

Inspection report for Oakhill Children's Centre

Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	404538
Inspection dates	9 - 10 January 2013
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Featherstone Girnhill Infant School URN 108168
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Oakhill Nursery EY343908

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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 manager and staff, representatives from the local authority, members of the partnership board, representatives from a wide range of partner agencies and parents.

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

Information about the centre

Oakhill Children's Centre is a phase one centre that was designated in 2006. It is located in the ex-mining community of Featherstone in Wakefield and serves an area of high deprivation. The centre is co-located with Girnhill Infant school. The centre manager was appointed in 2011. There are currently 706 children aged under five years in the reach area. The reach area is amongst the 30% most deprived nationally. Some areas of Featherstone are within the 10% most deprived in the country and 27% of children under four years live in households dependent on workless benefits. The large majority of children are of White British heritage, with an increasing number of Eastern European families. Children's skills on entry to early years provision are generally below age-related expectations.

The strategic management of the centre is undertaken by the governing body of Girnhill Infant School alongside a partnership board. The centre has links to a further three primary schools. The centre provides an appropriate range of services to meet the core purpose. These include: family support, health services, parent and young child-focused activities, Partner agencies include: health professionals, the speech and language team, employment services and housing advice. On-site childcare is provided and is subject to separate inspection arrangements.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Oakhill is a satisfactory children's centre that offers good levels of care and support to families that access its services. The senior leadership team and centre staff are passionate about the work of the centre and have successfully established good partnership working arrangements with a wide range of professionals. All staff and partners give the highest priority to safeguarding children and families. Families hold the centre in high regard and refer to centre staff as 'being like one of your mates'. They greatly value the care, guidance and support provided.

The centre uses resources suitably to avoid any duplication of services and has found creative ways of managing its own limited accommodation through the use of buildings throughout the community. A few parents engage well with the work of the centre through voluntary work. However, there has been a reduction in the number of parents directly involved in decision-making.

The centre places a high priority on encouraging adults to develop their confidence, skills and engage in learning. A focus on improving children's readiness for school has had excellent results demonstrating a significant increase in children's skills and knowledge. However, the centre does not gather information on outcomes for families well enough, particularly in regard to health, safety, adult learning, training and employment. Parents are keen to improve their parenting skills but some do not attend all of the sessions provided in parenting courses.

The centre has undergone several changes in the last eighteen months. Senior leaders have managed vacancies and interim arrangements well. The Head of Centre and newly appointed centre manager have worked as one. As a consequence, most families within the reach area are now registered with the centre and the majority of families are accessing a good range of services. This includes those families whose circumstances may make them hard to reach or more vulnerable. Changes within the local authority performance management systems have resulted in a targeted approach to the work the centre

undertakes. The local authority is very well placed to both challenge the centre and drive improvement. This, along with the commitment of staff and the absolute confidence in the new streamlined systems demonstrates that the centre has good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Agree with the local authority arrangements for collating data particularly for health outcomes, and use this information to prioritise need.
- Increase the number of parents involved in decision-making at the centre.
- Increase the retention rate of parents attending parenting courses.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Most families attending the centre have a satisfactory understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and take advantage of the courses on offer. The proportion of mothers who remain breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks has increased from 24% to 31%. Volunteer parents form part of the Breast Friends in partnership with Little Angels support group. Parents acknowledge that the information and support given through this group has been instrumental in them continuing to breastfeed. Healthy eating is promoted through the popular 'Cooks Kitchen'. A notable success has been the reduction in the percentage of children in Reception Year who are obese from 14% to 6%. The weekly 'Health Trainer Drop-in' supports parents to improve their health and lifestyle with advice on diet, smoking, exercise, alcohol and stress. However, information from these sessions is not shared with the centre. This restricts the centres ability to judge how effective these sessions are.

Families feel extremely safe at the centre and learn to keep themselves safe as they develop an understanding of dangers within the home. The number of families accessing the Home Safety Scheme has increased. The number of emergency hospital admissions due to an accident, for children under five years is low but has increased. Safeguarding is well promoted throughout the centre and collaborative working with a range of partners by centre staff has helped families to remain safe during difficult times. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process effectively. The majority of the most vulnerable two-year-old children in the area access services at the centre.

The on-site school serves many families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Data shows that over a three year period children from this school have made outstanding progress in their personal, social, and communication, language and literacy skills. The large majority of these children have had regular engagement with the children's centre. The skills and abilities of children as they begin Reception Year has also increased year on year. Overall the percentage gap between the lowest-achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest has reduced. Through 'Story and Rhyme', 'Learning through Play' and 'Stay and Play' children are more prepared for school. Parents improve

their parenting skills as they learn how to establish routines and manage behaviour in better ways.

A few parents use their skills on a voluntary basis and act as peer-support in groups. There has been a reduction in the number of parents directly involved in the decision-making of the centre and the Parents Forum is not currently operating. The centre has had some success with the number of teenagers who have returned to education. However, limited data are available on parent participation in adult learning and training or how families have improved their economic stability and independence.

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	3
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	3
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.	3

How good is the provision?

2

Over the last year the number of families accessing services has steadily increased with the majority of families, in the area now engaged. Through effective partnership work the centre has been able to identify target groups within the area. For those families who live in the 10% most deprived areas of Featherstone, 95% of them engaged with the centre in the last year. Some target groups such as, teenage parents and disabled children are well represented. Others, such as, fathers and those from minority ethnic groups remain low in number. Participation and attendance rates vary across activities, from the well-attended 'Stay and Play' sessions to the lower rate of retention for more formal parenting courses.

A range of activities supports families' learning and development. These include, 'Learning through Play', and 'Baby signing'. A notable success has been the 'Fun with Phonics' course. This was very well received and enabled parents to better support their children in preparation for reading. The centre-based library scheme has encouraged more families to read together at home. Childminders have a regular group session at the centre and along with other childcare provision have benefitted from the training and advice given by the

children's centre teacher. Parents say they value the benefit of parenting courses, and this helps them develop more confidence. A well-resourced crèche is available to support training and staff model good quality play activities. Personal achievement is celebrated by providing certificates at the end of courses.

The centre provides good care, guidance and support for families as staff recognise the needs within the community. Families frequently face a raft of complex issues, including housing problems, domestic violence and isolation. Staff are highly effective in supporting families through these difficult periods. Parents speak highly of the support they receive and say 'they never feel judged'. They particularly appreciate the times when staff accompany them on appointments. In times of crisis the centre provides immediate support and is able to ensure families access the most appropriate services. The on-site ante-natal sessions and links with the midwife and health visitor enable the centre to increase parental awareness of the services the centre has to offer at an early stage.

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	3
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 last eighteen months has seen the centre move through a period of transition following the appointment of a new centre manager and changes with the local authority performance management system. Leaders and managers have quickly extended provision and outcomes for children and families are improving. Senior management have high aspirations for the centre and a shared vision of how these will be achieved. The work of staff is monitored on a regular basis. Staff work well together and support each other. The action plan is matched to the needs of most families. The centre manages its resources stringently to avoid duplication of services and has shown its commitment to sustainability through signposting to services and the use of other buildings.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The centre operates within a very diverse area and the range of families accessing services is representative of the community. The centre makes good use of the skills and expertise of its own staff and that of staff from partner organisations. Particularly strong links exist with the midwife and health visitor. The centre promotes the inclusion of disabled children and those with special educational needs well through very effective partnership working.

The centre is not able to demonstrate the full influence of its work in improving outcomes for children and families because of ineffective systems for gathering data. Contractual arrangements and service level agreements do not always clarify what information is required to support the centre in its work. This contributes to the centre providing satisfactory rather than good value for money.

Safeguarding arrangements are a priority of the centre and safer recruitment procedures are stringently followed. Early interventions and referrals to the most appropriate agency are timely and effective in protecting families, particularly in relation to the high level of domestic violence in the area. Comprehensive risk assessments are in place across the centre.

Both parents and children are able to help shape and develop services through the 'Comment Caterpillar', 'Request and Respond Butterfly' and the 'Expression Tree'. The vast majority of parents who responded to the satisfaction survey say that they are satisfied with the services the centre offers.

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	3
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	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
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

Inspectors considered the previous inspection report for Girnhill Infant School and three other local schools. The childcare inspection report for Oakhill Nursery was also considered.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Oakhill Children's Centre on 9 January 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank those of you who helped with our work. You expressed your views clearly and they were helpful to us.

We visited some activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you. Like you, we found your centre to be welcoming and friendly. The care, guidance and support offered by staff and other agencies they work with are a real strength of the centre. Staff are enthusiastic and committed to improving outcomes for you and your families. The centre is good at encouraging you to use its services. The centre provides you with a wide range of activities which you told us you enjoy. You are developing your parenting skills and as a result, are enabling your children to feel secure and make the best progress they can.

You told us that coming to the centre has given you more confidence and we were pleased to see how some of you enjoy volunteering and support other parents in the groups. We hope this continues to grow. We have asked the centre to encourage you to become more involved in decision-making either through a parent forum or by becoming a member of the partnership board. We hope you take this offer up as your views are important.

We have asked the centre to consider how they can access more information especially when you have completed training courses and activities in order to ensure it has been a worthwhile experience for you and has continued to make a difference in improving your lives. We have also asked the centre to look at why some of you are not always able to regularly attend a course. You may be able to help them with this.

Thank you once again for your time. We wish you all the very best for the future.

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