serves 741 children who are aged under five years. The area has below average unemployment and low numbers of families in receipt of benefit with income deprivation affecting children. There is a small proportion of lone parents within the reach area. The children's centre serves a community that is predominantly White British, with a lower than county average of minority ethnic families, although more recently the area has seen an increase of Eastern European families in search of work.

The centre has a multi-agency approach, working in partnership to deliver a universal and targeted programme to meet its core purpose. The centre provides on-site early years childcare provision. It offers advice and guidance to parents on the day-care and childminding facilities available within the local community. Due to the wide range of social and economic factors within the reach area there is a wide ability range among the children. Therefore, the skills and knowledge children demonstrate when entering Early Years Foundation Stage provision are variable in comparison to age-related expectations. A minority of children's communication and language development are below those expected for their age.

In October 2010 the local authority delegated management responsibility for the Family Tree Children's Centre cluster to Barnardo's. The partnership advisory board is made up of a cross-section of professionals, parents and community groups. It is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development.

The extremely rural nature of the reach area and the dispersed population creates challenges for families in engaging with services, particularly as public transport services are far less frequent from outlying villages, such as Huntley and Staunton where transport remains problematic. There are few employment opportunities in the local area. Local families often travel outside of the area for work.

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

The Family Tree (Branches) is a satisfactory children's centre. It provides an inclusive, warm and welcoming environment. Parents speak highly of the centre as being a place where they feel safe, secure, supported and listened to.

The recently appointed manager is skilled and knowledgeable. She has a clear vision and commitment to develop the centre's services. She is supported by a dedicated team which aspires to serve its community well. The centre is raising the aspirations and increasing the confidence of adults by providing practical help and support for

parents and children to help them achieve better futures. As a result, outcomes for children and their families, although satisfactory, are improving. Feeling safe is a particular strength. Comments from users such as, 'Staff are very approachable', 'I feel welcome' and 'It's a good place to come', are typical. However, not enough families within the reach, particularly those who are most isolated and vulnerable, engage with the centre's services.

With the exception of the good arrangements for safeguarding centre users, partnership arrangements are only satisfactory. Key partners such as Jobcentre Plus, benefit advice, housing advice and some schools do not work sufficiently effectively with the centre to provide easily accessible services to users. Consequently, some vulnerable groups, such as lone parents and the unemployed, are not being reached or supported as well as they could be.

Obesity in young children and the reduction in the number of mothers breastfeeding their babies are areas of concern. The centre has taken positive action by training staff to promote the delivery of a healthy-living programme. It is working in partnership with the local health development manager, breastfeeding network and health visitors to develop a breastfeeding peer support group. Users report an increased understanding of the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle.

The partnership advisory board is supportive and has a strong commitment to the centre and to the ongoing development of its role in the community. However, the number of key agencies, partners and parents involved is low, and attendance at meetings is inconsistent. Most members have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The centre encourages participation of its users in decision making at various levels and has taken positive steps to encourage parents to become members of the partnership board and to establish a parents' forum. Despite these efforts, the uptake of volunteers who work at the centre remains low.

Good quality displays and resources promote children's learning well. Staff provide a good range of activities which are linked to children's interests and support their social and emotional development, and communication skills. Parents are encouraged to be involved in their children's learning journeys and are developing an understanding of how children learn. 'Stay and Play' sessions are well attended and appreciated by parents and children. Parents comment on how these sessions have helped them understand more about what their children enjoy and how they learn. However, the range of opportunities for adults to learn and improve their employment skills is satisfactory.

Inclusion is central to the vision of the centre and staff have a commitment to promoting equality and diversity. Users have confidence in the staff, with which they develop warm and trusting relationships. Parents are confident to approach staff and talk freely about any problems or issues they face. They comment on the positive impact the centre has had on their lives. Families receiving one-to-one support are successfully supported in accessing information. However, the centre is less successful in ensuring equality of access to information, for example leaflets

regarding smoking cessation, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol related issues, for users who have not had specific needs identified.

Families identified as requiring support receive timely and appropriate assessments of their needs. However, the centre does not routinely assess and identify individual learning and development needs of other users. Consequently, sessions to promote opportunities for adults to gain skills to improve their economic stability are not regularly provided for all families. Therefore, the range of services currently provided has only a satisfactory impact on outcomes for users.

The centre has recently improved its systems to gather and evaluate data. Consequently, it is gaining an increasingly accurate understanding of the community's needs. It is using this knowledge to plan and implement appropriate actions to address the identified gaps in provision and outcomes. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this work. Therefore, the centre's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the proportion of families who engage with the centre's services, particularly the most isolated and target groups, such as lone parents, minority ethnic families and fathers.
- Implement a more effective system to make services more accessible to adult users in order to improve their economic well-being by:
 - assessing their learning needs more accurately
 - delivering education and training, which lead to qualifications
 - increasing opportunities for families to access key services.
- Improve the physical and emotional health and well-being of children and adults by implementing strategies to:
 - reduce levels of obesity in children
 - increase the uptake of breastfeeding.
- Improve users' community involvement within the centre and promote sustainability by recruiting volunteers to work at the centre.
- Continue to increase the level of engagement with partner agencies, such as schools, Jobcentre, benefits and housing advice and early years providers.
- Improve the effectiveness of the advisory board so that it is able to support and contribute effectively to the development of the centre's services through:
 - increasing membership of key agencies and partners
 - ensuring good attendance at meetings

- improving all members' knowledge regarding their roles and responsibilities
- developing a parents' forum.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre is focused on improving the health and well-being of families as obesity in young children and the numbers of mothers breastfeeding their babies are areas of concern. Access to pregnancy data now enables the centre to make timely contact with families offering support where needed. Parents and children develop a sound understanding of healthy lifestyles through sessions such as 'Active Tots'. Healthy choices of food and the promotion of physical movement is an integral part of all sessions. Tailored one-to-one support enables adults facing challenging periods in their lives to gain confidence to access services with other agencies to resolve situations and to protect children as well as parents. Parents talked confidently about how supportive staff are, how they feel safe and how their lives would be very different without the centre's help.

Good procedures are in place to ensure that children are safeguarded. Staff have secure knowledge, are well trained and adopt very safe practices. They work effectively with key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. Those on child protection plans are very well supported, and as a result the number has reduced noticeably. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF), where required, is implemented effectively. First-aid courses and participation in a range of safety campaigns such as 'Child safety week' and 'Road, sun and fire safety' help raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities.

The centre provides a good range of early years activities to support children's learning and development. 'Stay and Play' and 'Active Tots' sessions provide parents, childminders and children with opportunities to play, have fun and learn together. Parents receive good advice and support from qualified and experienced staff that help build their confidence in parenting skills. Children develop social skills as they learn how to play well together. Effective partnership working between staff and speech and language therapists, and the good implementation of national initiatives to support children's language acquisition ensure children with speech and language difficulties are supported well. The centre works closely with parents, children and early years providers to ensure smooth transition arrangements for children moving on to school. The Early Years Foundation Stage data show that outcomes for the most vulnerable groups are improving.

The limited range of adult learning opportunities provided at the centre, combined with the restricted transport arrangements and location of adult training services, means that adults' opportunities to improve their skills and employability are reduced. Some parents have successfully moved into employment and voluntary work, although the numbers are low.

Parents say they feel 'included' and 'listened to' and comment on the difference that

the centre has made to their confidence and achievements as well as their children's progress, development and behaviour. Although there is no parents' forum, there is a satisfactory range of opportunities for parents to share their views. For example, through parental satisfaction surveys, evaluation of activities, suggestion boxes and membership of the partnership board.

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

Family assessments following referrals from health and other services are timely and thorough. These enable staff, in consultation with parents, to successfully plan and deliver services tailored to individual need. However, ongoing assessments of all adults' needs, particularly related to their learning, development and aspirations, are less well developed. The centre has rightly recognised this need and consulted with parents. As a result, the centre has successfully engaged with the local college to deliver a basic English course tailored to need. This is well received by parents who talked positively about how the course had improved their confidence and enabled them to meet other people.

The centre is a welcome and valued provision for the families who engage with it. The centre is steadily increasing the number of families accessing the centre, but staff are aware there is more to do. They use a range of strategies to engage families, such as attending baby clinics, displaying posters around the community and writing to all new and prospective parents. A newsletter is being sent to every family with a child aged under five years within the reach. In addition, parents are given information during all home visits made by the health visitor, maternity and family support workers. Consequently, the centre is reaching all groups to some degree. However, the infrequency of some sessions means that not all families' needs are fully met.

The provision to help children learn and develop is good, but for adults, less so. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage and promote children's learning and development well during sessions. Parents talked about their increasing confidence in playing with their children, developing their speech and managing their behaviour. Personal development and achievements are continually acknowledged, for example through children's learning journeys, adults' self-reflection during training sessions and photographs displayed around the setting.

Parents are signposted for advice and support to enable them to access services, such as housing, benefits, health services and childcare provision. This has resulted in outcomes for a minority of families improving because they have been re-housed and accessed benefits which have lifted them out of poverty. Parents talked positively about how the centre has helped their families in times of crisis and improved their lives considerably. Comments such as: 'The centre brought us together as a family'; 'I am happy and a lot healthier'; and, 'my children are happy and enjoy their lives', are typical. Some parents have successfully moved into learning, training and employment. However, the centre is unable to confirm how many families have accessed these services due to the lack of robust tracking systems.

The centre has successfully engaged a small number of volunteers in the past. These were supported through training and moved on to employment. However, the centre's current engagement with volunteers and the local community, which is a major contributory factor towards sustainability and improving outcomes for children and their families, is a particular concern. Events have taken place to engage with parents to recruit new volunteers. The centre continues to work with health workers to develop a breastfeeding support network and is currently recruiting parents to become peer support workers. As a result, the centre is currently processing seven applications for adults to become volunteers.

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	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leaders are well qualified, experienced and motivated to seek further improvement. Their expertise and skills are being used efficiently to ensure that the satisfactory service improves across the centre's operations. Quality assurance, through quarterly

reviews and annual conversations, is undertaken to ensure the services are operating in line with the local authority's requirements. Leaders have an increasing understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement and consequently improvement plans are accurately matched to these. Members of the partnership board are keen to share information and are engaged in supporting and developing the provision, for example health partners, the on-site school headteacher and early years providers. The centre is developing the rigour in monitoring and evaluation to ensure the ongoing analysis of the reach area is accurate and resources are being targeted where they are most needed. Staff are improving the systems to evidence the impact of the services they provide.

All staff are well trained to their level of responsibility and there is rigorous attention to vetting and recruitment procedures. Effective partnership working with some partners ensures children and families are safeguarded well. For example, multi-agency cooperation results in looked after children and those subject to child protection plans being very well supported. Adults experiencing difficulties in their lives, such as domestic violence and depression, receive timely and effective intervention. Staff take good action to ensure children and families are safe at the setting. For example, they undertake daily risk assessments and complete attendance registers. Consequently, outcomes for these families are good.

The children's centre is becoming embedded within the community it serves. Although located centrally and therefore easily accessible to some families, the rural nature and widespread location of families living across the reach, combined with limited public transport, mean that many families are either unaware of its presence or do not have access to the services provided. Equality is promoted and diversity is celebrated. However, the range of services currently provided has a satisfactory impact on outcomes for users. Consequently, the service provides satisfactory 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	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

The inspection report for the early years childcare provision, The Family Tree Children's Centre, inspected on 7 July 2011.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected The Family Tree Children's Centre (Branches) on 2 and 3 May 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents and concluded that the centre provides a satisfactory range of services that are mostly tailored to meet your particular needs.

The centre is an inclusive and welcoming place which is run by dedicated adults who want to serve you well. You speak highly of the centre as being a place where you feel safe, secure, supported, included and listened to. You comment on the difference that the centre has made to your confidence and achievements as well as your children's progress, development and behaviour. Comments such as: 'Staff are very approachable'; 'I feel welcome'; and, 'It's a good place to come', are typical of the views you communicated to us. However, not enough of you, particularly those who are most isolated and vulnerable, engage with the centre's services. Therefore, we have asked the centre leaders to increase the number of families who engage with the centre's services.

You and your children are developing a satisfactory awareness of how to lead healthy lifestyles through sessions such as 'Active Tots' and healthy choices of food during snack times. However, obesity in Reception-aged children and the reduction in the number of mothers breastfeeding their babies are areas of concern. Therefore, we have asked leaders to continue to put strategies into place to help improve these. Ensuring you are safeguarded is a particular strength of the centre. You told us that you feel safe at the centre, and how your awareness of keeping your children safe

had increased. You are supported in making your homes safe and participate in a range of safety campaigns such as 'Child safety week' and attend training in paediatric first aid to help you gain the necessary skills in the event of your children having an accident. Those of you who are feeling isolated or finding it hard to cope report positively on how staff support you well and how the centre has improved your confidence, self-esteem and social skills. Others of you report on how your parenting skills have improved and how you have made positive relationships.

Good quality displays and resources promote children's learning well. Staff provide a good range of activities which are linked to children's interests and support their social and emotional development, and communication skills. 'Stay and Play' sessions are well attended and appreciated by you and your children. Comments such as: 'My child really enjoys meeting and interacting with other children'; 'My child has been helped with her speech'; and, 'My children now enjoy their lives', demonstrate some of the benefits you gain from attending the centre and the one-to-one support you receive from staff. You are encouraged to be involved in your children's learning journeys and are developing an understanding of how children learn. However, the range of opportunities for you to learn and improve your employment skills is satisfactory.

Some aspects of the centre's work are stronger than others. For example, with the exception of the good arrangements for safeguarding, partnership arrangements are only satisfactory. Key partners such as Jobcentre Plus, benefit advice, housing advice and many schools do not work sufficiently effectively with the centre to provide easily accessible services for you. Therefore, we have asked the centre leaders to increase the level of engagement with these partner agencies.

The partnership advisory board is supportive and has a strong commitment to the centre and to the ongoing development of its role in the community. However, the number of key agencies, partners and parents involved is low, and attendance at meetings is inconsistent. The centre encourages you to express your views and to contribute towards decision making about the centre and has taken positive steps to encourage you to become members of the partnership board and to establish a parents' forum. However, there are not enough of you involved in supporting the centre's work. We have, therefore, asked leaders to increase the partnership membership and the number of volunteers working at the centre.

We know that the centre is good at responding to those of you who have been identified as in need of help and that staff undertake timely and appropriate assessments. However, the centre does not routinely assess and identify individual learning and development needs of other users. Consequently, sessions to promote opportunities for adults to gain skills to improve their economic stability are not regularly provided for all families. Therefore, we have asked the centre leaders to improve the way in which they find out what you need, and use this information where appropriate, to target resources more effectively to your needs.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre, and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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