

# Inspection report for Old Whittington Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Derbyshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	384038
<b>Inspection dates</b>	20–21 June 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Alison Veall HMI

<b>Centre leader</b>	Simon Smith
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
<b>Centre address</b>	Church Street North Old Whittington Derbyshire S41 9QW
<b>Telephone number</b>	01629 533690
<b>Fax number</b>	01246 261757
<b>Email address</b>	simon.smith@derbyshire.gov.uk

<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Mary Swanwick Community Primary School URN 112666
<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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Piccadilly Gate  
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Manchester  
M1 2WD

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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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, parents, partner agencies, headteachers from local schools and local authority senior managers.

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

## Information about the centre

Old Whittington Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre. It was designated in May 2007 and was delivering services from a local community resource centre until May 2011 when it moved into its current premise. The centre is attached to Mary Swanwick Community Primary School and is situated in the village of Old Whittington where there are a few local shops. The area comprises of privately owned, privately rented and social housing.

The centre is managed by a coordinator who also has responsibility for another children's centre. The strategic management and governance of the centre is the responsibility of Derbyshire County Council. Support and guidance is provided by the Local Advisory Board which consists of managers, staff, representatives from partner agencies and parents.

The majority of families are of White British heritage with 35 children from minority ethnic groups. There is no predominant minority ethnic group. The most recent estimates indicate there are approximately 721 children aged nought to five years living in the reach area. A little over 28% of children live in workless households. Most children enter the centre's childcare and play provision with a narrower range of experiences and skills than that 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

This children's centre has undergone significant change in the past 15 months. Strategic changes at local authority and district level have taken place; it has moved to new premises and it has had a change of coordinator. Despite the changes it has sustained good leadership and management with outstanding provision assisting the good and improving outcomes for families. The centre coordinator and senior managers convey determination, a strong sense of purpose and clear direction. As a result all involved in the centre have a good understanding of its aims and role in the community. Everyone is valued and this includes families, staff and partners. Consequently, staff morale is high and activities run smoothly. The centre has good capacity to improve because there is excellent use of data to target improvement and accurate self-evaluation which together with good staff development and the good use of resources ensures that families with the greatest needs receive high quality support that improves their lives.

The whole staff and leadership team are reflective and constantly search for ways to do things better. The centre knows and understands the need of its communities extremely well. They are aware of local issues and have developing strategies established to help families be healthier, for example in reducing the levels of obesity in children in Reception year and helping smokers give up, especially pregnant mothers.

Children in the area are making good progress from their starting points in developing skills which will help them in the future. The majority of parents using the centre engage in activities or training. This is having a positive impact and is increasing confidence, self-esteem, skills and qualifications. Improving the aspirations of families is fundamental to the work of the centre. Comments from parents support this. One parent said 'I didn't know what an aspiration was until the centre staff told me, I thought I was useless.' Another parent said how she had wanted to give something back for the support she had received and she is now a volunteer. However, there is a recognised need to further develop systems within centre activities to more clearly reflect the progress children make.

Excellent partnerships with the local community and other agencies are highly effective and have a positive impact on improving the lives of families using the centre across all outcome areas. Because much of the centre's work has focused on meeting the needs of vulnerable families, the centre has had the biggest impact on safeguarding children and ensuring their welfare. Visits from centre workers and their exceptionally effective signposting have helped families to deal with difficult situations, and have given them the confidence to address issues and provide a safer home environment. One parent, for example, who said, 'I was really anxious,' received on-going support which enabled her to confront her difficulties so that she could then say, 'I am so much more confident.' Staff use the Common Assessment Framework process extremely well which combined with their excellent understanding of safeguarding matters results in children being well protected. The centre's very effective early intervention and support have prevented escalation of difficulties and have significantly improved circumstances for those children whose circumstances make them most vulnerable.

The centre has a genuine inclusive ethos. Over 82% of families within the reach area are registered with the centre. Its high quality provision is consistently engaging over 74% of families. The centre has more fathers and teenage parents registered than live in the reach area. The centre's actions to promote greater equality for different groups are good. As a consequence, gaps in both the achievement and engagement of target groups of families are narrowing significantly year after year.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Build upon the existing good practice in order to further improve outcomes in relation to reducing obesity levels in children and decreasing the number of pregnant mothers smoking.
- The local authority, partners and parents should work with the centre to continue the development of systems that more clearly evidence the progress made by the children accessing the centre's good quality groups and activities.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>2</b>
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Health outcomes for families are good. A large majority of families are fully engaged with targeted or universal services. The emotional needs of families and particularly those with circumstances that make them most vulnerable are improving exceptionally well due to the support and guidance available from the centre and its partners including health visitors and 'CAMHS' (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service). Immunisation rates are high as is the distribution of vitamins. Prospective and new parents are well prepared for parenthood as a result of the

highly effective interventions from centre staff, health visitors and midwives. New fathers have a sound understanding of their role as they embark upon the centre's very effective 'Father's Ante-Natal' group. These strategies have had a very positive impact on sustained breastfeeding rates within the area which are 17% higher than national levels. Although the level of childhood obesity and smoking at delivery is above the local average, a wide range of programmes, are having a marked impact on tackling health-related problems and improving lifestyles.

Parents consider their families are safer at home because of the increased awareness of safety that the centre has given them. The comments of one parent following an activity to identify safe and dangerous liquids illustrate this: 'I am going home to make sure everything is stored properly and in the proper bottles'. Parents who have completed a first-aid programme identify that, 'I now feel more confident when my children are ill or injured'. Adults confidently approach the centre and its partners with concerns about personal and community issues. Case studies and case files show significant impact and improved outcomes for children on child protection plans. Highly effective working with partner agencies and the centres excellent approach to the Common Assessment Framework ensures that families and children who may be at risk of harm are afforded excellent levels of protection.

At 77.42% the percentage of children within the area achieving 78+ scale points at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is above that seen nationally. There has also been a year-on-year decrease in the achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest. The gap has narrowed considerably from 42% to 24% in 2011. The centre's good quality education and learning experiences for all children contributes significantly to this reduction. However, staff recognise that more work needs to be done in order to more clearly evidence the progress children make during their time in activities organised by the centre to check precisely what impact their work is having on children's learning and development.

The centre has a number of detailed case studies which show how well individual families have made progress in their personal and social development and how some families have improved their economic stability as well as their enjoyment and achievement. Parents are managing their finances better, reducing debt and accessing appropriate benefits as a result of fortnightly advice and support sessions delivered at the centre by the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). Parents are also developing confidence, skills and knowledge and as one parent said, 'Giving something back', as they lead groups and become volunteers. Parents very effectively challenge the centre through their feedback on activities and provision. Their comments are channelled through the 'Parents Forum' to the advisory board, where they are also members. Minutes from meetings and obvious changes to the service evidence their growing confidence and their desire to ensure the provision meets the needs of their families and the community.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are</b>	<b>2</b>
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<b>physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</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 parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>2</b>

### **How good is the provision?**

<b>1</b>
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The extremely caring and enthusiastic centre team works extremely well with all partners. The locality multi-agency team hold weekly 'request for support' meetings which ensure a holistic approach to service provision. They provide an excellent opportunity for information sharing and integrated working. As a consequence services provided are appropriately targeted and very effectively meet the individual needs of families whose circumstances make them very vulnerable. This rigorous assessment is a significant strength of the centre and one of the reasons why its work in meeting the needs of individuals and the community is so successful. Health and Midwifery services, some of which are delivered at the centre ensure that the health needs of families are well met. Professionals from these agencies are unequivocal in their praise of the centre's work.

Targeted interventions, particularly around speech and language are having a positive impact on improving children's communication skills. These interventions are delivered through the centre's good quality activities such as: 'Talking Toddlers'; 'Bounce and Rhyme' and the 'Stay and Play' groups in addition to outreach work. Weekly baby massage and father's groups, along with a range of parenting courses, are just part of the wide range of services which are having such a positive impact on users' lives. In all activities, personal development and achievement are celebrated well.

The care, guidance and support given to families are exceptional. A wide range of information is displayed throughout the centre. There is always a member of staff on hand when families are experiencing a crisis in their lives. All staff including administrators play a vital role in offering early interventions through centre specific services or effective signposting to specialist support. A strong sense of empowerment and a 'Can do' attitude pervades throughout the centre. One parent said 'You can ask them to do something for you but they do not take over, they show you'. Another said, 'When I came to the centre I said I couldn't look after my children properly, centre staff told me I could, I just needed a bit of help'. Such

comments are typical of those expressed by parents.

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>1</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**

Leadership and management are consistently good at all levels and excellent in some aspects. The dedication and commitment of the centre's management team including the co-ordinator ensure that all staff and volunteers receive high-quality support and training in their work. Appraisals are effective and professional supervision is used to ensure that services are of the highest standards. The centre is performing well and is making good progress towards meeting the majority of targets set for it by the local authority.

The centre's improvement plan has clearly identified priorities, actions and targets, all of which are reviewed on a regular basis. These all link extremely well to the key priorities of the local authority and the challenging targets which have been set for children's centres. The well-established advisory board, senior managers and staff play an active role in overseeing the centre's performance, through regular meetings and a formal annual conversation with the local authority. Effective financial management systems are in place to monitor day to day expenditure and delegation of responsibility for resources is at an appropriate level to ensure timely and effective packages of support. All staff are very well deployed and work within the locality is having a significant impact on improving outcomes for families. All of the above combined with a high take-up of services by local families, particularly the most vulnerable, ensures good value for money.

The centre promotes equality and diversity well. Diversity is celebrated through resources and information which reflect different faiths, cultures, and backgrounds. Careful consideration has been given to the design of the centre so that all users can gain full access. The centre provides an effective level of service for the families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities that are known to them and who require the centre's help.

Safeguarding is given the utmost priority. Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out for all who work or volunteer at the centre. Early intervention and a multi-agency approach underpin all that the centre delivers, this is central to its success in meeting the needs of those within its reach area. Risk assessments are comprehensive, these together with the effective lone working policy and highly effective policies and



procedures ensure staff and families are safe. In addition, all staff provide good advice and signpost to expert help for those experiencing domestic violence. All families are informed of the importance of safeguarding when they start at the centre. Parents we spoke to commented that they now better appreciated this to be a shared responsibility and not just the 'job of the professionals'.

The children's centre makes an exceptional commitment to partnership working and to improving the life chances of children and families within the area. Partners find the centre's staff supportive and cooperative and they contribute willingly and helpfully to the free flow of information which helps the centre to decide its priorities and to evaluate its services. Parents are key to this evaluation when they provide constructive feedback following all activities and contact with the centre.

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>1</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>1</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**

None

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 from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

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

We enjoyed our visit to your centre. We would like to thank those of you who helped us with our inspection work by coming into the centre and allowing inspectors to visit you in your homes.

Throughout our visit the people we met were very enthusiastic in telling us how the centre had helped them. We were told how much you look forward to meeting up with other parents, sharing tips and advice about a range of parenting issues. These opportunities reduced the feelings of isolation and increased your confidence. We were particularly impressed by the case studies that clearly showed the difference that the centre is making and how it has changed what you do at home for the better. You felt that your understanding of how to keep your children safe in the home and in the community was good as a result of the information and activities about safety in the home.

Your children's communication and social skills are improving as a result of their attendance at groups such as 'PEEPS 1 and 2', 'Talking Toddlers and the 'Bounce and Rhyme' groups. The two headteachers of the local primary schools and other staff that we talked to told us how your children, as a result of using the centre, are better prepared for entry into school. The children's centre staff have made a good start in recording the progress your children are making. In order to improve this we have asked managers to look at how this can be developed. We hope this is something you and the local authority might be able to support them with.

The centre has developed exceptional partnerships with many organisations such as health, schools, children's social care professionals, training and employment agencies, voluntary agencies and local providers such as libraries. These partnerships clearly add immense value to the services that are available to you. Staff know that if they cannot deliver a service from the centre that they can direct you to someone who has the necessary skills and expertise to help you.

We saw the action taken by the centre to support you and your children's safety and well-being. High levels of attention are placed on securing improvements in the emotional health of your families through the excellent care guidance and support both in the centre and on outreach visits. Inspectors observed how this support starts the minute you make contact with the centre. Administrators play a vital role in supporting the delivery of services and in the protection of staff when lone working.

It is the range of services and excellent partnership working which ensures that safeguarding arrangements for children and vulnerable adults are exemplary. The parents we spoke to describe the centre as providing a safe and welcoming environment; they are confident that their children will be secure and well cared for.

Inspectors heard how health professionals including health visitors, midwives, centre staff and volunteers give ongoing support and encouragement to new mothers who choose to breast feed. As a consequence of this the percentage of mothers who sustain breastfeeding at six to eight weeks is good and currently stands at 62%. On the other hand, initiatives aimed at healthy eating and smoking cessation are not yet having the same positive impact. Obesity levels of children in Reception and the numbers of mothers who continue to smoke during pregnancy remain higher than those nationally. We have asked the centre to help you to reduce these levels.

The local authority has high expectations that the centre help as many families as possible by placing rigorous and challenging targets. Senior managers are undertaking a vital role in monitoring how effective the centre is in meeting these targets.

We also saw how effectively you are helping to run the centre, as activity leaders, volunteers, through the parents' forum and through the advisory board. We also saw the changes that have been made as a result of your challenge to centre managers.

Thank you once again for sharing your views with us. 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).