

Inspection report for Woodlands Children's Centre

Local authority	Worcestershire
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Linked school if applicable	116730 Woodrow First School and Nursery
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY 333450 Little Angels Nursery and Out of School Care

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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with managers from the centre, staff, parents, outreach workers, health workers, and representatives from the local authority, the advisory board and partner organisations. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Woodlands Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated as a children's centre in 2007. It shares a site with Woodrow First School and Nursery. The centre is part of a cluster of four children's centres managed by Redditch Borough Council and two further centres managed by Redditch YMCA. It also has outreach provision at St. Thomas More Catholic First School.

The population of Redditch is predominantly White British with 10% of families of Asian and Polish heritage whose spoken languages are Urdu, Punjabi and Polish. There is high unemployment in the area and many families are on benefits. Thirty-eight percent of families live in wards in the highest levels of deprivation. There are currently 968 children under the age of five living in the reach area, of which 97% are registered at the centre and have accessed its services. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision are well below those expected for their age.

Governance of the centre is provided by the Borough Council. There is also an advisory board and a parents' forum. A range of health, social care, family support and education services is provided at the centre and from other outreach accommodation across the area.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Woodlands is an outstanding children's centre. It is extraordinarily successful in meeting the varied needs of its families and their children. The centre provides a vibrant, family-friendly welcome for parents and children of all backgrounds.

Motivational leadership has harnessed the enthusiasm of the staff and the centre's partners to reach out into the community and raise the aspirations and achievements of all, particularly of those families who are most disadvantaged. The centre has evaluated its activities robustly through listening and responding positively to what parents say. Monitoring of progress by the Redditch Children's Centres Advisory Board ensures the centre's focus on continuous improvement is maintained. As a result of this, funding to support a specialist smoking cessation worker at the centre has been sourced. Data provided by the local authority are extensive and allow the centre to plan precisely for improvements to key services.

The centre provides an excellent range of services that effectively raise the knowledge of parents about healthy lifestyles and keeping their children safe. Parents and children benefit from the broad and varied range of services provided at the centre and throughout the district. Support for breastfeeding mothers is inspiring. Through this support, the numbers of mothers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding is higher than that in the authority average as a whole. Specialist support for smoking cessation has been accessed and the number of mothers and younger parents who have stopped smoking is high.

Headteachers report that children entering school who have attended the centre's activities are more ready for school and achieve exceptionally well from their individual starting points. Comparative analysis of a sample of 41 children shows those who had attended this children's centre performed better in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) than a test group of 41 children who had not attended the centre.

Extensive analysis of local and individual needs, and consultation with children and their families, helps the centre to provide a range of activities that meets the needs

of its diverse community exceptionally well. However, further exploration of the views of children would enhance this process. Partners work with centre staff to provide timely, sensitive and highly effective support to families and children who are made vulnerable by their circumstances or facing significant difficulties in their lives. All children and parents, and carers of children who are subject to a child protection plan, are extremely well supported and virtually all attend activities that are helping children to remain safely with their families. One parent commented how she 'can now use a few different ways' to manage her child's behaviour. She went on to say, 'My marriage is better, the house is calmer, and we are all happier.'

Actions taken to ensure equality of opportunity and to tackle discrimination of any kind are highly effective. As a result, stereotyping behaviour is tackled well. Asian and Polish speaking staff support families to access a wide range of services and to develop their English.

Increasing numbers of parents are participating in adult learning. Programmes include English, mathematics, information and communication technology and parenting skills. Many develop better skills and improve their command of English in preparation for work or training. Following the parenting course, all parents said they were 'more able to protect their children and were less isolated'. Almost all said they were 'more hopeful for the future'. Some achieve qualifications which enable them to gain employment. Support for teenage parents is excellent and delivered through dedicated services that encourage them to stay in education where appropriate.

The centre provides outstanding value for money. Its highly effective leadership and knowledge of the needs of the area through dialogue with users in the community give it an excellent capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further develop the collection of the views of children for use in shaping the centre's development.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Outcomes for children and families are outstanding. Evidence of impact shows that 98% of those children in the most deprived areas access services more than once. The programmes to improve healthy lifestyles of children and parents attending the centre or supported by outreach are exceptional and improving. For example 53% of mothers sustained breastfeeding for at least six weeks, against 42% for the area, and immunisation rates are high at 95%. Food and exercise are regular themes of the services provided.

Through the provision of midwifery services in the centre, staff are able to make early contact with mothers to be and this often leads to their attendance at services

throughout their pregnancy. Partnerships with health and leisure services have provided introductory sessions and reduced costs for attendance at keep fit and swimming sessions. Fruit snacks are a feature of crèche and play provision. There is high take-up of cook and eat programmes and fathers attend weekend sessions doing activities such as gardening with their children. They are also introduced to topics such as paediatric first aid and do-it-yourself (DIY). The centre clearly understands the connection between children's engagement and happiness and that of their parents. Take-up rates, particularly for integrated health services, are high.

The centre's effectiveness in all issues to do with safeguarding has a considerable impact on families at risk of domestic violence, for example. They become significantly more confident as a result of the strategies they learn from staff. Parents are more aware of the potential risks to children through attendance on the parenting programme. They are more careful with their children in public places, ensuring they understand some of the potential risks, for example to hold their parent's hand when shopping and walking on pavements.

The extent to which children, including those with additional needs, enjoy and achieve is outstanding. Children are very well-prepared for nursery and mainstream school, some from a low starting point, due to the highly effective delivery of the EYFS. They demonstrate exceptionally positive relationships with staff, parents and other children. The centre has made outstanding progress over the last three years towards narrowing the gap with rates improving significantly. Many parents are now able to provide more positive play and learning experiences at home. Although children are encouraged to make choices about what they do at the centre, staff could develop communication with children to explore why they make some of these choices.

Many parents, including from potentially vulnerable groups such as young parents and those from minority ethnic groups, take up roles as volunteers after attending courses, supported by family learning, at the centre. All adult learning programmes are over-subscribed. Parents are encouraged into learning often through fun taster programmes such as 'nail art', they then progress to programmes such as paediatric first aid, safety in the home and then onto maths and English courses. Crèche provision is provided to enable parents to access training and development successfully. Exceptionally high numbers have achieved qualifications over the last three years, following the appointment of a learning and development co-ordinator. Some move on to college to obtain qualifications and employment. Good links with Jobcentre and Connexions provide information about up-to-date job vacancies and support for those seeking work.

Case studies and discussions with parents reveal the significant impact that parenting skills courses have on children's learning, development and well-being, from birth to five years. While all families benefit, the most disadvantaged children, including those who are the focus of multi-agency intervention, gain most, as do their parents. One parent told us that without the support of the centre she would have 'had no future at all'. Parents are well represented in the consultation and evaluation

processes in place to support centre improvements, including parent focus groups and the parents' forum. Representation fully reflects the range of users.

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	1
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	1
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	1

How good is the provision?

1

Home visits from family support workers and through commissioned services have led to the highly successful engagement of almost all of the hard-to-engage families, enabling them to access a range of services. These visits cover a variety of issues including safety checks and parenting support. The outstanding level of personal support received by families has contributed to their genuine sense of trust in and respect for staff. Participation rates in all programmes are high with waiting lists for further courses. Support for families in times of crisis is exceptional with requests coming both from partners and self-referrals.

The centre staff are very experienced in using a range of assessment tools to identify needs. Many of these, such as the use of the Common Assessment Framework process (CAF), are shared with other professionals. Centre staff play a critical role within multi-agency team meetings, often as lead professionals. Outreach staff are ever vigilant, and network highly effectively should they judge a child or family to be at risk.

Provision to help children learn and develop is excellent and helps to ensure that the achievements and aspirations of children are raised. Staff expectations for children and their families are high. Parents say that they feel empowered and comment on the real difference the centre has made to their own confidence and learning. Tracking systems are highly effective in recording interventions and progress. The celebration of achievements is an integral part of the culture of this vibrant, welcoming and inclusive centre. The commitment of family support workers, combined with very effective arrangements for transition which involve parents, staff and schools, ensures that children are exceptionally well prepared for the next steps

in their education.

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	1
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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Leaders and managers at all levels are highly effective and motivational. The senior leadership team is highly qualified and experienced, and provides excellent direction for the centre. Because of this, and the centre's strong 'can do' attitude, outcomes are outstanding. Governance and strategic leadership are provided very effectively through the Borough Council and the advisory board. They create the underpinning ethos of the centre and set important priorities, notably the promotion of safeguarding for staff, children and parents. Policies and procedures are very clear and understanding is thoroughly checked. All staff are checked thoroughly to ensure they are suitable to work with children, and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) records are updated regularly. Within venues, rigorous safeguarding, risk assessments and health and safety ensure the well-being of participants. Child protection, procedures for referrals between agencies, safer recruitment procedures, staff safety procedures and risk assessments are robust. Inclusion and equality are given high priority and can be seen in the high standard of the centre's work with parents and children, especially for children with disabilities, – many of whom are made vulnerable by their circumstances – fathers, young parents and those families suffering from domestic violence. The centre demonstrates a strong commitment to continuous improvement. It also provides a powerful force for community cohesion in the success of its work across the whole community.

Rigorous self-evaluation is undertaken. Regular and highly effective supervision supports the personal and professional development of staff. The advisory board, consisting of a strong mix of all the partners involved in the centre's work, provides support and challenge for the leaders and managers. Users of services contribute very effectively to feedback on services and the whole team nurtures parents to play an active role in the parent focus groups and the parents' forum.

The outreach team's care for families is first rate. The wide range of services offered at the centre are well used, particularly by those most in need, and make a significant contribution to improving outcomes. Sharing of resources across the cluster impacts extremely positively on the sustainability of this centre. The centre is also exceptionally good at one of the most vital skills for any children's centre: the capacity to work with partners. The high skill levels and professionalism of centre

staff, particularly in its outreach activity and collaboration with its partners, provides excellent 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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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	1

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

Before the inspection, inspectors read the Ofsted inspection reports on St. Thomas More Catholic First School, Woodrow First School and Nursery and Little Angels Nursery and Out of School Care, in order to see what was written about their partnerships with the centre. Inspectors noted that the inspection report for St. Thomas More School took place some considerable time ago.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Woodlands Children's Centre on 20–21 June 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

The two of us were impressed as soon as we entered the centre. It is very child-and family-friendly. Many of you feel that being made welcome is very important and we agree. We soon realised that safety, security and your well-being are top of the centre's agenda. Safeguarding is very rigorous. Reception staff are very vigilant on your behalf.

The main job of a children's centre is to get all the services for children and families to work together in your best interests. Woodlands do this brilliantly. All the centre's different partners were full of praise for the way in which the centre manager and her team make things happen and make things better. They provide so many services and opportunities for you and your children! We fully understood when many of you told us that involvement with the centre has turned your life around.

One of you reflected the views of a number when she said, 'the centre has helped me be a better parent and to enjoy doing so many things with them. We now play in the park and cook together.' Some of you told us that taking part in the centre's activities has given you an opportunity to make new friends and learn new skills. Particularly helpful has been the support provided through programmes on parenting and first aid. Increasing numbers of mothers have been breastfeeding and have valued the support of other mothers in helping them to maintain this. Children who use the centre make outstanding progress in their learning and development.

We found that the centre is working particularly well with partners such as midwives and health visitors. You tell us that it is good to go to the centre where you have the opportunity to talk to the health professionals or the outreach worker in a relaxed, informal environment.

The people in charge of running the centre are doing a brilliant job. The centre manager works extremely hard to make sure that everything the centre does for you will make a difference to the area in which you live. She makes sure that everyone who works with Woodlands Children's Centre shares this strong commitment. We heard many examples from you about how they are all making a real difference to your lives. The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is seen in the high quality of the individual support that is provided.

We could see very little wrong in Woodlands. Like all outstanding centres, they are never satisfied and always want to get better. Behind the scenes, we asked the centre to develop more ways of finding out the views of the children and the things that work best for them.

If you were one of the parents or carers we talked to, thank you for your help.

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