

Inspection report for Parks and Walcot East Children's Centre

Local authority	Swindon
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Goddard Park Community Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY302989 Parks and Walcot Children's Centre

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, extended school services coordinator, members of the partnership group, staff, a local authority representative and partner agencies, including representatives from the health service. They had informal discussions with parents, carers and children and visited sessions held at the centre and in the community.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, school development plan, evaluations and data about people who use the centre.

Information about the centre

The Parks and Walcot East Children's Centre is situated on the site of the Goddard Park Community Primary School and serves the Park North, Park South and Walcot East areas of Swindon. The centre was designated in 2004 and is run by the school's governing body on behalf of the local authority. The partnership group contributes to the management of the centre and includes representatives from a number of community and statutory partners and is chaired by a parent representative. The centre is open from 8.00am to 6.00pm, each weekday for 51 weeks of the year.

The centre serves an area that is ethnically, socially and economically diverse. There is significant overcrowding, high levels of crime and ill-health and a high number of vulnerable families in the reach area. There are 960 children under five in the reach area and 738 families. The majority of families in the reach are White British, with smaller percentages of other minority ethnic groups. The families registered at the centre come from 15 different ethnic backgrounds and 22 families speak English as an additional language. Around 39% of children aged under five are living in households dependant on workless benefits and take-up of further education is low. Overall the centre serves one of the 30% of deprived areas nationally.

The children’s centre is integrated with the primary school. The centre manager is the deputy headteacher of the school and the extended school services coordinator is responsible for the day-to-day management of the children’s centre services. It is a full service children’s centre, offering integrated childcare and multi-agency services for families and children who are under five years of age. These include family learning, weekly health clinics and family support, outreach and support for those seeking employment. The majority of services are delivered from the centre with others being held in community venues. These include a baby clinic at Mountford Manor Primary School, and activity sessions held at St Johns Church, Oaktree Nursery and Primary School, the Walcot Dome and supported housing groups.

The school provides childcare for children who are under eight years of age. The early years provision provided for children under three years is registered on the Early Years Register. Childcare provision is available from 8.00am to 6.00pm, each weekday for 48 weeks of the year. Sessions include full day care for children under four years, pre-school sessions and breakfast and after-school clubs for school age children. The levels of skills shown by children on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are well below those expected for their age. The early years provision for children under three years was previously inspected as part of the school inspection in January 2010.

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

The Parks and Walcot East Children’s Centre makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for families. The centre is a highly welcoming place within the community and all users say they feel extremely safe and see the centre as a safe haven. Parents report, ‘There’s always a smile at reception’ and ‘You can have had a terrible day but coming into the centre makes it better.’ A key strength of the centre is the family support work which is helping those who are identified as more vulnerable or experiencing difficulties in their lives to make significant improvements. Case studies, for example, confirm there is significant and sustained improvement for children on child protection plans or identified as children in need.

Staff are enthusiastic and passionate about their work with families. This is because those in charge demonstrate a clear vision and inspire continued improvement. They have a secure understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement and with partners work together to deliver a cohesive set of services, both at the centre and in community venues. There is a strong working relationship with health partners, in order to ensure families have access to universal health services. For example, data showed that fewer families from Walcot East were accessing health clinics, so they worked together to establish a clinic within the community.

The centre uses available data provided by the local authority, partners and their local knowledge well to identify need and plan services. This has led to the centre reaching an increasing number of families in the area, including significant increases of those from target groups, such as high risk families, teenage parents and those living in households dependant on workless benefits. Leaders are strongly focused on promoting high quality services and conduct a range of monitoring activities. As a result, the centre's self-evaluation is accurate and supported by evidence of impact on outcomes and leads to the identification of future priorities. However, leaders recognise that the evaluation system does not yet consistently include all available information, for example, the success data of those families accessing training provided by partners, to evidence the full impact on outcomes. The centre's capacity to improve further is good.

Children's safety and well-being are significantly enhanced by highly effective and robust implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures, which are securely understood by staff. The centre is inclusive and ensures all users feel valued. Staff often go the extra mile to offer good levels of care, guidance and support. This is confirmed by one parent who reports, 'Staff listen and really help when times are difficult.'

Children make excellent progress in their learning and development, from their very low starting points. The 'Every child a talker' (ECAT) programme, coupled with input from speech and language therapy, has had a significant impact on children's language and communication skills. This is evidenced through the recent Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores. The data show that children who attended the centre's childcare provision have made secure progress. The percentage of children achieving six plus points in communication, language and literacy has risen from around 47% to 76%. The ECAT assessment tool shows the numbers and groups of children who were at risk of delay and are now making expected progress has increased over time, with just 1% of vulnerable two-year-olds, in receipt of funding, now at risk of delay. This demonstrates that the gap in outcomes for this group of children is closing.

Families respond well to the range of advice and guidance they receive to keep their children healthy provided by professionals at the health clinics. Parents develop an excellent understanding of how to keep their families safe and protect them from harmful situations, such as domestic violence and alcohol misuse. Some parents are

systematically involved in the governance of the centre as they contribute to the regular partnership meetings. Parents and carers appreciate the range of good quality activities, for example, Bumps to Babes, Young Parents group and parenting courses, which they report help to raise their self-esteem and develop their parenting skills.

The centre provides a range of different opportunities for parents to develop skills to support their child's learning. There are a number of case studies, which show how some families have improved their economic stability. For example, family support workers support individual families to access the benefits they are entitled to. However, there are fewer opportunities for parents to develop their skills for the future. The centre is working with adult learning partners so together they can provide more opportunities for families to access accredited training and education, and gain skills in preparation for gaining employment.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Extend the centre's evaluation system to ensure all available data, including from partners, are more robustly analysed to enable the impact on outcomes for users to be more explicit.
- Develop the work to support parents in improving their education, learning and development and provide more opportunities to prepare for employment.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Parents develop their understanding of providing healthy meals for their families when they attend courses, such as 'Healthy Eating on a Budget'. Children are consistently encouraged to eat healthy meals and snacks. Children in the after-school club enjoy a vast selection of fruits. The take-up rate for breastfeeding in the reach is historically below the local authority average and as a result the centre has set up a new group, 'Breastmates', which is providing support and guidance for new mothers. The group is predominately run by three peer supporters, trained volunteers who are highly enthusiastic to promote the benefits of breastfeeding in the wider community to increase take-up rates.

The promotion of emotional well-being is an important aspect of the centre's work. They work well with health partners to provide effective support for users' feelings of isolation. One parent said that being new to the area and attending the centre has prevented isolation and resulted in feeling part of the community. Courses, for example 'Emotional Freedom Techniques', further promote emotional well-being. One parent reports, 'I can manage my children and the stressful situations I find myself in so much more at ease, it's brilliant.'

All services within the centre ensure children and their families stay extremely safe. Families have very positive and trusting relationships with staff and approach them

at any time for guidance and support. As a result, staff know families well and successfully and quickly identify when they may be experiencing a crisis or change in circumstance so they access the required support. This results in improved parenting skills and very effective emotional support in times of crisis. One parent reports, 'My family support worker has been fantastic.'

Children consistently behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others, for example, when in the 'forest area' taking calculated risks as they climb trees and using sticks in their imaginative play. Parents and carers at the 'Bumps and Babes', a drop-in group for parents to be and those who have a baby, share experiences of keeping their homes safe as their children reach different stages of development. For example, they identify that corner protectors and cupboard locks help to minimise risks as their children become mobile. The centre has highly effective assessment systems in place to ensure the safety of vulnerable children and adults.

The 'Working Together with Parents' course supports families, including fathers with behaviour management issues, and helps to improve relationships within the family. Courses and activities are tailored to the needs of target groups. The Young Parents group is particularly successful in providing information and guidance which is helping to develop confidence and opportunities for young parents to engage and bond with their babies.

The centre works with adult learning partners to deliver a range of training opportunities for families. Available evidence demonstrates that some families are improving their economic stability and independence. This is because families access support about family law, help with benefits, housing advice and opportunities to become volunteers. One young parent reported that being a volunteer has contributed to gaining full-time employment. There are a few courses currently offered which lead to qualifications. The centre has plans to improve the opportunities for families to access accredited courses and gain skills in preparation for future employment.

Early intervention strategies ensure children are protected very effectively against harm. Children who are subject to child protection plans are monitored closely and those subject to a Common Assessment Framework are supported extremely well. Parents report the benefits of their children accessing two-year-old funding and recognise how this helps their learning and development. One parent reports, 'My daughter now gets the two-year-old funding and she loves nursery and doesn't want to come home.' This group of children are making significant strides in their learning and development, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. It was impressive to see the way in which these young children are actively involved in planning and taking part in their own learning, providing them with excellent skills for the future.

Informal opportunities are used to seek the views of families, for example through questionnaires to evaluate activity sessions and courses and a suggestions box. Parents told inspectors they feel confident to share their views with staff. A parent

forum meeting was held before the summer, for example, to consult families on the types of activities they would like during the summer holidays. As a result, the centre arranged several trips for families, such as a trip to the seaside and a local farm.

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	1
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 knows the families in the area well and, with partners, skilfully identifies the ones whose circumstances make them more vulnerable and who are in need of greater support. Family support work is making a positive contribution to breaking down barriers, particularly for families at risk or isolated. Joint home visits are often made with partners from the referring agency ensuring that the family support work is carefully tailored to families' needs. Resources, including staffing, for this specific work are carefully considered and allocated, ensuring the intensity of this work results in improved outcomes for families.

Parents greatly value the good care, guidance and support given to them. Staff are extremely sensitive to how and where they provide information that families may wish to access in private. For example, information relating to domestic violence, alcohol misuse, sexually transmitted diseases and chlamydia testing kits is available in the privacy of the bathroom.

Multi-agency working ensures families accessing services are well supported. There is effective support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The centre works with a neighbouring centre to provide 'Little Pumpkins', a new group set up under the portage model for children with additional needs. Staff are trained in basic portage in response to a reduction of portage workers in the area, in order to support these families. There has already been some success for this new group.

The centre uses the data profile supplied by the local authority in order to identify the needs of the community. They receive new birth data and ensure each family

receives information about centre services, resulting in an increase of families registering and accessing services, including a significant increase of target groups. For example, the centre uses the under five data to target groups who are not yet accessing services, thereby increasing those from minority ethnic groups by 28% and fathers by 27% in the last year. As a result, the gap in most outcome areas between those from target groups compared with other families is narrowing.

The centre provides a good range of weekly activities. The majority of these are well attended with newer groups establishing in the community, such as 'Carousel Bump', a drop-in at Walcot Dome. The centre is seen as a hub in the community. Pupils from the school enjoy joining the older people for their weekly lunch club. The local childminders meet at the centre once a month and access training such as a 'PEEP' course, which helps to develop their understanding of listening and talking with children and the importance of play, resulting in improvements in their childminding practice.

The centre encourages families to undertake family learning and some accredited learning. A family literacy course for children in the Reception class and their parents provides exciting opportunities for joint learning. Together they enjoy stories, make puppets and parents develop skills to support their children's learning.

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

Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood at all levels and links between strategic planning and service provision are effective. Good partnerships with other services and key partners are firmly established, ensuring services are integrated and making a difference for users. The centre is making good strides in addressing targets set by the local authority. The governing body provides both support and challenge to centre leaders. Staff are very well led by centre leaders and staff morale is high. The extended school services coordinator is very much at the heart of the centre's recent success in increasing the number of families they reach, particularly target groups and those families in greatest need. As a result, they are narrowing the gap for the most disadvantaged. The use of resources, including the deployment of staff and volunteers and the good outcomes for families, demonstrate that the centre is providing good value for money.

There is a range of monitoring and evaluation systems in place, which ensure

services are of high quality and identify where staff need to develop services further. Staff evaluate the success of groups, courses and activities and use this information to plan for future sessions. Case studies are routinely collected to demonstrate the good impact services have for individual families. The centre's self-evaluation is accurate and leads to setting of key areas for development, such as developing opportunities for families to access accredited training and further opportunities to gain skills in preparation for education or employment. The centre is yet to include the full range of evidence from partners to demonstrate the impact their service has on outcomes.

Staff value professional development opportunities, such as the support they receive to develop specific skills to work with different groups, for example, parents with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and to gain their NVQ Level 3 qualification.

User engagement is positive and parents are invited to evaluate the impact of the services they receive, particularly from family support workers. Children's views are consistently and routinely sought. They expertly engage in making choices in their own learning.

Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. All staff and those in governance give the highest priority to safeguarding children. Policies, procedures and practice are highly consistent and robust, including risk assessments, to maintain a safe environment. Rigorous recruitment practices ensure all adults, including volunteers working with children, are suitable. Family support workers skilfully inform families of their responsibility to keep their children safe and support them well to achieve this, which results in improved outcomes for children on child protection plans. Prompt action is taken to share concerns with key agencies.

There is strong commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and to celebrate diversity. The range of families who access the centre reflects the community it serves. All families are treated with respect and individual needs are effectively catered for. The centre is successfully narrowing the achievement gap as evidenced by the recent Early Years Foundation Stage profile data, which show that the gap for those children in the reach in the lowest 20% is closing, dropping to 32% from 40%.

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,	2

illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	
The effectiveness of the centre’s policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
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

The Parks and Walcot Children’s Centre registered early years provision was previously inspected in January 2010 as part of the Goddard Park Primary School inspection. This inspection of the children’s centre was informed by the findings and judgements made at the time.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Parks and Walcot Children’s Centre on 12 and 13 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Your children’s centre provides you with an attractive, highly safe and inclusive environment where you and your children feel safe, valued and respected. Those of you we spoke to told us that you really enjoy the range of activities on offer, from drop-in groups, such as Allsorts and Young Parents, to courses, such as ‘Healthy eating on a Budget’. Recently, they have started to work from other sites in the community, such as Walcot Dome and a health clinic at Mountford Manor Primary School, in order to reach even more families.

From our observations, discussions and case studies, we were able to see that the centre has a positive impact on your lives. The ‘Every Child a Talker’ (ECAT), a speech and language programme, is reducing the numbers of children at risk of speech delay and helps children to make secure progress in their communication, language and literacy skills. You told us how your children are benefiting from attending the childcare, particularly as part of the two-year-old funding, and this is helping to prepare them for school. The children are making significant strides in their learning and development.

We found that staff are enthusiastic and work well with partners, such as health, to successfully help you make positive changes in your lives. Outcomes for users are good overall and improving. Evaluations show that you are very appreciative of all that is on offer. The staff use this information for future planning and to measure the success of services on offer. We have asked them to develop the evaluation system further and include information that partners collect in order to show the full impact services have in improving your lives.

We can see that you have good opportunities to take part in group activities and some courses that help you adopt healthy lifestyles and the importance of keeping you and your families safe. Children consistently behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. They skilfully take calculated risks as they climb trees and play with sticks in the forest. It was good to see some of you working together with your children during family literacy and the wonderful puppets you made. There are fewer opportunities for you to access academic courses that lead to qualifications as well as helping you to gain skills to prepare for employment, and the centre already has plans to address this.

Partnerships with key agencies are strong so they can offer the correct support and guidance. Staff and partners are effective in assessing the individual needs of families in order to ensure you receive the correct support. Family support workers work very effectively together to plan support for families who are facing challenges and need the most help and support. Some of you told us how you appreciate the support they provide.

We found out about courses, such as, 'Emotional Freedom Techniques' is helping to enhance your emotional well-being. Course evaluations confirm how this has made a difference, with comments, such as, 'I can manage my children and the stressful situations I find myself in so much more at ease, it's brilliant.' We found that the centre carefully plans the use of space and resources and provides good value for money. For example, your children access places in the childcare so you can attend counselling sessions.

Safeguarding practices are outstanding as staff exemplify high quality practice in ensuring you and your children are safe. For, example, leaders follow rigorous and robust practices to ensure all adults working in the centre are suitable to do so and staff are highly trained in how to safeguard children.

The centre leaders work well with the governing body and the local authority and have set clear targets in order to continue to improve. They seek your views at the parent forum and some of you are involved in shaping services as part of the partnership group.

It was lovely to see how exciting life is for those children who spend time in the childcare, Nursery class, breakfast and after-school clubs. The children settle extremely well and make excellent strides in their development as they are effectively supported in all they do.

We were pleased to talk to some of you during the inspection and were grateful for your views and comments. Thank you for contributing to the inspection at Parks and Walcot East Children's Centre.

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