

Inspection report for The Woodlands Children's Centre

Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	383842
Inspection dates	18 - 19 October 2012
Reporting inspector	Philip Ellwand

Centre leader	Ann Court
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Birchwood Church of England Primary School 111304
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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with managers, staff, volunteers and users of the centre, representatives of the local authority, staff from partner organisations, members of the advisory board of the centre and parents active in the parents' forum.

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

Information about the centre

The Woodlands Children's Centre is a phase two centre, designated in February 2008. It provides the appropriate level of services, including family support, outreach, early years activities, adult learning activities and access to advice and guidance services. Its core purpose does not include early years education or childcare provision. The centre serves the Birchwood ward in the east of Warrington. The ward has eight super output areas which mix social and private housing, including some of more affluent estates. The two super output areas nearest the centre, in the Oakwood part of the ward, are in the country's 30% most deprived areas. These areas have become more disadvantaged in the last three years and are characterised by higher figures of lone parents and more families who move into and away from the area on short-term tenancies. There are approximately 665 children under five years within the centre's reach area, 219 of these live within the more disadvantaged area. Overall, 17% of families with children are regarded as being in poverty and 16% of are dependent on workless benefits. The large majority of the area's population is of White British heritage, with most of the balance being South Asian, Chinese or of mixed heritages. The centre is a purpose-built facility attached to Birchwood Church of England Primary School, which also has its own early years education provision. The linked provision is subject to separate inspection arrangements. The school was last inspected in June 2012. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk. The centre has spaces for crèche or family and child activities, outdoor play and for confidential appointments and shares a multi-use community room and kitchen area with the school.

The local authority provides the strategic management and direction of the centre through the Prevention Family Support and Youth Division which was restructured in April 2011. The new staff team have been together since then and include a full-time manager, two part-time family support workers and one full-time and one part-time centre support worker with two part-time administrative assistants and one part-time caretaker. The staff support the Woodlands Children's Centre as well as two phase three centres in the east of Warrington, Meadow View Children's Centre in Culcheth and Butterflies Children's Centre in Woolston. The manager is responsible for managing all of these and a joint advisory group provides the governance. Woodlands centre has an active parents' forum.

Woodland's reach area has a further two primary schools and a range of early years and childcare provision including four day nurseries, two link clubs and two pre-school playgroups, three parent and toddler groups and 23 registered childminders. These serve families from outside Birchwood who work in the area as well as local families. Most children enter early years provision with skills and knowledge at the levels 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

Woodlands Children's Centre provides a welcoming environment with good care, guidance and support. Overall effectiveness is good, as are outcomes and quality of provision. A typical parent comment about the centre is, 'They do everything they can, helping me with things I didn't think they could help me with.' The centre has made considerable progress since the restructuring of the service and the establishment of the current staff team. Registrations and contact with families has increased well, including the registration of all families with new births. The centre has successfully increased its work with hard-to-engage families in the area through its outreach work. However, it is too early to see if it is successful in extending this work and in working with more of the families with children in need. There has been good progress in raising the scores of the Early Years and Foundation Stage profile and improvements in many of the health concerns for the area. However, the number of children admitted to hospital has not declined significantly in the area and this remains an area for development.

The centre maintains very effective partnerships with a wide range of statutory and community-based organisations. Many partners are also members of the advisory board which includes parents' representatives and the local authority, providing effective governance of the centre. The centre has a satisfactory and improving self-evaluation process which identifies the challenges facing the centre. The service improvement plan builds on this and has a clear focus extending work with the centre's target groups. The service is bringing in new data collection and analysis measures to evaluate the impact of services and provision more fully, but it is still too early to see whether this will help set more precise targets and identify future improvements, particularly for those families identified as most in need. Overall the centre has good leadership and management and has made good progress in a short time, thus showing a good capacity for sustained improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the collection and analysis of data by working with partners to:
 - evaluate more fully the impact of the services offered on the outcomes of users
 - inform planning, monitoring and reviewing of provision
 - ensure that provision is particularly effective in target areas and with groups who have been identified as most in need.
- Extend work to reduce the rate of emergency admissions to hospital for children.
- Extend outreach activities to increase the registration and contact with target groups further, especially families in areas of higher disadvantage.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre helps improve the health of children and their families in the area. Ante-natal sessions and initiatives such as the 'Tiny Stars' group provide a wide range of health ideas and advice for families. Surveys suggest that the majority know how to keep themselves healthy. The take-up of health services has increased and all families access post-natal appointments and early development sessions, with a large majority of families following these up. The centre's support for breastfeeding including 'Bosom Buddy' support sessions have helped breastfeeding initiation rates to increase in the last two years to 69%. Numbers maintaining breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks has doubled in the same period to around 36%. The percentage of parents smoking in pregnancy has halved. Healthy eating is promoted in all activities and in cookery courses for adults. The centre promotes outdoor exercise such as 'Woodland Walks.' As a result there has been a slight reduction in the numbers of children classed as obese. The centre is working towards a healthy eating awards scheme. Health partners comment that joint working is leading to improved health outcomes generally. For example, work with speech and language therapy assistants has

increased the early identification of concerns and fast-tracked referrals for further help when appropriate. One parent with a visual disability praised the centre for the support she had, 'They brought the different health providers together, so that I and my children had the help needed.' Some health initiatives are evaluated thoroughly, although it is not clear in all sessions that the hard-to-reach families are being targeted fully.

The centre's environment is safe and the risk assessment process is comprehensive. Staff and partners promote safety in all activities and home visits. The 'safe-buy' scheme enables families to have safety aids such as stair gates, at affordable rates. Families appreciate the first aid courses at the centre and can demonstrate how they are more aware of safety issues. One mother said, 'I knew exactly what to do when my child was choking.' However, data for the area show that there is still a high rate of admissions to hospitals following injuries to under five year-olds. The centre has increased the targeted home visits to families, although it is still too early to see the impact of this.

Staff are trained in awareness of domestic violence issues, which helps them identify incidences more effectively. The centre and partners make very effective use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and a new single point of referral ensures very effective support for families where their cases are being transferred between agencies.

The centre offers good support to local early years settings and works closely with its neighbouring school and its nursery. As a result, the centre supports children's transition to school effectively. Good progress in the Early Years and Foundation Stage increased the number of children achieving at least 78 points across the target profile scores to 67.2% which is above the national average. The attainment gap between the lowest-attaining children and the rest is low in this area, although there has been a slight increase in the last year as overall performance has risen.

Parents value the opportunities to play together and learn about their child's development. As one parent expressed it, 'I feel that I am valued and that I can make a contribution to my child's progress.' The centre provides good adult and family learning sessions, well-tailored to the needs of the centre users. Staff from the 'Brighter Futures' project attend the centre to give one-to-one guidance and support on employability, volunteering and job-seeking skills. The centre works with many partners including a learning champion to provide families with a wide range of advice and guidance.

Relationships in the centre are good and also between children during activities. The parents' forum is active in bringing together the views of centre users. One parent said, 'We are listened to and our views are important to the centre.' Parents on the advisory board now have a clearer understanding of the priorities of the centre and can see the need for a more targeted approach. Staff and users are starting to raise the profile of the centre in the community, with volunteers providing activities and events, including a parent-led drop-in session for young babies which parents themselves suggested.

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	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
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	2
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?

2

The centre staff work closely with partners to ensure that the provision matches the needs of the area. The parents' forum and advisory board are very actively involved in reviewing the centre's goals and have helped the centre focus on the families who have the greatest needs. This helps the centre to move from a universal service to one with more precise targets.

Services are shaped to meet the needs of users and there is a clear focus on providing purposeful activities and learning which helps the development of parents and children. For example, a concern about issues of debt discussed with centre users led to the provision of 'money matters' training. There is some very effective evaluation of learning but there are some gaps in data use, making it difficult for more precise targets to be set to improve outcomes further, such as improving home safety. Centre users comment that they greatly enjoy learning and development opportunities, typically, 'The tutor was witty and he made us relaxed and confident in what we were doing.' The learning and achievements of both adults and children are celebrated with 'Woodlands Star' displays in the centre. Volunteering opportunities are used well to refresh skills and support employability.

Centre users praise the good quality of the care, guidance and support offered by the centre. One user said, 'This centre has been a lifeline to me.' Many other users explained how the centre has been receptive and welcoming, especially in the time of crisis. There is sensitive support so that families needing specialist help can use the centre for appointments, often with crèche support. 'It's a lovely, lovely place – I had quite severe depression, but the support worker was a massive help with guiding my next steps,' as one user explained. Family support is managed well in the centre and is benefiting the families with the greatest needs.

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	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre's governance is very effective with clear priorities set by the local authority in the annual conversation and which are thoroughly reviewed each quarter. The advisory board both provides a challenge for the centre's management and local accountability. The board has good representation of both community, partner organisations and users, with active participation by parents. The parents' forum also ensures that parents' views, ideas and concerns are considered fully in planning the work of the centre. Overall, the centre's self-assessment is thorough and makes good use of the available data and evaluations with extensive feedback from centre users. However, although the service improvement plan is used to review priorities, it does not fully consider the impact of the outcomes for families. As a consequence, targets and measures of progress are not sufficiently precise to ensure improvements in a few of the centre's priority areas of work. The service has started improved monitoring and tracking of impact with some good examples but this is at an early stage and does not always securely demonstrate outcomes for all families.

Professional supervision is comprehensive and conducted well and provides good monitoring and management of family support cases. Day-to-day management is structured well and the manager provides strong leadership to a highly motivated team. The centre has rigorous target setting for staff performance linked to development goals. Partners and users of the centre comment on the improved relationships and effectiveness in the centre since the establishment of the current structure and team.

The centre makes very good use of limited resources and targets the provision effectively at areas of greatest need. Space in the centre is used creatively. The centre is well-maintained, attractive and welcoming. As a result the centre's value for money is good. The centre's outreach and home visiting has reached a significant majority of families of children in their first year successfully, as well as increasing the participation of the most disadvantaged families. However, it is too early to see if it is successful in extending this work and in working with more of the families with children in need.

A user of the centre talked of mixing with different members of the community, 'It's an inclusive environment – genuinely multi-cultural and positive about diversity.' There is good support for disabled adults and children and their families. The centre fulfils its statutory duties in supporting equality of opportunity.

The centre has good arrangements for safeguarding, and staff, partners and volunteers are appropriately trained about policies and procedures. The centre fully complies with safe recruitment practices. Information sharing between partners using the single referral system is good and quality assured. A procedure of 'Step-up' or 'Step-down' ensures that both agencies keep in contact with the family while new relationships are being established. Social care partners confirm that the centre's involvement helps promote quicker and better resolution of cases. Users of the centre understand the priority given by the centre to safeguarding, and as one said, 'We are now building in risk assessments and safeguarding issues before we discuss proposals in the parents' forum.'

The centre's partnerships are strong and effective. It is also working closely with social housing providers to improve safety of homes and to support families at risk of eviction. There is good support for parents to be effective participants in the advisory board, with very effective briefings and wider discussions and well-attended parents' forum meetings. Service questionnaires demonstrate significant levels of satisfaction. 'We are listened to. The centre is good at asking for feedback and we have a real sense of decision-making power.'

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	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
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	2
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.	2

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Woodlands Children's Centre on 18 – 19 October 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We wish to thank those of you who came to see us during the inspection, or who completed evaluation forms or questionnaires about the centre and your activities and learning there. It has helped us to see the service which the centre provides. We heard how many of you have taken part in the centre's work by volunteering or by joining the advisory board or taking part in the parents' forum. We hope that this will continue to develop and make sure that the centre continues to value the views and suggestions of its users.

You told us that the centre provides a welcome for you and that you trust the good quality of care, guidance and support that it offers. We were able to see this and many of you were able to describe how the centre has played an important part in supporting you and your children. We judge that the centre makes a good difference to people's lives and that what it offers is of good quality. One centre user stated that, 'They do everything they can, helping me with things I didn't think they could help me with.'

The centre has made considerable progress since the new staff team came together after the restructuring of the service just over a year ago. The centre has increased its numbers of families registered and kept contact with families well. It has managed to register all families with new births and to make home visits to those in the most vulnerable areas. Staff have also managed to visit a large majority of the families with children under five to increase the membership of the centre.

We heard of the services which the centre offers, and how many of you appreciate the 'All Kinds of Play' activities, the 'Tiny Stars' sessions, the 'Storycrafts' or support for breastfeeding. We heard how the centre is helping families understand their children's development and how they can best help them be more ready for when they transfer to school or early years education. Some of you told us how you'd gained skills and confidence through this. We also heard how the centre's partners provide a wide range of support and advice, from coping with debt to finding out more about training and work opportunities. We heard how the centre promotes the health of families by helping develop better patterns of healthy eating and exercise. We've judged that the centre has done well to encourage more

breastfeeding, better dental health and giving up smoking. We judged that this provision by the centre is good. We've heard how staff help promote safety at home, on the road and in the centre. There are still large numbers of emergency admissions to hospital for children in this area, even after the centre has been providing advice and running first aid courses. We have asked the centre to work with its partners to reduce this.

We have asked the centre and partner organisations to make better use of the information about the area and about the effect on people of all it does. We hope that by analysing this information, that the centre can see what is working well for families. We have also asked the centre to do more to make contact with those families who have the most difficulties in joining in, often because they are under considerable stress and have the greatest needs for the services of the centre. Overall, with the improvements already made we think that the centre has a good capacity to improve.

Thank you again for helping us to find out about the centre and we wish you and your families every future success.

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