

# Inspection report for Shifnal Area Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Shropshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	383812
<b>Inspection dates</b>	20–21 June 2012
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Albrighton Primary School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Not applicable

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/partner 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Early Years Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers, health and education professionals, representatives of the local authority and adult learning services, support workers, parents and carers.

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

## Information about the centre

Shifnal Children's Centre serves the district to the south of the county. The centre's main administrative base is in Albrighton on the site of Albrighton Primary School. The head of centre reports to the local authority and has responsibility for seven centres. The advisory board supports the work of the leaders. In addition to the facilities at Albrighton, the centre provides services in a number of other venues nearby, in particular at the on-site primary school and St Andrew's Primary School, Shifnal. The centre does not provide children's day care.

Statistical data for the Albrighton area indicate that the area is not one of high social and economic disadvantage. Many families living on the nearby air force base stay in the area for short periods. The percentage of workless households and those dependent on workless benefits is broadly average. The population is largely White British with a small population from minority ethnic backgrounds especially families from Eastern Europe. The centre also serves established Traveller communities. Children start school with skills, knowledge and abilities 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**

**1**

## Main findings

Shifnal is a good children's centre. It provides an inclusive, warm and welcoming environment. Despite significant restructuring in the last year, leaders and staff have ensured that services for children and their families continue to flourish. The leadership team is highly skilled and knowledgeable. Leaders share a clear vision and commitment to developing the centre's services and are supported by a dedicated but very small team which aspires to serve its community well. Staff morale is good. Outcomes for children and their families are good and there is clear evidence of continued improvement. One parent commented, 'I would be very lonely and isolated without the support of the centre.' Leaders exemplify outstanding practice in their successful partnership arrangements. The success of this centre has a great deal to do with the way leaders reach out and secure quality services provided by other agencies and organisations for the benefit of children and families.

Governance arrangements are good. The advisory board replaced the centre's steering group in 2011. Parents are well represented on the board and meetings take place regularly. The board shares the ambition and drive of the senior leaders. It is increasingly effective. However, some parents lack confidence in their position as guardians of the centre. Therefore, the board's role in scrutinising and challenging the work of the centre has yet to become fully realised.

Centre staff safeguard and protect families and enable them to develop behaviour which promotes their safety and the safety of their children. For instance, parents attend paediatric first-aid courses so that they are able to respond appropriately if their children are injured. One parent said that when their child almost choked recently, she was able to act immediately to clear the blockage as a result of the first-aid knowledge she had gained via the training. Those families made vulnerable by their circumstances receive outstanding care, guidance and support from experienced staff. Comments from users such as, '(The centre) is a very supportive environment for all parents and their different circumstances'; 'The staff and resources are excellent and I shall continue to attend' are typical. However, some

families within the reach, particularly those with disabled children and those who have special educational needs, have yet to fully engage with the centre's services.

The centre provides a safe place where families enjoy the activities on offer. The range of adult education and learning and development opportunities are exciting and varied. However, currently the centre is not able to fully demonstrate outcomes for a large proportion of learners in the area.

The centre's capacity for further improvement is outstanding. This is because highly motivated and robust leadership and evaluation systems drive improvements at the centre. Sophisticated performance management and quality assurance monitoring, involving all staff and significant partners, are leading to good and improving outcomes for families. The use of data to enhance the knowledge and understanding of this community has enabled more targeted work and the provision of excellent information, advice, guidance and support. The centre has a clear pathway to success and provides convincing evidence of its excellent capacity to succeed.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Accelerate opportunities for parents and carers in their role as governors to further contribute to decision-making and the formal assessment of the centre's work.
- Undertake further analysis of the provision for disabled children and those who have special educational needs and adult learners and take any action necessary to ensure good or better outcomes for these target groups.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2
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A wide range of positive health initiatives is improving the health of children and families. For instance, healthy eating activities are very popular and include parent and child cooking sessions. Breastfeeding is a priority and mothers receive invaluable encouragement and advice and guidance from peer supporters. Breastfeeding take-up rates are good at 79% and child obesity at Reception age is broadly average at 9%. There is an increasingly positive picture of families' health with a reduction in smoking and obesity. The numbers of teenage conceptions is very low in this area.

Good procedures are in place to ensure that children are safe and protected. Staff are well trained and adopt very safe working practices. They work effectively with key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children and families. Children on protection plans are very few and receive effective and timely support. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF), where required, is used well to ensure positive outcomes for families. Those parents who made their views known said they and their families feel very safe at the centre. First-aid training for families and a range of safety campaigns such as 'Child safety week' and ROSPA's home safety scheme help

raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities.

Children who attend early years provision make good progress from their starting points during the Early Years Foundation Stage. Most early years provision in the area is good and improving. The percentage of children living in the area achieving at least 78 scale points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) is well above the national average at 91.8%. The gap between the lowest and highest achieving 20% continues to decrease year-on-year. The gap is below that seen nationally. The centre, schools and parents work together to help children to prepare confidently for full-time education.

Parenting and nurturing programmes are very popular with families. These are leading to significant gains in parenting confidence and skills, which is having a positive impact on children's behaviour. The 'stay and play' and drop-in sessions provide valuable opportunities for parents and children to play and learn together. Parents make highly prized contributions to the life of the centre as volunteers and members of the advisory board. However, they play a less significant role in the formal assessment of the quality of the centre's work. They play an increasing role in the governance of the centre.

Many adults living in the area and using the centre are involved in learning activities. The volunteers at the centre are provided with training opportunities and are well supported to develop their confidence, skills and attitudes to support them on pathways to employment. There is evidence that the economic well-being of families is improving because of the quality learning activities and workshops. The Citizens Advice Bureau and the welfare rights workers, both much valued partners, support families to maximise their incomes by ensuring they claim benefits to which they are entitled. There is persuasive evidence to show how vital support has helped to increase individuals' employability. Unemployment in the area is broadly in line with national average at around 10%. However, low pay is an issue for many families. On average, families increase their household income by an estimated £4,000 after consultation with the welfare rights service.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	
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## How good is the provision?

<b>2</b>
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Services offered are good and are continuing to improve because of the high quality inter-agency partnerships and the regular and valued feedback from families. This is particularly evident in the case of those identified as in most need of intervention. For instance, targeted support is provided to families in crisis, including survivors of domestic violence, and those with mental ill-health. Support includes practical help with transport and childcare as well as activities to promote families' emotional well-being.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Parents expressed very high levels of satisfaction and appreciation for the support they receive and the positive changes that have resulted for their children and themselves. Case studies provide convincing evidence of how staff help them through difficult times and how their lives would be less fulfilled without the centre's help. The centre successfully targets its support to those considered in greatest need. Staff have established trusting relations with the local Traveller community, families from Eastern European and those new to the area. They have vital partnerships with forces support service to ensure families living on the nearby air force base access good quality targeted and universal provision. However, the centre has yet to be fully confident that it is actively engaging with the vast majority of families with disabled children and those who have special educational needs.

Families made vulnerable by their circumstances are prioritised for premium provision, for example nursery funding for two-year-olds, and take-up is growing. Families using the centre say they feel their needs are met very well. The use of tried and tested assessments, such as the Common Assessment Framework, family reviews, and Early Years Foundation Stage assessments, are effective and ensure that services and interventions are planned effectively and improve outcomes. Families who are in receipt of intensive support are consistently encouraged and supported to contribute to the process of assessing and reviewing their achievements. Effective links with health and social care services help families to access information and services quickly and result in the positive safeguarding and early interventions to promote their well-being.

Early Years Foundation Stage providers are well supported by quality improvement partners. Speech and language support across the reach area is having a positive impact on children's communication and language development. The effective range of learning and development opportunities provided at the centre and via partners, such as local colleges, is popular and take-up rates are good. One parent commented; 'There is always a wide variety of courses on offer with crèche places – the courses are all very well run.' Crèche provision helps to overcome barriers to learning. However, the centre does not currently collate the range of data available to demonstrate the total number of learners in the reach or the qualifications gained.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

The governance and accountability of the centre are good. Leaders at all levels are ambitious for the success of the centre. They are driven, very resourceful and inspire confidence. They communicate high expectations with key partners to secure sustained and positive service provision. Parents and families provide comments and feedback and this is used by leaders and partners to improve services available. One parent commented: 'The (centre staff are) non-judgemental... everyone feels happy and comfortable to ask questions.'

The advisory board was established in late 2011 and is becoming increasingly established in the governance of the centre. There is a strong commitment to developing the role of parents on the advisory board to further challenge and drive the direction of the centre. The effectiveness of the board has yet to be fully experienced at the centre but early signs of its impact are encouraging.

Action plans target families made vulnerable by their circumstances, including Traveller families. As a result of highly prized and very effective partnerships, outcomes for children and families are continuing to improve. There is a strong focus on performance management and quality assurance of the centre's work. The large majority of families are actively involved in services provided by or commissioned by the centre. Staff target families who are not engaging with the centre and membership continues to increase year on year.

The centre is very inclusive and those families in greatest need are quickly identified and receive prompt and effective support and access to additional services. The centre plays a key role in celebrating diversity and difference. Resources reflect the wider community and are readily shared with partners to support their work with families. Target groups are well represented but the centre was not able to provide accurate information about the number of disabled children and those who have special educational needs living in the area. As a result, they were also unable to provide reassurance that the children are receiving effective support and services. Those disabled children and those who have special educational needs who are known to be accessing provision are receiving timely support.



Safeguarding practice and guidance are strong aspects of the work of the centre. They are underpinned by the way staff work collaboratively and positively with relevant agencies to promote the welfare of all children and families. The centre has a robust recruitment and selection process for staff and volunteers. All staff have an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. They have a depth of safeguarding knowledge and use this to good effect as they support families living with domestic violence, drug and alcohol dependency, and mental ill-health. As a result of staff's expertise and non-judgemental approaches to their work, families report that the support they receive is invaluable and helps them to regain their emotional well-being.

The centre manages available resources very effectively and they have a positive impact, as reflected in the good and improving outcomes. As a result, the centre provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

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

Not applicable

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Shifnal Area Children's Centre on 20–21 June 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time to come in and meet with us and tell us about your centre. We can see that you appreciate the support and advice the staff give you and that you love meeting other parents and making new friends. Many of you said how safe and happy you and your children feel at the centre and that staff are always friendly and helpful. The safeguarding arrangements are good because of the staff's determination to promote and protect the well-being of children and families. Centre staff are very good at helping parents to keep their homes as safe as possible and we know several of you have had home and fire safety checks.

The centre is providing you with important support at times of crisis and staff and partner agencies are helping you to manage your money, cope with debt and resolve housing issues. It is good to know that a few of you are volunteering at the centre. There are opportunities for you to improve your qualifications but we have asked the centre leaders to ensure they are able to demonstrate the wide range of training activities available, the numbers of adult learners who are being supported on their path to employment, and evidence of their achievements'.

Children make good progress because of the wide range of good quality early years provision in the area. Those of you who attend the 'stay and play' sessions with your children join in your children's play and develop your knowledge and understanding of how children learn.

We have seen that the care, support and guidance the centre provides are outstanding. The partnerships the centre has developed with agencies, organisations, and community groups are excellent and ensure that you are able to access good quality services across the area.

Several parents told us how staff never judge anyone but are always welcoming and supportive. We saw how well the centre staff work with other partners, for example the local schools to support children's transitions to school and to improve pupils' attendance. There are positive services and activities being provided by the centre but not all families with young children in the area come to the centre. We have asked the centre staff to reach out to more families and especially those who have disabled children and those with special educational needs so that they too can enjoy coming to the centre. We have also asked that parents take a more significant role in the governance of the centre.

Thank you again for helping us with the inspection. It was good to meet you all and we wish you all the very best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).