

# Willow Trees Children's Centre

Church Hill Community Centre, Loxley Close, Redditch, B98 9JL

**Inspection date** 19–20 November, 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a good centre.

- The very large majority of local families use children centre services regularly, including those who most need support such as lone, young and vulnerable parents. A close check is kept on which families take up services. Community events known as 'Grass' sessions are a positive feature in marketing the centre's services and increasing registrations.
- Family support work, including home visits, results in families overcoming personal challenges. Parents say their confidence builds, well-being is enhanced and parenting skills improve, as a result of the staff's timely support. Families benefit well from the integrated health partnership. The clinics held in the centre are very well attended.
- Sessions such as 'Stay and Play', particularly the 'messy play', are enjoyed by young children. Adults improve their economic well-being by attending courses and the volunteering pathway is very successful in helping some parents upskill and find paid employment following their work experiences.
- The culture of safeguarding is well embedded and families say they feel safe and looked after well.
- The new leadership team has already undertaken an accurate audit of strengths and weaker aspects. They have devised a well focused action plan which together with their proven track record in leading other children's centres in the locality, all judged as outstanding, means there is strong capacity to build for even better effectiveness.

### It is not outstanding because:

- Checks on children's progress in sessions are incomplete, and there is no system in place to follow up the longer term impact of the centre's work on children's achievement when they are five years old.
- The advisory board, though supportive, does not provide enough challenge.
- Parents have limited involvement in the centre's decision-making, particularly at the strategic level.
- The local authority does not fully check on the outcomes of its monitoring, including how well service level agreements are being met.

## Information about this inspection

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

This inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the acting children's centres' programme manager, officers from the local authority, partners, members of the advisory board and parents. Two activities were observed by the inspectors jointly with senior staff. The acting centre programme manager and her line manager attended all team meetings.

Inspectors looked at the centre's self evaluation, improvement plan, a sample of case studies, safeguarding policies and procedures and a wide range of other documentation.

## Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Geoff Dorrity	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

The centre opened in 2008 as a phase two stand-alone centre and delivers a range of services to meet its core purpose. The centre shares a site with a full day care nursery, a before and after school club and a holiday club which are subject to separate inspection arrangements. The centre is housed in Church Hill YMCA Community Centre on the Church Hill estate in Redditch and covers the communities of Church Hill, Moons Moat and Winyates Green.

Redditch Borough Council took over the management of the centre on 1 October 2013 on behalf of Worcestershire County Council; previously the centre was managed by the YMCA. An advisory board is in place comprising service delivery partners. The centre works in a cluster arrangement sharing resources and some staffing across the locality with five other children's centres in Redditch. These centres are subject to separate inspection arrangements.

There are 712 children under five years of age living in the area served by the centre, of which 342 live within the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Children enter early years provision at levels below those expected for their age. Families are mainly White British with a growing number from other ethnic groups, mainly Eastern European. Around a fifth of families are assessed as living in poverty and nearly a tenth are eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit.

The centre has identified its priority groups as vulnerable children and families, young parents, workless families, ethnic minority families and fathers.

The service and staffing are currently under review because Redditch Borough Council has now been commissioned as the early help provider in Redditch, which delivers support services for families with children 0-19 years.

### What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Build on the good practice used previously to track the progress of priority children who attend sessions at the centre; find out how well they achieve by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage; and use the information to inform future services that enable all children, and particularly boys, to have the very best start.
- Strengthen the work of the advisory board by ensuring that meetings give enough time to checking on and challenging the centre's performance.
- Provide parents with an effective forum in which to share their views and enhance the part they play in governance and decision-making concerning key priorities and performance.
- Make sure that the findings of local authority monitoring activities, including those related to service level agreements, are followed up and checked for impact.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

**Good**

- The centre has successfully registered 83% of families living in the area it serves. They access children's centre services across the locality on a regular basis, with the majority using Willow Trees. Families use services they prefer at other centres in the locality because of the strong partnership arrangements that exist. Robust target setting is helping to drive up already good participation rates for all priority groups.
- New birth visits take place to all families living in the centre's most deprived community, and this enables an early focus on ensuring those who need services the most are contacted. As a result, most lone, young and vulnerable families engage well in early childhood services.
- Weekly clinics, together with a range of health-related services such as the 'Young Parents to Be' course and 'Early Days at Home', widen access to services for expectant and new mothers, including those from Polish and Urdu-speaking families who are given specific interpretation and translation support.
- The centre makes extremely good use of social networks to keep families abreast of what is going on. Community events, known as 'Grass' sessions, are organised regularly and involve fun activities which attract a wide audience. The most recent resulted in 100 new registrations.
- Nearly three quarters of vulnerable two year olds and virtually all eligible three and four year old children from priority families take up their free entitlement to early education in good quality local settings.
- Most workless families are in regular contact with the centre. The centre already has plans in hand to give a sharper focus to matching the services available to even better meet all of their needs.

### The quality of practice and services

**Good**

- The high level of families' engagement reflects well on the quality and range of services provided. Parents say they feel welcome, safe and very well supported by caring staff. Comments such as 'Good support has improved my family life', and 'My parenting has improved – I now feel confident and enjoy playing with my child and much better equipped to manage his behaviour positively', are typical of the positive impact services have.
- The level of care, guidance and support offered to families is good. A range of well attended courses, including first aid, successfully raises parents' awareness about how to keep their children safe, and the work with health partners results in a good awareness amongst families about healthy diet and lifestyles. A rising number of mothers continue to breastfeed their babies after eight weeks, and almost all young children are immunised by their second birthday.
- Parents' social skills improve as a result of attending 'My time' sessions. Families in abusive relationships benefit from the life coaching commissioned by the centre, or by attending specific programmes, such as 'Freedom' run by Stonham. The rising number of families who are worried about debt are given expert advice from Citizen's Advice Bureau partners, who hold surgeries at the centre.
- The exchange of information between agencies involved in supporting the most vulnerable families, including children subject to a child protection plan, is robust and supported by shared access to case files which are stored electronically. 'Step up' and 'Step down' Procedures which help families get the level of support they need are clearly understood by everyone, and have proved effective by providing families with more intensive personalised support or helping them to access universal services as appropriate.
- Good emphasis is given to improving parents' life chances, for example through the well established volunteering programme. This is part of the pathway to further education, and has enabled 66% of volunteers to move into paid work. Currently 14 volunteers are undertaking an accredited diploma run by a training partner. An agreement regarding what services Jobcentre Plus will provide has been arranged by the local authority but the impact of this is not being monitored effectively.

- Any concerns identified through the development checks on two year olds are referred to the centre for follow-up. The partnership with speech and language specialists has been highly effective in helping children to improve their communication and language development.
- Last year, considerable work took place with early years partners to set up a system for tracking children's early learning and development and ongoing achievement. The outcomes from the pilot demonstrated the good progress being made by children from typically low starting point. However, this practice has fallen away and the centre is not currently monitoring children's progress and therefore cannot show what impact its work has at a time when the most recent Early Years Foundation Stage results show a significant dip in the proportion of children, particularly boys, reaching a good level of development.

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

**Good**

- The new leadership team, in post for six weeks, has a clear and accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses, and has already set up a prioritised, well-focused action plan. A range of data is used effectively to shape services and review staffing and financial resource allocations, in order to make short and longer term changes.
- Supervision takes place monthly with personal well being at the heart of the process alongside good staff development. Staff are experienced and positive about the future and keen to play their part in moving things forward rapidly. One staff comment sums this up: 'my voice has been heard in the change process and my role has already been adapted to enable even better effectiveness'.
- Purposeful collaboration with partners and other locality-based children's centres means that families can readily access services in their community and can make use of specialist groups when they are needed. This approach is very successful in attracting high numbers of families who most need support and reducing any barriers to their engagement.
- Governance is well established. Advisory board members have been very proactive in helping leadership to develop the early help procedures which have superseded the use of the Common Assessment Framework. This extensive and highly complex work has pushed other matters down the agenda. As a result there has been too little attention paid at recent board meetings to checking the centre's performance and injecting challenge into associated decision-making.
- Safeguarding matters are given due attention, with policy and procedures for staff vetting and recruitment up to date and clearly understood. The welfare of vulnerable children, including those subject to specific care and protection plans, and early help procedures, is at the forefront of the centre's work.
- Diversity is recognised positively and equality promoted well. Parents from different backgrounds get along together and new parents are welcomed to sessions. Parents learning English as an additional language are supported by a volunteer and staff's use of Polish and Urdu means that advice and guidance can be given in the language spoken by families the mother tongue to ensure full understanding.
- The local authority monitors the centre's efficient and effective use of its resources very closely, and keeps tabs on how well the centre is engaging with families reach figures through quarterly data checks. Monitoring of quality and impact is less rigorous, however, and there is limited follow up to check that areas for improvement are being tackled effectively.
- Families are very satisfied with the centre's services. There are regular opportunities for feedback after activities and for comments to be displayed on the 'Boos and Bravos' board. The use of forums from time to time enables the centre to listen to parents' views, but the links with governance are under-developed and no parents currently serve on the advisory board.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

**Children's Centre**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	23599
<b>Local authority</b>	Worcestershire
<b>Inspection number</b>	427493
<b>Managed by</b>	Redditch Borough Council on behalf of Worcestershire County Council

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	712
<b>Centre leader</b>	Louise Langston
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01527 65668
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