

# Inspection report for Oak Tree Children's Centre

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Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	384032
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leaders, district manager, centre staff and a representative from the local authority. Discussions were also held with members of the advisory board, a range of partners, parents, and service users. The inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Oak Tree Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre located in the St Anne's district of Fylde in Lancashire. The centre developed from a support service for families in the Fylde area provided by the local Primary Care Trust and was designated in May 2007. Services were commissioned from North Lancashire Primary Care Trust until March 2012. The centre is now governed by the local authority. An advisory board is in place.

The centre provides a range of groups and activities for children and families on site. Some services are delivered from the Kilgrimol Centre, a building owned by the Guide Association, 1.8 miles from Oak Tree Children's Centre. Early years provision is through a range of early years settings and childminders across the reach area.

There are 17 super output areas served by the centre, three of which are in the poorest 30% areas in the country. In contrast, some of the other areas served by the centre are more affluent. There are 19.5% of local children aged under five who live in households where no one is working. The proportion of the local population who are in receipt of Job Seekers' Allowance is 2.2%, and 9.8% of local people who claim benefits receive Incapacity Benefit or Disability Living Allowance. Most local families are from a White British background with a small minority of families from a range of minority ethnic groups.

Children enter early years provision with skills and knowledge levels typical of those expected for their age.

## Inspection judgements

**Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

### Overall effectiveness

**The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families**

**2**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**2**

## Main findings

'Without their help I would have gone under'. This comment from a parent and similar praise from many others illustrate why Oak Tree is a good children's centre. Staff and centre leaders provide very effective support for children and parents. This means that families are helped with a wide range of needs, ranging from wanting to make new friends, to finding enough food to eat, to improving personal safety. Staff treat centre users with respect and, as a result, people from different heritages and backgrounds feel welcome and at ease with one another in the centre. Furthermore, there is a good take-up of services by target groups of children and families and this includes those whose circumstances might make them vulnerable.

The quality of support from the centre for children's and parents' learning is good. As a result, many parents told inspectors that they have become more confident and knowledgeable in supporting their children at home. Learning is promoted well across centre activities. This is also reflected in good partnership work with local schools, early years settings and childminders to improve outcomes for children.

Staff listen carefully to the views of local people. Consequently, parents are able to make a good contribution to helping the centre evaluate and set priorities. It is a centre where local families say that they feel safe both practically and emotionally. For example, when attending groups parents feel comfortable to share their feelings and needs with centre staff as well as giving their children some freedom to play and explore.

While centre activities promote healthy eating and physical exercise, this is not yet impacting upon the levels of obesity for local Reception Year children at school. Furthermore, only some families are improving their economic stability and independence.

This is reflected in the levels of worklessness which have been increasing for the past five years across the local area.

All requirements for safeguarding children and families are met. Safeguarding issues are given high priority by the centre and some aspects of work exemplify good practice. For example, staff knowledge is regularly improved through training and checked through team discussion and quizzes.

Over the past year, the centre has been through a period of upheaval in the staffing, management and governance of services. One significant change has been the handover of governance from the primary care trust to the local authority. This occurred at the same time as significant staffing issues. Through well-planned support for the centre from the local authority and the clearly focused work of centre leaders, the centre has maintained good services. It has also ensured that services are firmly directed towards tackling the challenges of the next phase of the centre's development. Self-evaluation is honest and reflective and well-informed by data and parent feedback. Targets for improvement are realistic and the local network of support for the centre is strong. Together with the trend of ongoing improvement this indicates that the capacity for further improvement is good.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Work with partners in health and in primary schools to ensure that health promotion aimed at parents and activities for children lead to a reduction in the level of obesity for Reception Year children.
- Increase the number of parents improving their economic stability and independence through training and adult learning that lead to employment.

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

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The centre is having a positive impact upon local parents feeling less isolated. A typical comment was that the centre is 'a lifeline'. Parents look forward to attending groups. For those new to parenthood or wanting specific support, the centre has helped them with their individual needs. Some families using the centre have increased their economic stability and independence, for example through learning to grow their own food at gardening group. The number who access training or adult learning leading to employment is satisfactory.

Many individuals express their views about centre activities and contribute to key decisions being made by the centre. Some parents contribute to the centre advisory board and Parent Parlez group. As a result, parents say that their views matter and are used to shape the work of the centre.

Parents are able to choose from a range of local early years provision for their children and this is mostly good or better. The centre contributes to this through its partnership work

with providers. For example, support to local childminders has led to positive increases in their inspection outcomes. Data at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage indicate that the percentage of children attaining a good outcome improved from 62.9% in 2009 to 68.2% in 2011. Crucially, this has occurred at the same time as the gap between the lowest achieving children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and others has decreased by 3.9%. Centre leaders are not complacent and are working closely with schools through a 'Best Start' programme to improve attainment for target groups of children.

Between 2008 and 2011, the levels of breastfeeding at six to eight weeks increased from 28% to 38%. These data are for a larger area than that served by the centre. However, new data for breastfeeding at three months show that levels in the reach area are higher than in other local areas. This has been achieved through extensive promotion of breastfeeding and the impact of a well-attended support group at the centre, supported by trained volunteers.

The benefits of fresh fruit and vegetables are well promoted in the centre and families spoken to had a satisfactory understanding of healthy eating. They enjoy opportunities to access activities such as the mile walk and the dance fitness class (with crèche provided by the centre). However, while there has been some improvement in the healthy weight of local children, the key performance indicator of the percentage of children in the Reception Year who are obese increased from 7.8% in 2008 to 12.8% in 2011.

Children attending groups or outings are kept safe due to clear guidelines for adult behaviour and careful risk assessments by centre staff. Parents have been helped to keep their children safe through popular centre courses, such as First Aid. Posters promote clear messages about safe sleeping for babies. The numbers of children on child protection plans are low and these children and their families are in regular contact with the centre. Outcomes for children subject to a child protection plan and those in care are good because of the attention to individual family needs and the good liaison with colleagues from social care and other organisations. The centre's active engagement in the local MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) is ensuring that the centre is working closely with other agencies to improve safety, health and well-being of high-risk victims of domestic abuse and their families. The rate of hospital admissions has declined a little but the data are for a much larger area than the reach area of the children's centre.

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>3</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>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

The reach area served by the centre is diverse and all staff, including centre leaders, have an in-depth knowledge of the St Anne's locality and local families. Many referrals for support come through good partnership work with health and social care. Consequently, the assessment of individual and family needs is used to good purpose, particularly following recent improvements in the use of the Common Assessment Framework. Families experiencing times of crisis feel well-supported by the centre. Their needs vary widely but can involve a need for food, for example the centre distributed 56 food parcels over a recent seven-month period. The trust that families have in the centre is illustrated by the fact that many parents choose to ask staff for support with their needs. As one parent said, 'You only have to ring and someone will help you'. A good range of information helps parents to gain advice about smoking, substance misuse, sexual health, benefits and employment opportunities.

Centre staff understand the challenges that some people face in accessing services. This has led the centre to make efficient use of outreach premises and home visits to reach local families across the community. Furthermore, staff are regularly looking to find new ways to reach the most vulnerable individuals and groups. For example, data about the take-up by those living in the poorest super output areas have been aptly used to target activities. As a result, a majority of local children from birth to aged four years are registered with the centre and a majority of these actually access centre services. The centre has established contact with a range of target groups and the extent to which those in greatest need participate is good and improving. For example, high numbers of lone parents use the centre. The centre does not have large numbers of disabled children or those with special educational needs accessing services but parents of those children commented very positively on the support received. The centre's development plan already includes increasing the numbers as a priority for further improvement.

A focus upon purposeful learning is evident across centre activities and these are attended by a good mix of local people. The most well-attended activities include baby yoga, Stay and Play and Tiny Treasures. Centre data show that babies and toddlers are being well reached by the centre, including those living in the poorest super output areas.

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>
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<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>2</b>

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

**2**

The centre manager has ensured that the centre has a strong focus upon supporting families with the greatest needs as well as including all local young children and parents. She knows families and the wider community well. She very effectively ensures that equality and diversity are central to shaping the delivery of services. Owing to this, people feel valued, safe and included. A majority of local families are satisfied and engaged with the centre. There are no recorded instances of bullying and families have confidence in the staff's ability to deal with any unsatisfactory adult or child behaviour. Inclusion is well-promoted through display, celebration, cultural festivals and a well-used sensory room. A striking example is the recent Bollywood events that parents had asked to celebrate together. Disabled children and those with special educational needs are treated as individuals and given tailored support by staff. Positive images of disability are evident in some of the books available for children.

Staff have access to good professional development and supervision and are qualified to a high level. This impacts positively upon provision. For example, a wall display for parents about patterns in children's play demonstrated an excellent staff understanding about child development. Also, a range of group activities reflects a sound understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Leaders know the centre's strengths and have a clear understanding of the key areas for improvement. These in turn are closely aligned to wider strategic priorities of the local authority. Recently improved systems of self-evaluation and data analysis have enabled leaders to focus sharply upon outcomes and take-up of services by the most vulnerable. Families have very effective opportunities to evaluate and shape services and one parent has recently been appointed as a vice-chair of the advisory board. The advisory board involves a broad range of partners and offers strong support to the centre.

Centre leaders have very effectively led the centre through a period of significant change. New accountability and support mechanisms are now in place and the centre is strongly placed to continue to refine what it provides and to challenge itself further about improvement. A typical comment from partners was, 'This is a centre that wants to learn and to improve'. Partnership with health, schools and a range of statutory and voluntary organisations is good and impacts positively across the majority of outcomes for children and their parents. Partnership with social care is also effective in supporting individual families. The local authority is aware that there are opportunities to further reshape and integrate social care services within the centre rather than locating them next door.



All Criminal Records Bureau and recruitment checks are undertaken for staff and volunteers. Training and quality assurance of staff's understanding of safeguarding are good. Ensuring that families are supported with their emotional health and well-being and dealing with domestic violence are treated as high priority by staff and partners.

The centre makes very good use of the small, attractive premises and a range of outreach sites to provide services. Together with the strong partnerships and the good outcomes for children and their families, this indicates that the centre gives 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 secures 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>2</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**

Before the inspection, inspectors read the inspection reports for all local schools and early years settings to learn contextual information about the area in which the centre is situated.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Oak Tree Children's Centre on 4 and 5 July 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for speaking to us during your group activities at the centre, at your mile walk and in your homes. A big thank you should go as well to those of you who came into the centre especially to speak to us. Your views were very helpful.

Your children's centre has some important strengths. We particularly liked the way in which staff try to ensure that all local families can access activities and feel welcome and valued. They use the Kilgrimol centre and other locations for activities so that you can participate. We were impressed that the centre manager and the staff have a well-developed knowledge of your community and of each of you as individuals. We were very pleased to find that the centre values what you say and that you feel listened to. It was also good to hear that many of you tell the centre what you think of groups and activities and some of you are sharing your views and helping the centre through the Parent Parlez group and through the centre advisory board.

You told us that you feel safe and we found that the centre has good systems to ensure that only properly checked staff and volunteers work with you. We found that the centre is an attractive place to meet, learn and get support or information.

Your children are making good progress at the centre and through local schools and nurseries. We judged that the activities provided at the centre for you and your children are good, for example, the Stay and Play sessions. It was very encouraging to meet dads and mums at this group. At other times when we spoke to individual parents we were told how well the centre has helped them with their own needs. A typical comment was that 'Without their help I would have gone under' – this helps to show that Oak Tree is a good children's centre. It was good to learn that the centre will support families with food where this is needed as well helping people to make friends or with learning how to enjoy being a parent.

Although there are several activities promoting healthy eating and physical exercise, we found that obesity for local Reception Year children at school is getting worse. To help improve this we have recommended that centre staff work with schools and health colleagues to find ways to reduce obesity.

We also found that while the centre is helping you to become more confident and makes job information available, the number of homes in your community where no person is working has been increasing each year for a number of years. Therefore, we have asked the centre to find ways to ensure that more of you start to benefit from opportunities to gain increased skills leading into employment.

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