

Inspection report for Gardners Lane Children's Centre

Local authority	Gloucestershire
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Gardners Lane Primary School (131249)
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Gardners Lane Children's Centre (101783)

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 registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: 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 the local authority, centre staff, representatives of the governance and advisory board, partner agencies, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

Information about the centre

Gardners Lane Children's Centre is a phase one centre attached to Gardners Lane Primary School, located in a residential area of Cheltenham.

The centre was designated in May 2005 and serves a community that falls into the 30% most deprived areas nationally. Areas of relative prosperity are interspersed with pockets of deprivation. The area is served by a number of local amenities, such as: St Paul's Medical Centre, which contains five surgeries; shops; a post office; a sports centre; a youth centre and educational provision for people aged from birth to 21+ years.

Gardners Lane Children's Centre reach area population is 24,720 of which there are 1,035 children aged under five years. The percentage of workless households and those dependent on benefits is below average at 3.2%. There are approximately 962 lone parent households within the centre's reach area, of which 655 households have one or more dependent children. The centre serves a community where the majority of the population (93%) is White British, with the remainder being from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds.

The centre provides a range of services, including health and family services, and play and learning experiences for children and adults. There is an on-site early years provision which operates during school terms for pre-school care and education, and during the school holidays for family playschemes and community family support. The centre provides crèche provision for pre-nursery children whilst their parents attend courses at the centre. It runs two targeted 'New for Two' groups, supporting twelve children for four morning sessions and eight children for four afternoon sessions each week. This is a Government-funded project to provide additional early years sessions for children identified as most needy against set criteria, including income deprivation, speech and language needs, additional or special learning needs.

The centre offers advice and guidance to parents on the daycare and childminding facilities available within the local community. Approximately 70% of children, on entry to early years provision at the centre, have skills, knowledge and abilities which are below those expected for their age.

Governance is provided by the school governing body. There is a partnership advisory board in place made up of a cross-section of professionals, including representatives from the voluntary sector and parents. It is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development. The centre has a parents' forum.

Forty staff are employed across the Gardners Lane cluster. All key personnel hold early years teaching, learning support or social work qualifications at Level 3 or above. The centre works in partnership with agencies to deliver a range of integrated services for families and children. The centre has established working relationships with other professional services to deliver a programme of universal and targeted services to meet the local community's needs.

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

The centre's vision, 'Aspire and Achieve' is at the heart of the work of leaders and all those who are involved in the centre. The centre is an excellent example of what can

be achieved when the shared vision and commitment of many people combine to serve the local community.

Leadership and management are outstanding and are described by partners as being 'second to none'. Leaders are fully focused on the needs of the immediate community. Their pursuit of excellence in all of the centre's activities, combined with the highly effective work of the well-qualified staff team, has led to an excellent quality of provision and outstanding outcomes for children and families. Nevertheless, leaders are not complacent and realise that the centre could do even more for its users. For example, although highly successful at engaging parents to volunteer at the centre and positively supporting students on work experience, they rightly recognise that more could be done to promote employment opportunities for all users. As a result, they are exploring innovative ways in which to provide increased opportunities for adults to gain volunteering experience in areas of their choosing.

Leaders continually check the effectiveness of the centre's work and seek ways to improve things. They are reflective and have accurately identified areas for further development. For example, they fully acknowledge that systems to track the future success of users who have been supported in accessing outside services, training and employment are not as robust as the excellent systems to evaluate the work within the centre.

Leaders and staff have a thorough understanding of families' individual needs. They make very good use of the information available and target resources where they are most needed. Staff are very successful in targeting and engaging the most vulnerable groups and are successfully engaging families who, traditionally, have been unwilling or unable to take up services. As a result, over 80% of families with children aged under five engage with services. The centre demonstrates that it has an excellent ability to carry on improving.

The work of the centre is overseen effectively by the governing body and local authority. Governors are highly supportive and have a strong commitment to the on-going development of the centre's role in the community. The centre has a very effective advisory board, the membership of which includes representatives from the wide range of the services which the centre provides. The centre is innovative in the way it captures children's and parents' views. These are taken into consideration fully when shaping the services to meet the community's needs.

Safeguarding is the centre's highest priority. Outstanding partnerships And excellent inter-agency working by highly skilled professionals means that the needs of potentially vulnerable families are identified at an early stage and interventions are appropriate with provision tailored carefully to match families' individual needs. The centre makes excellent use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to target resources effectively.

The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the centre's vision.

The support given to teenage and young parents, including young fathers, is excellent. It is specialist, tailored to individual needs and is delivered in an environment that encourages teenagers to access early advice and support. As a result, these parents gain improved self-esteem and self-confidence. They successfully improve their parenting skills, particularly in managing their children's behaviour, and develop a very good understanding of how to stay safe, live healthier lifestyles and support their children's learning and development.

The importance and the role of fathers are promoted very well. Fathers are included in all activities and attend a range of sessions, such as parenting programmes, 'Caring Dads' and story making workshops. They speak very highly about how they feel and the confidence they have in supporting their children's development and learning. There is excellent support for the Polish community and their children are prepared well for their transition to school.

Partners speak extremely highly about the excellent partnership working and the positive effect the centre has in contributing to improved outcomes for young children and their families. Partners are very clear about the centre's main priorities. The highly beneficial relationships with a wide range of partners contribute significantly to the centre's rich programme of activities. For example, excellent collaborative working with adult education means that parents attend sessions which are carefully tailored to their individual needs; retention at these sessions is excellent.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Evaluate the impact of the centre's work even more effectively by improving the rigour of systems to track the future success of users who have been supported in accessing outside services, training and employment.
- Improve the opportunities for parents to develop independence and economic stability by enhancing services to promote employment.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

The health and well-being of families are improving considerably because the centre is acutely aware of the health and safety issues facing many families. It works energetically to bring about improvement. Parents and children develop an excellent awareness of healthy lifestyles. The cafe is a very well-received resource where parents participate in healthy cooking sessions and routinely access low-cost, nutritious meals with their children. Children with health-related concerns and eating problems have their individual needs met very well. Parents have improved their cooking skills and provide a greater range of healthy meals for their families. Children

develop excellent independence in their personal care, including good hygiene and they know the routines extremely well from a young age.

The excellent partnerships between health visitors, midwives and staff result in positive outcomes for teenage mothers and those new mothers considered to be most vulnerable. Health visitors speak very highly of the centre and that the excellent services and support from staff are absolutely invaluable. The midwifery project provides excellent ante- and post-natal support which has resulted in a marked increase in young parents securing early attachment with their babies. Of the 65 babies born this year to vulnerable mothers, 75% were normal birth and there was an increase in the uptake of breastfeeding, with 45% at discharge. Of the 49 parents who received breastfeeding support in March this year, 100% continued to breastfeed, an increase of 35% in the past year. Immunisation rates are high and smoking during pregnancy has reduced. Parents are given valuable opportunities to learn how to care for their babies and are very proud of their achievements. The early intervention and joint working between speech and language therapists, staff and play therapists reduces the risk of delay in communication and language development in children.

The centre has a major impact on improving parenting skills. Discussion with parents, and case studies, demonstrate exemplary support to parents in improving their skills to reduce the risk of harm to children. Excellent partnership working, training in first aid and safeguarding, and the on-going review of progress, provide excellent opportunities to support parents with the skills they need to manage their own and their children's safety. Parents show an extremely strong sense of security and confidence in their actions.

The 'New for Two' groups provide exceptional care, learning and development opportunities for the most vulnerable two-year-old children, with priority being placed for children on child-protection plans. Enjoyment is evident everywhere. There is compelling evidence of young children and their parents bonding well and of children developing their play, exploration and communication skills through a variety of interesting activities in the wonderful indoor and outdoor play areas. The many opportunities for parents and children to play, have fun and learn together lead to significant all-round improvements for families. As parents' skills are improving rapidly, so are those of their children. For example, parents' improved literacy skills enable and encourage them to spend more time reading with their children at home. Consequently, children develop their speech and language skills more rapidly. The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data show a continued trend of improvement in narrowing the gap between the outcomes for the most vulnerable groups and others. Evaluations of the success of courses and activities are highly positive. Parents speak very highly about how much they value the excellent nursery and crèche provision, without which many would be unable to access the courses available.

Behaviour across the centre is excellent. Parents are empowered, are enthusiastic and want to learn. They commented on how their confidence has improved as a result of the opportunities to volunteer at the centre. Many have successfully

achieved qualifications and moved onto higher education and employment. However, the centre is acutely aware of the need to increase the range of opportunities for adults to gain skills that will improve their employability chances. Parents said staff listen and care. They feel that they have a voice and their views are taken into consideration and have a major impact on shaping the services provided by the centre. Parents, partners and leaders are extremely complimentary about the work of the staff and the impact it is having on families' lives. Comments such as, 'staff are so fantastic', 'staff are very passionate' and 'I would have been lost without their help' are typical.

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	2

How good is the provision?

1

Centre staff know and understand the community extremely well and use this knowledge to plan very high-quality provision. The centre always seeks to improve the life chances and personal development of both parents and children. It is well equipped for this challenge. Parents expressed great appreciation of the support they receive and of the positive changes that have resulted for their children and themselves. As one parent stated, 'I would have been lost without it. I would have been a different person and my life wouldn't have gone down the right way.'

The centre assesses users' needs and tracks progress extremely well. It thoroughly documents and evaluates interventions and the progress of all vulnerable families. It uses this information well to learn how to improve future provision. Parents are actively involved in reviewing their child's learning; attendance at parent and key worker reviews is high. The centre is exceptionally effective as a facilitating resource for the families and children. It has outstandingly good links with family and children's services. Through these, it provides very effective support for the most vulnerable families, such as teenage parents, lone parents and families in crisis. Staff work effectively on a one-to-one basis or group session, either within the centre or at

venues local to families where they feel comfortable.

Staff are extremely good at identifying needs within the community and are innovative in providing services to meet these needs. For example, excellent provision is in place to support victims of domestic violence and young children who witness this. 'Social English' sessions provide learning and confidence-building opportunities for non-English speaking parents. Families are provided with an extensive range of fun activities during school holidays in partnership with the local schools and other agencies. Staff co-facilitate a summer playscheme with social care to support children with disabilities. Joint sessions with Reception classes throughout the year support children's transition arrangements. All these activities contribute significantly to improving the life chances of children and their families.

Participation and retention rates for most services are excellent and the centre is a constant hive of activity. Excellent quality of care, guidance and support is provided by staff who are extremely knowledgeable, warm, welcoming and supportive towards parents and children. Young teenage parents have a strong link with the centre and are exceptionally well supported in continuing their education during pregnancy and after their child is born. Parents talked passionately about how the centre has had a significant impact on their confidence and self-esteem, resulting in improved outcomes for themselves and their children.

The centre's early years practitioners demonstrate exceptional specialist skills and an excellent understanding of the requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage. This promotes children's learning and development extremely well. Staff make excellent use of sign language and pictorial aids to support children's communication and language skills. The centre promotes individualised, purposeful learning for adults and all users' achievements are acknowledged and celebrated. The centre removes barriers to learning by providing crèche facilities so that adults can attend courses. Participants' views of the centre's activities are highly positive and result in many users coming to the centre because of word-of mouth recommendations.

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

The centre has very well-established and effective governance. Members are highly supportive and have a strong commitment to the centre and to the on-going development of its role in the community. The leadership team provides exceptional

leadership and management for the centre and is held in the highest regard by partners. The head of the centre and senior leaders display a burning passion to serve the community and are constantly looking for new and innovative ways to improve what is already outstanding provision. They have plans for ambitious projects. Priorities for action are based on an astute analysis of need and are communicated clearly so that all can contribute to meeting them. Teamwork among staff is excellent and morale is very high. Staff are well qualified and experienced.

A culture of self-evaluation and continuous improvement is integral to the work of all those involved at the centre. The centre is highly effective in analysing needs and setting ambitious targets for the future. It is proactive and constantly leading the way in finding new assessment systems and testing these out. In many respects, the centre's evaluation of the effectiveness of its services is meticulous. For example, evaluations of centre activities take place immediately and these inform the planning for the next activity which is tailored to meet users' individual needs. Excellent systems are in place to evaluate the long-term impact on children's development and learning. However, the systems are not as robust for tracking and evaluating the future success of adults they have supported. Adults are helped to be involved in their own assessments and in their children's assessments. The centre makes effective use of the information available to them and targets resources effectively where they are most needed. As a result, the centre has successfully increased engagement with families.

Families who use the centre are fully involved in consultation and routinely share their views. Parents feel listened to and valued. The centre's work to promote equality and diversity and tackle discrimination against vulnerable groups is of a high order. Staff seek to understand and to break down barriers, especially those for the most vulnerable families, such as young parents, disabled children and those who speak English as an additional language. The children's centre is an integrated part of the community it serves. It is particularly successful in its targeted work to support children and families who are in most need of support. For example, disabled children and those who have special educational needs are exceptionally well cared for. They benefit from co-working with the portage workers who deliver a targeted 'Stay and Play' group and an 'Early Start' baby group.

The centre's excellent procedures ensure children and their families are very well safeguarded. Robust training for staff and effective inter-agency working with skilled professionals means that they identify the needs of potentially vulnerable families at an early stage and intervene quickly. This prompt action and excellent use of the CAF ensure efficient use of resources and reduces the number of children subject to child protection plans. Consequently, the centre improves the lives of the children and families who are accessing services.

Excellent relationships with a wide range of partners contribute significantly to the centre's rich programme of activities which are tailored to individual needs and give adults the opportunities to maximise their development. The centre provides excellent value for money through working in partnership with other agencies and

commissioned services. It makes excellent use of resources, successfully taps into additional funding wherever possible and increases its impact by training staff and using large numbers of volunteers.

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

The outcome judgements of the on-site early years provision inspection carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre were taken into consideration for this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Gardners Lane Centre on 17–18 October 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall. We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

Leadership and management are outstanding and are described by partners as being 'second to none'. The centre manager and her dedicated, well-qualified staff team have provided you and your families with an excellent range of services that are carefully tailored to meet your particular needs. The outcomes for you and your children who use the centre are excellent overall. You participate enthusiastically in activities and courses which build your confidence and develop your parenting and life skills.

Leaders are constantly looking at ways to make things better for you and your families as they realise that the centre could do even more for you. For example, although they are highly successful at engaging you in volunteer work at the centre, and they support students on work experience, they know they could do more to promote employment opportunities for you. As a result, they are looking at different ways in which to provide you with more opportunities to gain volunteering experience in areas of your choosing. Therefore, we have asked that they continue to do this.

Leaders are continually checking on the effectiveness of the centre's work and seeking ways to improve things. They have successfully identified areas for further development. For example, you are supported very well in accessing information, services, training and employment, but leaders are fully aware that systems to track how successful you are when you have been supported in accessing outside services, are not as good as the excellent systems to evaluate the work within the centre. Therefore, we have asked that they improve these.

Leaders and staff have an excellent understanding of the individual needs of you and your families. They make effective use of the information available to them and target resources where they are most needed. Staff are successfully engaging over 80% of families with children aged under five within the area. Consequently, they are making a difference to a very large majority of children's and families' lives.

The centre is excellent in the way it captures you and your children's views. These are taken into consideration fully when shaping the services to meet the community's needs. For example, you asked for more sessions to play and learn with your children, so the centre provides 'Family Learning Days' for you to do this. You asked if the centre would continue providing opportunities for you to attend the patchwork and craft-making sessions, and staff supported you to become volunteers so that you are able to run these sessions yourselves.

Safeguarding is the centre's highest priority and is at the heart of what it does. Outstanding partnerships with key agencies result in the most vulnerable children and families being supported. Excellent inter-agency working by highly skilled professionals means that the needs of potentially vulnerable families are identified early and staff intervene quickly with provision tailored carefully to match families' individual needs. For example, mothers and child witnesses of domestic abuse are exceptionally well-supported. As a result, you and your children feel exceptionally

safe at the centre and you feel more confident in caring for your children and improving their lives.

The inclusion of you and your families is extremely important to the centre. The support given to teenage and young parents, including young fathers, is excellent. They are provided with specialist, tailored support which is delivered in an environment that encourages teenagers to access early advice and support, resulting in improved self-esteem and self-confidence. These parents are successfully improving their parenting skills, particularly in managing their children's behaviour. They develop a very good understanding of how to stay safe, live healthier lifestyles and how to support their children's learning and development.

The importance of the role of fathers is promoted very well. Fathers are included in all activities and attend a range of sessions, such as parenting programmes, 'Caring Dads' and story making workshops. Fathers speak very highly about how they feel and the confidence they have in supporting their children's development and learning. Excellent support helps you and your children become well-prepared in their transition onto school.

Those of you who use the centre are now much more aware of how to stay safe and healthy and to provide for your families. Staff provide you with access to training in first aid and safeguarding, and home visits and give advice on how you can prevent accidents in and around your homes to keep your children safe. They help you to keep yourselves and your children very healthy by encouraging you to cook and eat healthy foods and support mothers to breastfeed their babies.

Staff have exceptional specialist skills and promote children's learning and development extremely well. Enjoyment is evident everywhere. We saw you and your children bonding well and your children developing their play, exploration and communication skills through a variety of interesting activities. Your children benefit from wonderful indoor and outdoor play areas that help to stimulate and extend learning. There are many activities for you and your children to play, have fun and learn together. As your skills are improving rapidly, so are those of your children. For example, your improved literacy skills enable and encourage you to spend more time reading with your children at home. Consequently, your children develop their speech and language skills more rapidly. Staff make excellent use of sign language and pictorial aids to support children's communication and language skills, and help you to support your children's learning at home. The centre removes barriers to learning by providing crèche facilities so that you can attend courses.

You expressed great appreciation of the support you receive through the centre and of the positive changes that have resulted for your children and yourselves. As one parent stated, 'I would have been lost without it. I would have been a different person and my life wouldn't have gone down the right way.'

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk to you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely

during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre, and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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

