

Inspection report for Gorse Hill Children's Centre

Local authority	Swindon Borough Council
Inspection number	362485
Inspection dates	4–5 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Hazel Callaghan

Centre governance	Swindon Borough Council
Centre leader	Susan Kershaw
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	Gorse Hill Infant and Junior schools
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.

An inspection of the maintained Nursery was carried out last year as part of the inspection of Gorse Hill Infant School under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The junior school was inspected at the same time as the children's centre. The reports of these inspections are available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the centre's advisory board, the local authority, partnership agencies, members of staff and users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

Gorse Hill Children's Centre is a Phase 2 centre which was designated in March 2007. Initially, it was based in the local community centre and moved into purpose-built premises in the infant school in September 2008. The centre aims to provide the full core offer of integrated childcare and family learning, health and family support. It has links with the local childminder network and provides financial advice. It has links with Jobcentre Plus and North Wessex Learning, who provide support for those seeking employment.

The centre serves an area in which there is an increasing proportion of families from minority ethnic groups, many of whom have little or no knowledge of English. Families in Gorse Hill are from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. The

local authority data indicate that teenage pregnancies within the area are of concern. Children enter the Nursery with levels of knowledge and experience which are well below those found nationally, especially in their personal and social skills and their language acquisition.

The children’s centre is part of the infant school and has close links to the on-site junior school. The centre manager and deputy manager are also the headteacher and deputy headteacher of the infant school. The infant and junior schools are currently going through an amalgamation consultation process. During this process, the manager of the children’s centre has extended her duties to be executive headteacher of both schools. At the time of the inspection, the centre operated under the management of the school’s governing body with the support of an advisory board.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Gorse Hill is a satisfactory centre overall but it has a number of clear strengths. The children’s centre has focused well on providing good levels of support for its registered users. The outcomes for children in the Nursery and the adults that attend the adult learning sessions are good. The centre’s ability to respond quickly and provide good levels of support when families are in crisis is ‘second to none’.

The centre has very effectively directed its attention to supporting the growing population of minority ethnic families who have little or no knowledge of English. Courses to support the acquisition of English language are often oversubscribed and successful. The provision for children in the Nursery is good and although children reach standards which are still below those expected for their age by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, their achievement is good. Progress is particularly effective in children’s social, emotional and language development. Children have very positive attitudes, a willingness to try hard and their behaviour is good.

The centre creates a family-friendly environment where all users are made to feel welcome. Many parents told the inspectors that they feel very welcome and that the staff provide ‘tremendous’ levels of support and advice. One of the strongest aspects of the centre’s work is the identification of families’ individual needs from the moment that health visitors go to visit a new baby. The family support workers are

also crucial in this assessment and in the quality of support provided. Drawing on well-established partnerships with other professional agencies and the appropriate use of the Common Assessment Framework has led to strong integrated support for families of children with special educational needs. Equal opportunities underpin the centre's work. 'Everyone who comes in through the centre's door is welcome,' said one member of staff, and parents confirm that this is the case.

Parents confirm that, with the centre's support, they have made improvements in their achievement and they clearly derive pride and enjoyment from their connections with the centre. The centre has supported the development of healthy lifestyles with some success and is now extending its efforts into areas such as promoting breastfeeding.

The centre is still developing its provision and is aware that the number of users engaged in the centre's activities is a little low in comparison to some of the other centres in the area. The data provided by the local authority is in the early stages of development so a baseline profile of local needs is limited at present. Consequently, the centre's management team is unclear about the precise nature of some of the most vulnerable groups in the area which limits its ability to target services more closely at improving the engagement of these groups. The centre has begun to gather and record information on the families who are accessing the centre. Key partners also provide evaluations of activities but these are not always helpful to the centre's management in targeting future action. The centre's activities are publicised locally and those families already connected to the school and the centre are effectively engaged. Failure to advertise more widely is inevitably limiting usage.

The centre's senior leaders are positive in their approach, are providing support to improve the centre's overall effectiveness and have a satisfactory capacity to improve. They have an accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses. Improvements have been made in the way senior leaders work with partners to ensure that services are well focused on the needs of the registered users. It was recognised, for example, that many parents needed financial support and advice and a family advice worker has been employed which has proved very successful and the advice given much appreciated by parents.

Staff are very effective in promoting the safeguarding of all the children and other users. Procedures meet the requirements well and a high profile is given to ensuring all activities are safe and children feel secure. The governing body and advisory board provide satisfactory support and users are beginning to be involved in the governance of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority to develop data that will accurately identify the needs of potential users in the wider community and provide comparisons to national indicators wherever possible to support the centre's assessment of its

effectiveness.

- Advertise more effectively the work of the centre to broaden outreach and, in particular, help staff to engage with the hard-to-reach groups.
- Improve the contribution that key partners' evaluations make towards identifying important needs to be met by the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

A rich and varied range of activities for children both indoors and outdoors makes a good contribution to children's development in the early years. Staff work closely to plan the curriculum and, as a result, the majority of children make good progress from their starting points, especially in their personal development, language skills and their awareness of the world around them. Children were seen using torches to explore the outside area with great interest and enthusiasm. One child took great delight in describing the 'ferocious blue bear that had black ears and three feet' that she had seen. Toddlers who accompany their mothers to some of the music activities were also making good progress in their responses to songs, enjoying the rhythms and sharing instruments with others in the group.

Healthy eating is an important focus for staff in the Nursery and parents say their children enjoy eating fruit and the healthy snacks provided. Parents are supported in their understanding of how to develop healthy lifestyles for their children and there is evidence of success. The centre is now beginning to address other aspects, such as the promotion of breastfeeding.

The centre ensures that children feel safe and build positive relationships with adults with whom they work. The centre has robust systems of security in the building to ensure the safety of adults and children attending.

There are good relationships with parents who are encouraged to communicate their views through a range of informal channels. Staff are responsive and make adaptations to services in the light of these comments so that parents feel that their contributions are valued and respected. This has resulted in good feedback from parents on the type of courses they would like, such as on the need for financial advice and on how to manage their children's behaviour. The first meeting of a parents' forum is to take place shortly.

Case studies and discussions with parents provide strong evidence that centre staff and partner agencies help families, especially those who are most vulnerable, to improve their self-confidence and personal well-being. Effective support from family support workers has been successful in raising the personal esteem and confidence of a number of adults so they are more able to deal with family difficulties. In particular, the centre's partnership arrangements have helped some parents gain certificates and accreditation from the adult education courses provided. English courses are highly popular amongst those with little or no knowledge of the language. An increasing number of fathers are being involved in the monthly

'SataDads' events. The staff direct adults to Jobcentre Plus support and have recently engaged the services of North Wessex Training in helping individuals to improve their skills and in support of their efforts to find employment. These initiatives are beginning to show signs of success.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

2

Staff across the centre are approachable and act as good role models so that partnerships with parents are strong. Parents report that they feel well supported and benefit from the calm, friendly atmosphere. Very good links with local health visitors and other health professionals ensure that assessments of family need are accurate and timely so that programmes of support are quickly put into action if there is a need. 'It's been a godsend,' reported one parent.

Multi-agency working ensures that those users who access services are well supported. There is effective tailored support for parents with children with special educational needs so that users make good personal development and improve their well-being. There is little data on the number of families in which there are adults with special needs but, when such a family is encountered, good levels of support are provided for both adults and children. Links with local child minders and the Peers Early Years Programme provide a wide variety of activities that support mothers and their children.

Parents who wish to access the adult learning courses held at the centre are well supported by the provision of a crèche so they can give both their time and attention. The centre has also successfully supported a number of parents from a variety of ethnic minority groups to set up the 'Tulip group', which aims to share and celebrate different cultures so supporting community cohesion. The centre's strong focus on promoting equality and diversity can also be seen in its successful bid for lottery funding for an artist to work with the group.

The quality of provision for children in the Nursery continues to be good and the reason for children’s effective progress. A good range of resources stimulates children’s interest and desire to experiment and explore; even the simplest things are used well to stimulate their interest. For example, children were fascinated to find a frog under dead leaves.

Outreach activities where the family support workers work with specific families in their homes are very successful, although rightly, staff acknowledge that knowledge of the centre’s activities is not as effectively disseminated as it could be. This is having a direct and adverse impact on usage.

The data provided by the local authority is in the early stages of development and a baseline profile of local needs is limited at present. The data available are not as yet linked to national indicators. Consequently, the centre’s management team is unclear about assessing the precise nature of some of the most vulnerable groups in the area which limits its ability to target services more closely at improving the engagement of these groups. Senior leaders are beginning to gather and record data on the different groups of users they are already reaching in order to target services more effectively but the rates of engagement for some groups, such as teenage parents and those who are not in education, employment or in training, remain low. This limits the centre’s ability to promote equality and celebrate diversity in the wider community.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre runs smoothly and the staff work as a cohesive and experienced team. The centre’s safeguarding arrangements are good. Staff use common protocols and procedures to share concerns with other relevant agencies. Procedures to recruit and appoint staff involve appropriate checks on the suitability of staff about to work with children and vulnerable adults. The centre works closely with the infant school to share good practice.

All staff contribute to the centre’s self-evaluation which is used to identify strengths and highlight the key priorities to develop and improve provision and outcomes.

The leaders have high expectations for the quality of services to be provided. In response to this, partners have started to develop systems where they too evaluate the outcomes of their activities, but these are inconsistent in their quality and so not always helpful to the centre's leadership team. Targeted evaluations from specific groups of users and the use of case studies provide feedback on the centre's work, but as they do not sufficiently focus on the outcomes of activities, they do not help the senior leaders evaluate how well the services have met users' needs.

The centre has developed strong partnerships with parents with a clear emphasis on promoting an inclusive and friendly environment. Parents value the centre's close links with specialists to help children, including those with special educational needs, develop and learn. For example, the centre has good links with health workers, speech therapy, educational psychologists and social services. Those staff who work with more vulnerable families receive regular opportunities to meet with a variety of professionals and share information. Equality is promoted and diversity celebrated by the good work with children and adults with special educational needs, the support for those users and children needing language support, and the engagement of an increasing number of minority ethnic families in the area. No incidents of racist behaviour have been reported and the centre has a group working successfully on celebrating diversity and community cohesion. Performance management systems and staff supervision are in place and effective.

Outcomes for the current users are good and staff are used effectively to provide a good range of services to meet both children's and families' needs on both a one-to-one basis and in groups. However, the centre is not as successful in identifying the needs of the wider community and is not yet reaching a good proportion of those groups identified as vulnerable within their area.

The advisory board provides satisfactory support. Partners are well represented, but not parents as yet, and this limits the board's ability to shape provision and improve outcomes in key areas. A parent forum is in the early stages of formation and it is hoped that representatives will join the advisory board. The governing body monitors the budget effectively and looks for value for money. It appropriately challenges the work of the centre. The centre provides satisfactory 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	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
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	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

The Nursery was inspected as part of Gorse Hill Infant School in October 2009 and the judgements on the good quality of education and good leadership and management have informed the judgements made on this inspection of the children's centre.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Gorse Hill Children's Centre 4–5 November 2010. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. However, it was recognised that there were many very positive aspects of the centre's work. Children who attend the Nursery make good progress, especially in their speaking and listening skills and their behaviour and kindness to others. The centre building is well designed and gives children the chance to play and learn. They enjoy the outdoor area and make good progress in developing their personal and social and language skills. Staff work well together to plan exciting activities for children and keep an eye on how they are doing.

Many of you told us that you feel that the centre is a warm and friendly place to visit. Staff listen to what you have to say about the centre and have made positive changes. Staff work together well and have good partnerships with other professionals such as speech and language therapists, health visitors and educational psychologists so that you and your children get support. You told us how much you appreciate the good support from these adults and the difference that they have made to your lives.

You recognise the support that you receive from the family support workers and the family advice worker. They are helping many of you to improve your lives. We were impressed by the published 'life stories' of some of the adults who attend the centre. They show clearly how the centre has helped to support a number of families to change their lives for the better. We have asked the local authority to help the centre identify the number of families in the area who might benefit from support so that the centre can make sure that it is making contact. Sometimes, the centre does not advertise its activities widely enough to help all those who would benefit from its services to take part.

The leaders at the centre are positive in their attitudes and get to know you well and ensure the day-to-day running of the centre goes smoothly. They regularly evaluate the work of the centre and this gives them a clear understanding of what works well in the centre and what needs to improve. They are developing systems that will help them see how well they are meeting families' needs but need help from the local authority to improve this understanding. Staff are very effective in helping children enjoy eating healthily and helping parents in developing good-quality meals, but staff are aware that they could do more to help you develop healthy lifestyles.

The school governing body has provided satisfactory support to the centre. We have asked that key partners consider how they can help the centre to improve its evaluation of what is provided so as to meet the needs of all users.

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