

Inspection report for Oldhams Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Bolton |
| Inspection number | 409612 |
| Inspection dates | 30–31 January 2013 |
| Reporting inspector | Gillian Bishop HMI |

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| Centre leader | Charlotte Mitchell |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
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| Linked school if applicable | High Lawn Primary School URN 105156 |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Not applicable |

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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 parents, centre staff, representatives from professional partnerships, the advisory board and the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Oldhams Children's Centre is a phase two centre located in North Bolton and serving the Astley Bridge area. The catchment is relatively affluent with the majority of families living in the 50% most deprived area in the country. However, two of the super output areas are within the lowest 20% most deprived. Over 1100 children aged nought to five years reside in the area. Approximately a third of children aged nought to four years live in the most deprived area and in households dependent on workless benefits.

The large majority of families residing in the area are of White British heritage with a small minority from minority ethnic groups. Families experience a range of social and economic difficulties associated with substance misuse, domestic violence and unemployment. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage often enter early years provision with below age-related expectations in their development.

The centre received designation in 2008 and it provides the appropriate range of services to meet the core purpose. The strategic management of the centre is undertaken by the local authority alongside an advisory board. A recent restructure of services has seen children's centres, Social Care Family Support, the borough-wide Contact Team and Sponsored Childcare Service combining to become the 'Children & Families Support Service'.

The Children's Centre Network Manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of this centre alongside two other phase two centres within the north of Bolton. The assistant manager, Children and Family Support Services, provides line management to the family support team. Partner agencies include health professionals, the speech and language service, Home Start, High Lawn Primary School, Illume Education and UCAN.

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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| 3 |
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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

Oldhams Children's Centre provides satisfactory and improving support to children and families. Outcomes are satisfactory overall and good in some respects. The centre provides a warm and friendly place in which to meet and make new friends. The well-resourced building includes a community café, library and access to computers; which is helping to promote informal engagement with families in the first instance, and secure longer term relationships over time. This, coupled with onsite maternal care is providing an increasingly successful approach to registering and engaging more families.

The leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory and improving. The manager leads by example and has high expectations of her team and the people she works with. However, despite persistence she has been unable to secure the full commitment of some partners in the strategic steer of the centre. This is impeding the centre from moving forward more rapidly and from securing, in some respects, stronger outcomes for families. Furthermore, the lack of parental representation on the advisory board prevents their involvement in governance and decision-making processes.

The centre's approach to safeguarding is robust and statutory requirements are fully met. The large majority of parents confirm that the centre provides well for their needs and that they feel well protected and supported in times of crisis in particular. 'This place is an absolute lifesaver', and, 'when I feel down I know I only have to go to the centre for help', are typical comments from parents. Health outcomes are improving securely due to well-targeted provision sustaining a positive trend towards healthier lifestyles for children and parents.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in their learning and development. This is due to the priority given to improving the quality of activities and the expertise and support from the Early Years specialists. Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores have improved and are above national averages although the gap between the lowest 20% of children and the rest has widened. The role of parents in supporting children's learning and progress is still embedding and not yet extended to all groups, particularly those which are parent-led. In addition, the range of adult learning opportunities is still evolving and systems to assess learning needs and track outcomes and progress are often hindered by weak information sharing arrangements with some partners.

Provision for families is satisfactory. The centre is making great strides in the engagement of Muslim families although the broad range of needs and expectations of the community as a whole, have proved difficult to unite. As a result, the centre is only just beginning to establish a position of trust among local families and some tension still exists where changes to services have been made. Some new partnerships alongside improvements in the quality of local data are helping to increase engagement levels, match services more effectively and reach families who need it most which demonstrates the centre's capacity to improve. However, the centre has still to investigate the profile and needs of the community surrounding the centre as these families have proved harder to reach; particularly fathers, including those who may be workless. As a result, the centre's overall effectiveness is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Audit the learning needs of parents, particularly workless fathers and improve pathways into suitable volunteering, education, training or employment opportunities.
- Continue to raise parents' awareness of how to support and contribute to their children's learning and development in order to enhance the quality of parent-led play sessions.
- Involve parents in the analysis of local community needs and the development of future provision and sustain their engagement in governance and decision-making arrangements.
- Work with the local authority and the advisory board to strengthen the strategic input of partners, and improve the rigour in which they engage in local needs analysis, measure outcomes and contribute to centre improvement plans.

How good are outcomes for families?

'The Friends and Family Group has been an absolute godsend' and, 'I would not have been able to cope and move on without the wonderful family support'. Such comments from parents confirm the sense of value and appreciation which many parents hold for the centre. Effective multi-agency partnerships, referral into MARP (Multi-Agency Referral Panel) alongside the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework ensures the holistic needs of the family influence and tailor support. Hence, good outcomes and increased stability for children most at risk such as those subject to child protection plans.

Parents confirm that large scale safety events have raised their awareness of how to keep their families healthy and safe. As a result, some have developed fire escape plans for home and are adopting safe sleeping arrangements for young babies. Local youths have created anti-bullying and behaviour posters for display in the centre and parenting programmes have improved parents' confidence and ability to manage their children's challenging behaviour. As a result, they report that they no longer feel embarrassed or unable to cope if a behaviour incident occurs at the shops or in the centre.

Families are engaging well with 'Mini Movers', 'Babies First Foods' and 'Kids on the Go' increasing their enthusiasm for physical fun and exercise. In turn, this is helping to reduce previously high obesity rates for children in their Reception Year bringing them closer to national averages. In addition, the breastfeeding group and good support from midwives and health visitors are improving the length of time which mothers continue to feed their babies and their awareness of the benefits of doing so.

Centre data confirm that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, including those with disabilities and special educational needs, make good progress in their learning and development given their individual starting points. Guidance from the Children's Centre Link Teacher has led to good improvements in systems to plan for, and assess children's educational needs. For example, 'WOW' books are more routinely used to track children's progress, and provision such as 'Chatter Matters' and 'Rhythm, Rhyme and Story' are improving communication and language skills for children engaging with these programmes. To some extent, parents are becoming involved with their children's learning particularly where staff nurture their knowledge, skills and ideas within groups. However, parent-led play sessions lack the same structure preventing children from getting the very best from all their play and learning opportunities.

In the main, parents confirm that they are consulted about how well provision meets their needs and a couple of parents volunteer by running and supporting groups such as 'the Twins Group' and 'Messy Play'. In addition, other parents have played a more active role in governance arrangements by representing their community on the advisory board. However, these roles have not previously been sustained. Local partnerships with UCAN, HOOT credit union and the Neighbourhood Management Team have provided access to training, further education and work clubs leading to improved economic stability and employability skills for

some local families. However, the take-up and progress of training is not systematically tracked preventing a more comprehensive analysis of outcomes. Nor, are personal learning needs and goals used to guide suitable pathways to employment or further education, particularly for fathers and young parents.

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

3

Restraints within resources have led to a sharper analysis of need within the community and a renewed focus to deliver services for families living in the most deprived areas. Early analysis shows local engagement is increasing well and the centre is working hard to break down existing barriers to access within the surrounding estate. The centre ensures that all disabled children in the area receive appropriate support and provision and 76% of teen parents are now participating in some activities. Furthermore, hugely successful collaboration with Illume Education (After School Club) has provided a welcoming venue for an evening religious and activity club which 50 local children attend each day.

Maternal and health services are a strength of the centre's work. Antenatal sessions are well attended and they provide a valuable opportunity to register and support new parents and assess needs at an early point. Astute and effective screening by health professionals alongside perceptive and friendly staff ensure families in difficulty are swiftly identified and referred to services. This is particularly so for families at risk of domestic violence or substance misuse. However, a small minority of parents report that some activities are not as good as they used to be and some do not sustain contact.

The provision to help children learn, develop and gain skills for the future is generally good and improving. Furthermore, centre data confirm that the take-up of nursery entitlement is

good. Some parents have completed accredited first aid courses and BTEC Customer Service training. These achievements are celebrated within the UCAN newsletter and the 'Let's Celebrate' achievement board. However, the range of training that local parents participate in and their educational progression is unclear. For example, the centre does not know if sufficient numbers of fathers or young parents, who need it, are engaged in training or outcomes for adults signposted to English for Speakers of Other Languages courses.

The centre is particularly sensitive to potential language barriers ensuring the wealth of literature, information and guidance are displayed in a range of local languages. Helplines and contact details for support agencies are discreetly placed and information about the centre's safeguarding duties is prominently positioned providing complete transparency with regard to the centre's complex work. The centre is proactive in developing support networks for families who feel particularly isolated and it has been instrumental in the development of a specialist training programme for parents experiencing domestic violence. Family support visiting is highly personal to needs and therefore effective. Comments such as, 'they always seem to know when you need them', and, 'staff go above and beyond expectations', confirm the good levels of care, guidance and support reported by parents who have needed it most.

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 | 3 |
| The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups | 3 |
| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups. | 2 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Accountability and arrangements for staff supervision at all levels are secure. Staff benefit from a continuous programme of professional development, in addition to staff training provided by partners in relation to infant feeding, speech and language and early years childcare practice. Managers and staff maintain a strong passion for their work and hold a shared goal drive to improve the life chances and aspirations of the families they work with. Parents and partners confirm improved provision and outcomes for families since the appointment of the centre leader. The advisory board understands the complex nature of the work of the children's centre and that of the community it serves. However, the position of a nominated chair is vacant preventing a firm strategic steer. Representation by partners on the board is narrow and not consistent and the role of the board in planning an improvement cycle is not yet embedded preventing rigour in their challenge.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money. Provision and services have a satisfactory impact on outcomes for families. The building is maintained to a good standard and

generally well utilised although participation rates vary across services. Financial management and the sustainability of services are a priority for the centre. Subsequently, the centre leader's creative management style and her ability to expand the centre's income and access various funding streams enhance provision for parents wherever possible.

Safeguarding procedures are good. Effective partnerships with health, children's social care and family support services ensure families at risk of isolation and social and economic difficulties are routinely referred to the centre. Effective case supervision ensures families are well protected and make progress towards positive change. Within parent-led play session's, parents are consulted about group and behavioural expectations such as 'no use of mobile phones for photographs'. Procedures for undertaking Criminal Record Bureau checks are robust and all staff receive safeguarding training pertinent to their roles and responsibilities.

The centre strives to provide an inclusive service from which everybody can benefit, hence their willingness to seek parental views and respond accordingly. Examples of which are, the 'You Said We Did' board which provides a focus for parental views and the 'Twins Group' led by a parent. In addition, regular consultation with centre users has influenced the range of the school holiday provision and family events. The centre ensures all disabled children in the area are well provided for and particular attention is given to promote equality and diversity in a meaningful way. Provision is firmly focused on closing the achievement gap and breaking down barriers to engagement. Partnerships with Illume Education have been pivotal in the increasing engagement of minority ethnic families and breaking down culture barriers promoting cohesion and harmony within the community.

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 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 | 3 |

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| 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. | 3 |
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Not applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Oldhams Children's Centre on 30–31 January 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

As part of our inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you, staff and centre partners who work with you.

During our inspection, we found that the centre provides a satisfactory range of services and activities which most of you enjoy and which meet your particular needs. The centre has experienced some difficulty providing services for all the different needs in the community and it still needs to know more about the families not using the centre and what they might need. We know that more people are beginning to use services and this is particularly so for children and parents from different cultures and backgrounds. This is partly because it has been able to make good partnerships with a local after-school club attended by Muslim children. However, the centre knows that it must encourage more people to use the centre, particularly those families who have health, social and financial problems and who may need more help than others.

We found that the centre provides a safe and welcoming place for you and staff work hard to support and protect you during times of crisis and difficulty. Comments such as, 'I would not have been able to cope and move on without the wonderful family support', and, 'this place is a lifesaver', confirm that many of you think that too. The centre offer good levels of care, guidance and support. This is particularly so for the families who have attended the 'Friends and Families Group' and those that have received really personal care and attention. Equally, we found that the breastfeeding support group is helping mothers to feed their babies for longer and activities such as 'Mini Mover's' and 'Kids on the Go' encouraged families to take regular exercise and keep healthy.

Parents like using the centre for antenatal appointments and baby clinic and for some, these services encourage families who perhaps do not know about the centre, to find out more and get involved. Activities such as 'Rhythm, Rhyme and Story' and 'Chatter Matters' are very much enjoyed by families and help children to make good progress in their learning and development. They also help parents to learn how to promote and support their children's learning as well. However, some of the play activities are parent-led groups and some parents find that these groups are less beneficial to them and their children because they would like ideas about how best to use these sessions. So we have asked staff to find ways to improve these groups. A few parents have started to volunteer in the centre and others have been on training and courses such as first aid and customer service training. In some cases, training opportunities have helped people to gain a place at college and get jobs. However, there are lots of other courses that parents enrol on but the centre does not know if these make a difference because this information is not tracked enough. So, we have asked the centre to ask parents about the courses they might need and then work with centre partners to track your achievements in the future, particularly for fathers and young parents.

The leadership and management of the centre is satisfactory overall, although we found that the way staff protect families and the way they encourage and welcome everybody in the community to use their services fairly, are good. Leaders encourage you to share your views and most of you are happy in the way they listen and respond to your ideas. As a result of your views, the centre runs a 'Twins Group' and there are more family events and activities for older children in the summer. However, it has not been able to keep parent representatives on the advisory board which prevents you being involved in important decisions. So, we have asked the centre to find ways in which you can do this.

Thank you for taking time to speak with us and 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.