

Inspection report for Oswestry Area Children's Centre

Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	404520
Inspection dates	13–14 February 2013
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Woodside Primary School URN 123387
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	START EY330102 Oswestry Sure Start Childrens Centre Woodside EY315497

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

Report published: February 2013



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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 centre coordinator, senior leaders, centre staff, members of the locality advisory board, partner agencies and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation document, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

Information about the centre

Oswestry Children's Centre serves a geographical area in north-west Shropshire. The centre is managed by a Children's Centre Coordinator on behalf of the local authority. The centre fulfils its core purpose through a range of integrated services relating to health, family support and adult training. Early years childcare, managed by the START Management Board, is available on-site.

The Children's Centres Coordinator has been in post for just under three months at the time of the inspection. The locality advisory board supports the centre's governance and accountability arrangements. The membership of the board is drawn from a range of partners and includes representation from the health, education, library, adult education and family learning services, Job Centre Plus, maternity services, and the local authority. Parents from Oswestry Children's Centre are represented on the board.

The centre's staff team consists of the children's centre coordinator, senior children's centre support worker, children's centre support workers, crèche coordinator, crèche leaders/workers and administrative staff team.

Oswestry was designated as a phase one children's centre as part of the Sure Start Local Programme in June 2003. It is one of 12 centres in the county. It serves a large rural population. Some of the centre's provision is delivered collaboratively with community partners to maximise services for families.

In the area, almost 25% of children under 5 years live in households dependent on workless benefits. The area is ranked within the top 30% of the most socially and economically disadvantaged areas in the country. The large majority of families living in the reach area are White British. Approximately 7% of families are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Within the reach area, there are 1461 children who are under five years of age. Children enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities that are above those expected for their age.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Things are changing for the better at this good children's centre. Under new leadership, there is an air of excitement as leaders at all levels motivate and inspire each other to drive further improvements for the benefit of children and families in the area. Leaders, at all levels have a very good understanding of the community and the needs of children and families attending the centre. They are highly successful at engaging with those families considered to be in greatest need of support and access to good quality services. For instance, Traveller families, children with disabilities, and teenage parents are well-established members of the centre, its services and groups. Parents who expressed a view could not speak more highly of the centre and its staff. One parent said, 'The staff here are just stars!'

As the areas for improvement became apparent during the inspection, the centre

leaders, parent representatives on the advisory board, and key partners began discussing and sharing their ideas and aspirations for improving parents' contributions to the governance of the centre via the advisory board and parents' panel; and to improve outcomes for parents in relation to their economic well-being. This is typical of leaders at this centre who are determined to ensure the centre becomes increasingly effective; and who share ambitions for the centre to be outstanding in all aspects of its performance.

There is clear and convincing evidence that health outcomes are improving strongly and most outcomes are good. However, unemployment in the area remains stubbornly high. Families receive high quality advice and support to maximise their incomes through benefit entitlements. However, there is limited information to show how families are improving their financial independence through adult education, volunteering and employment.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Establish parent representatives as key participants on the advisory board to further enhance the strategic management and governance of the centre; and increase the involvement in, and awareness of, the parents' panel so that parents' views at these meetings are recorded, acted upon and fed on to the advisory board.
- Improve families' economic well-being by:
 - putting in place effective systems to record and monitor the impact of adult education and vocational training on individuals' employment success and their employability
 - use this information to plan services, and to create volunteering opportunities for families to support their economic independence.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The improvement in the health of children and families is as a result of the effective targeted health promotion and provision of high quality health related activities. Breastfeeding initiation rates have improved each year and are up 5% on the previous year. Excellent breastfeeding initiatives in place include weekly visits to the maternity wards to support attachment and bonding. Immunisation rates are very good across the range of vaccines. Childhood obesity at the end of Reception continues to reduce and is broadly in line with the national average.

The use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has been replaced by the Early Help Offer (EHO) which is being used effectively at the centre to target support and interventions to families made vulnerable by their circumstances. Case studies show that previous CAF assessments have been used to improve outcomes for

children and families at times of crisis and concern. The EHO is fast becoming a strong feature of the centre's work in improving the child and families' emotional well-being and safety. The welfare of families is central to the work of the centre. 'Involvement with the children's centre has been a life-changing experience for me.' said one parent. She went on to explain that she and her children had benefitted enormously from the intensive and individualised support.

Risk assessments are working documents which are regularly reviewed and updated to reflect good practice and safety measures. For instance, several staff recently attended personal safety training and the lone working policy and risk assessment were amended, in consultation with staff, to reflect current best practice. Parents have an increasingly good awareness of personal and home safety as they attend relevant training such as family first aid. The safety and security of children and families attending the centre and groups and activities at various locations around the area remains a high priority. Security is excellent. All parents, who expressed a view, said they and their children feel very safe at the centre. Home risk assessments conducted by family support workers, in partnership with parents, and the continued provision of home-safety equipment, help to raise children's and families' awareness of risks and dangers in the home and their communities.

All children are able to access good quality early years provision. They all make good progress, including children with disabilities and special needs, and those new to English, as a result of their involvement with the centre and access to high quality play and learning provision. Early years professionals at the centre and working for partner agencies, play a vital role in driving up standards across the early years sector. The gap between the lowest and highest-achieving 20% has closed considerably and is now at 19% compared to the national average of 30%. Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores show that children in this area achieve considerably better than their peers nationally in their personal, social and emotional development and communication and language. Transition arrangements are very secure and support children's journey into the next phase of their learning.

Parents play an increasingly important role in the life of the centre. They contribute their views and ideas in a number of ways. The 'Tops and Pants' survey successfully captured what parents particularly like and do not like about the centre. The few parents who commented on what they did not like said they did not like that their favourite groups were not available more often. The views of parents and children are routinely used to assess the quality of provision and to make improvements to their experiences. Parent representation on the advisory board has been boosted recently as a further six parents have been appointed. This has generated great interest and excitement within the centre. However, it is too early to show what impact this higher level of parental involvement is having on the effectiveness of the governance and accountability of the centre.

The number of children in the early years living in households dependent on workless benefits has remained stagnant for the last few years with no sign of improvement. There is some evidence of how certain families have improved their financial stability

and economic independence, as a result of volunteering opportunities and access to good quality learning and development programmes. Access to welfare benefits advice has also help families to maximise their incomes. However, the centre is not able to provide sufficient evidence of improvements to individuals' economic well-being, or employment readiness, to support or justify a higher grade.

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	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	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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre is highly successful at reaching out to, and engaging with families identified as in greatest need. All services are targeted to meet community and family needs across the area. The strong emphasis on community based provision and services has led to greater sense of belonging in the community and friendships between families across the area. Family support workers, and other key partners, are persistent in their efforts to successfully engage with families made vulnerable by their circumstances. In this very inclusive centre, all families, including transgender and same sex parents, traveller families, families from minority ethnic groups, those new to English and families with children with disabilities and special needs, receive a warm welcome.

Specialist programmes have increased parenting confidence and have helped parents to develop clear and appropriate expectations of behaviour management to secure good outcomes regarding children's safety. Highly effective and skilled partners, such as health and early years professionals all play a vital part in the centre's success and in providing high quality provision. The Multicultural Ladies group meets each week and is helping to reduce feeling of isolation, improve self-esteem and help the women to settle, make friends and become part of the community.

Adult and family learning and both accredited and non-accredited courses and

activities are popular, and take-up rates for activities are good. The centre has started to record progression pathways for individuals with a view to encouraging greater aspirations regarding their learning and achievement. The strong emphasis on health promotion within the centre's activity programme and learning and development opportunities is helping to raise expectations of healthy lifestyles within families.

Care, guidance and support are good. Individualised, targeted support is a particular strength of the centre and is highly prized and valued by parents. Case studies provide highly compelling evidence of how staff help to meet the complex and challenging needs of individual families, including those experiencing domestic abuse, debt, and child protection. Skilful support workers conduct home visits, provide one-to-one support and group work, and work in partnership with families to help to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. One parent commented; 'When you think you can't carry on, the group is always there to support you'.

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

Recent changes in the leadership team have been welcomed by parents, partners and staff. Leaders at all levels are effective and the governance and lines of accountability are very clear. Leaders say they are energised and enthusiastic as a result of changes in leadership. This includes the advisory board which has recently recruited a number of parent representatives from the centre. The board is well established, meets regularly, and is well-placed to evaluate the effectiveness of the centre. This motivation and enthusiasm is shared by partners. One key partner commented on the new leadership; 'They are bringing fresh eyes to the role.'

The achievements of the centre during the last two years, including the improvement in outcomes for families, the increasing engagement with families, and especially those families identified as being in greatest need, are important. Evaluation of the centre's work is a routine feature, and the views of partners, parents and children are always taken into account.

There are very effective performance management systems in place to support staff's professional development. This is complimented by effective support and strategic direction from the local authority to promote improvement and the centre's

performance. The centre engages with most (90%) of children and their families and significantly with those families identified as in greatest need. The inclusion of families from the wider community and those identified as most vulnerable due to their circumstances, is at the heart of the success of the centre.

Collaborative and effective partnerships with a wide variety of agencies, including health, education, and private, voluntary and independent providers, play a key role in the accomplishments of the centre and the development of good quality provision across the locality. These very effective partnerships contribute to the success of the centre and its work with children and families.

The centre's safeguarding arrangements are thorough, and improving, as a result of the new Early Help Framework. A great focus on prevention and support reduces the number of concerns escalating. Highly successful multi-agency working between key agencies ensures that child protection concerns are swiftly acted upon. Rigorous and improving recording systems enhance the centre's safeguarding practice. Recruitment procedures are very comprehensive, and include appropriate suitability checks on all staff. All staff attend regular training to update their professional knowledge of child protection.

All children with disabilities access good-quality early years provision and their individual needs are well met in partnership with other agencies. Those families identified as vulnerable due to their circumstances, families living with domestic violence, families from minority ethnic groups, teenage parents and those with disabilities receive priority support. The early help provided is having a significant impact on outcomes for the families, especially in relation to their confidence, self-esteem and emotional well-being. As a result of the good provision, and the strong leadership and management, most outcomes for the majority of families are good. The centre provides good value for money.

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 secure improvement in outcomes	2
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	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

Woodside Primary School was judged to be good at its last inspection.

START, early years provision on-site of the children's centre, was inspected days before this inspection and was judged to be outstanding in all respects. The setting has improved its effectiveness as it was judged to be good at its previous inspection. Oswestry Sure Start Childrens Centre Woodside EY315497 was judged to be good at its last inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Oswestry Area Children's Centre on 13–14 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited the centre. Particular thanks go to those of you who shared your personal stories of how the centre and services have touched your lives and made a difference. You obviously feel safe, secure, and able to share your worries with caring and professional staff, who you trust, without being judged.

The new leadership team are very motivated and enthusiastic. Their enthusiasm is infectious and is shared by parent members of the advisory board, partners and staff. They are working hard to make the centre even better.

You told us that you have learnt positive skills in the range of parenting programmes you have attended, which has also led to better relationships with your own children. We can see that you enjoy taking your children to sessions like 'Stay and Play' and are learning about how to play with your children and support them in their language skills. The centre also supports fathers who enjoy learning how to cook healthy recipes and play physical games with their children.

The centre and its key partners are working well to improve outcomes for families particularly in relation to health, safety and enjoying and achieving. There is a good deal of work being done to improve childrens and families health further. For instance, there is good promotion of breastfeeding, and mothers access high quality support, from support workers, to form strong attachments and emotional bonds with their babies. All children make good or better progress in their learning because of the good quality early years provision. Most children achieve significantly better than their peers nationally at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in their personal, social and emotional development and communication and language.

The centre is doing very well in meeting the needs of families and is engaging with most families in the reach area. It is not surprising that the large majority of families want to be involved in the centre, as staff are very friendly, welcoming and approachable. The centre provides a wide range of good quality services, activities and events to meet the needs of families and the community.

Overall, the centre is working well to encourage parents in their learning and development and many of you are moving towards access to further learning and gaining qualifications. However, the centre has little evidence to show parents gaining employment or moving into higher education. Staff are keen to help you progress in your learning and support you through to employment. They are aware that more needs to be done to ensure better monitoring of families' economic well-being. The centre is also keen to encourage parents to volunteer in the centre and in the local community.

Excitingly, there are six new parent representatives on the advisory board. Although there has been parent representation on the board for some time, this is a new development and provides even greater opportunities for parents' views to play a major part in the governance and development of the centre. We have asked the centre leaders to ensure that the new parent members quickly become established on the board and that all parents are made aware of the parents' panel.

Once again, many thanks for your help during the inspection. It was a pleasure to meet you all and we wish you well for the future.

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