

Inspection report for Tree Tops Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Worcestershire |
| Inspection number | 409877 |
| Inspection dates | 11–12 October 2012 |
| Reporting inspector | Cliff Rose HMI |

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| Centre leader | Allison Epstein (Service Co-ordinator) |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
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| Linked school if applicable | Birchen Coppice Primary School, URN 135045 |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | First Class Nursery, URN EY320742 |

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.

Report published: October 2012



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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre lead and cluster manager, and representatives from the local authority and the advisory board. They also spoke to partner agencies, including professionals from the health and social care services, members of staff, volunteers, parents and other users of the centre

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's action and development plans.

Information about the centre

Tree Tops Children's Centre was designated as a phase one centre in January 2006 when it moved into its current, purpose-built accommodation, having originated as a Sure Start children's centre to serve the Oldington and Foley Park and Sutton Park wards of Kidderminster in 2003. A specialist service run by the Primary Care Trust (Woodbury), offer a weekly Crèche and two drop in sessions, they also have premises in the building. The centre is operated by the charity Action for Children on behalf of Worcestershire County Council. Since August 2012, the charity has operated the centre as one of a pilot cluster of six centres spread through the county.

The children's centre fulfils its core purpose by the provision of a range of services including child and family health services, advice on parenting and access to specialist services, for example, antenatal and post natal groups. The independent First Class Nursery, located within the children's centre building, is subject to a separate inspection and the report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk

Most of the catchment area is within the 30% most deprived areas of the country, with some in the 20% most deprived and a small area in the 10% most deprived.

The centre is located on the Birchen Coppice Primary School campus in Kidderminster. Some 98% of the residents in the catchment area are White British and include a large number of lone-parent families with a high incidence of teenage pregnancy. Levels of literacy and language are among some of the lowest in the UK. The area is populated by a large number of housed Travellers. Recently, a small number of migrant families, predominantly from Eastern Europe, have moved into the area. The number of families in the area for whom English is an additional language is small but increasing.

There are approximately 890 children under five in the area. Some 20% of those aged nought to four live in households dependent on workless benefits. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are typically lower than 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

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Capacity for sustained improvement

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

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Main findings

Tree Tops Children's Centre provides an outstanding service for families. This is due to a large extent to its work with its extensive network of partners, with whom it either works collaboratively or to whom it can refer families for specialist support. Families, particularly those from target groups, also access the wide variety of high-quality and accessible programmes and outreach services, which the centre supplies directly. Families find the well-designed centre and its staff extremely welcoming and feel very safe there. They see it as a one-stop shop for support and guidance. They describe the staff as 'marvellous' and the support as 'life changing'.

The centre has been particularly effective at engaging families from all the target groups in this area of high deprivation. This included the engagement of pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers through a specifically funded programme, which ended in 2011. Since then, engagement of young women from this group has fallen. The centre's response to local needs is greatly assisted by participation from parents in the parents' forum and the centre's advisory board and through the presence of volunteers drawn from users and former users of the centre, who express their

gratitude for the support they have received by 'wanting to give something back'.

The provision to help children and adults learn and develop is outstanding and complemented by the arrangements to track the children's development.

The capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding as the outstanding leadership and management have identified the actions necessary to continue the marked steady improvement to the current high levels of outcomes and provision. The accurate and self-critical self-evaluation has informed the latest development plans, which contain challenging targets. Partner agencies value the role of the centre in supporting the most vulnerable groups in the area. The centre's success in engaging with the most-hard-to-reach groups in the population further enhances its ability to improve the support service it provides.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the percentage of teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers engaging with the centre by:
 - building on the success of the funded programme which ended in 2011
 - continuing to work with partner agencies to identify alternative additional funding for this aspect of the centre's work

How good are outcomes for families?

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Over the last three years, an increasingly large majority of families have engaged well with the centre and with health services. Families who do so have a very good awareness of how to lead healthy lifestyles. There is a very strong focus on outdoor activities and making use of forest schools, which are a feature of the county. The centre has also organised swimming sessions. Parents now have the knowledge and skills to cook low-cost meals for their families. Childhood obesity levels as children enter school are now roughly at national levels despite the high levels of obesity normally associated with high levels of deprivation. Parents recognise that everyday objects and occurrences can be used to support their children's healthy development. Parents from targeted groups have attended training sessions with staff including first aid, food hygiene and sign along sessions.

As a result of the centre's activities, children are very aware of safety, particularly their own, and behave accordingly. Parents' or carers' health and safety awareness is enhanced and they support their children's health and safety well. Some 40% of children aged three to five years are registered with the National Traffic Club. Accidents and emergency hospital attendances for patients aged nought to four in the area have decreased dramatically. Road improvement schemes have been implemented to reduce the speed of cars and support young children in crossing the roads. Children practise safety themes through role modelling and playing. Swimming sessions increase water-safety awareness.

Children are well prepared for transition to school. The percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest, as indicated by the points score in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, has reduced steadily from 41% in 2008 to 32% in 2012. The county council's data analyst has compared the individual scores of children who attended the children's centre with a control group of children from similar backgrounds who did not. His analysis shows that in each case those who had attended the children's centre outscored the control group.

Both parents and family support workers report that children's behaviour and their relationships improve markedly following interventions by the children's centre. Inspectors observed excellent behaviour and mutual respect among children and families attending the centre. Parents report greatly increased self-confidence and a number have gone on to do volunteer work, either with the centre or elsewhere, or to progress to paid employment. Despite the economic downturn and a largely unchanged number of children in the area, the number of children in workless households reduced by almost 40% in 2011/12, compared to the previous year.

Due to the nature of the reach area, almost all parents are from the centre's target groups. They contribute to decision making and governance by active participation as volunteers, as members of the advisory board and through their exceptionally high response rates to evaluative questionnaires.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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| 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?

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Particularly strong links with other agencies have resulted in almost all new-born children in the area now being registered with the centre and all target groups being very well represented. The centre has had unusually high success in engaging with housed Travellers and, with its nearby sister centre, with the small local Bangladeshi community. Case studies demonstrate a careful assessment of the needs of each

individual or family and well-coordinated actions by the centre and its partner agencies to meet them. This is achieved through a combination of suitable in-house programmes and extensive outreach work by family support workers and others, which also results in the very high participation rates.

The large majority of adults engaged with the centre are taking part in purposeful learning either directly in the centre, in one of its outreach centres or through the county's libraries and learning service. Families and children thoroughly enjoy the varied programmes on offer, which have a strong focus on children's learning through play. Programmes and special events emphasise the arts and creativity and also focus on communication and language development. Effective tracking of progress shows that both families and family support workers recognise improvement in the vast majority of those engaged.

The excellent relationships between centre staff and families in the community make the centre the first port of call for those seeking advice and guidance. The centre is then able to provide highly effective, personalised support itself, jointly with others, or to signpost families to the most appropriate agency within its extensive network of partner agencies. All parents comment extremely positively on staff friendliness, the support they receive and on the significant improvement in their children's behaviour.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| 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

The centre benefits extensively from the dual governance arrangements exercised by the county council and Action for Children. The new arrangements for day-to-day management are clear and well understood by all staff, who are being kept well informed during both the current transition and in preparation for further changes expected in 2013 with the change to nought to 19 provision and revised council contractual arrangements. However, some partner agencies are not yet fully familiar with the new management arrangements at the centre. The cluster management arrangements allow for a further extension of the good exchange of best practice

and mutual support the centre has already enjoyed with its neighbouring sister centre.

Development and action plans demonstrate a continuing focus on the particular needs of the prioritised target groups in the reach area, rather than a generic response to the overall needs within the geographically dispersed pilot cluster. Centre staff make extensive use of live data, data reports from the council and feedback from users to monitor performance and evaluate the success of programmes in meeting users' needs and in planning further developments.

The purpose-built premises, provided by the council to house both the children's centre and the independent nursery, have been equipped with high-quality resources including a state-of-the-art sensory room. The centre is cheerfully decorated and welcoming as the result of a project involving a local commissioned artist and the local community when the centre moved there from its previous building. The high engagement with hard-to-reach families and the outstanding outcomes which result from management's best use of resources, including volunteers and shared resources with other centres, represents outstanding value for money.

The centre's success in promoting equality and diversity is demonstrated by the high levels of engagement by hard-to-reach groups including the Traveller community and fathers, which include their involvement as volunteers or as members of the advisory board. Centre activities with families include celebration of a variety of cultures and belief systems, which most users would not otherwise have encountered.

Safeguarding is a particular priority of the centre. The centre's policies and procedures in this area, including health and safety, are comprehensive and well informed, drawing on input from both the parent body and the council. Safeguarding of children is paramount, but the centre's work with vulnerable adults, the victims of domestic violence and other target groups such as those with a history of mental illness or with learning difficulties or disabilities, is also awarded a very high priority. Although the centre has not initiated many requests to use the Common Assessment Framework, it works effectively with other agencies to improve outcomes for families significantly. Staff receive regular additional training to supplement their mandatory safeguarding training. They have an excellent understanding of the issues and reporting procedures. The centre keeps appropriate records of the Criminal Records Bureau checks to which all staff are subjected.

Centre staff work closely and very effectively with a wide variety of partners, either through mutual referrals but, in particular, through coordinated plans to meet the various needs of families within the target groups in the area. The local community view Tree Tops as very much their centre. Users are delighted with the support they receive. As one mother said, 'I would not be where I am without Tree Tops.'

These are the grades for leadership and management

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| The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and | 1 |
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| understood | |
| 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

The first Class Nursery early years provider sharing the building with the centre was inspected in 2009 and judged to be good with some outstanding features.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Tree Tops Children's Centre on 11–12 October 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Two particularly outstanding features are the safeguarding arrangements and the way the centre works in partnership with other agencies to make sure that you get the very best levels of care, guidance and support. All of you that we spoke to said how much you appreciate the staff and what they have done for you.

We were impressed with the extent to which you and your children have healthy lifestyles and how safe and well protected your children are. Children who have attended the centre are better prepared for school than those who have not. We also saw that children behave well.

Many of you are attending programmes at the centre and are developing your own self-confidence as well as learning more about being good parents. You also take a keen interest in what the centre has to offer and how it is run.

The centre is well run. Staff have a clear vision of the centre's future development and are committed to continuing the excellent service they provide and extending it to even more families. To help them achieve this we have asked the centre to look at ways of increasing the numbers of teenage parents and pregnant teenagers using the centre.

During the inspection, we looked at your centre and how it fits in with others in the Wyre Forest and elsewhere in Worcestershire. We looked at development plans and many other documents. We spoke to representatives from a large number of other agencies, with which the centre works including the health service, social care and district and county council departments as well as staff, volunteers and members of the advisory board. We visited as many of the centre's activities as we could in the time we were there, including 'Shake, Rattle and Roll' and the antenatal class. We also spoke to a number of families using the centre.

Thank you for talking to us during the inspection. Your enthusiasm for the centre and your praise for the staff were very useful. In particular, your views on the level of support for you and your children were most encouraging. Comments such as, 'It's been a lifeline' were typical. Those who had attended the forest school had really appreciated the effect on both themselves and their children.

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