

Inspection report for Whitegate Children's Centre

Local authority	Lancashire
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Centre leader	Kay Burke
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	119096 Whitegate Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY334266 The Teddy Club

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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, deputy, senior managers, staff and volunteers. They met governors, parents and children, the local authority's senior officer for children's centres and representatives from a wide range of partner agencies including health, education and social care. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Whitegate Children's Centre is a phase one children's centre based on the site of Whitegate Nursery School. It shares the same building as the school and the Teddy Club childcare facility. It is led and managed by the headteacher under the overarching governance of the Nursery School. The centre has its own established children's centre committee, which is made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and parents. The centre is situated in the Gawthorpe and Hapton with Park wards of Padiham. The majority of families accessing the centre live in the reach area, which is in the top 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country.

The children's centre, nursery school and childcare are all led by the headteacher who is also the Head of Centre supported by a centre leadership team of five.

The centre provides early years provision under the registration of a charitable organisation linked to Whitegate Nursery School and is led by a not for profit voluntary management committee. It provides services to meet all elements of the core purpose of children's centres.

There are 835 children in the reach area, 719 of whom are registered at the centre. The majority of children are of White British heritage and 2% are from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is in line with the local population. There are a high number of workless families dependent on state benefits. The rate of unemployment is just below the national average. Children in the centre's reach area demonstrate skills below those normally expected for their age on entry to early years provision. The linked provisions are subject to separate inspection arrangements. The nursery school was last inspected in July 2010 and the childcare was last inspected in August 2010. The reports of these inspections are available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Outstanding leadership and management have inspired this high quality centre to make a significant impact on the lives of families within the reach area. One parent described the centre as a, 'fantastic centre with very helpful staff that are very warm and welcoming'. Centre managers, governors and staff are fully committed to continuous improvement informed by extremely thorough research and data analysis to benefit centre users. They plan and deliver services exceptionally well to meet the needs of the most vulnerable families.

Staff have excellent, trusting relationships with all service users which has enabled them to develop a very close understanding of their needs and the challenges they face. Extremely close partnership working is having a significant positive effect on meeting families' needs and improving outcomes. Children's centre outreach workers work exceptionally well with midwives at 'booking-in clinics' at General Practitioner (GP) surgeries, gaining early knowledge and understanding of the local need and allowing excellent early intervention. This is recognised as an exemplar model and is now being encouraged throughout Lancashire. One parent echoed the views of many others when stating, 'If I could have my time again I would not change a thing about my child's time here'. This extremely close working has helped to significantly increase both the initiation and sustained breastfeeding

rates from a low base although both are still slightly below the target average for Lancashire.

The centre has exceptional partnership working arrangements with a wide range of professionals and voluntary organisations, particularly in the local area. This ensures local services are closely integrated and extremely well planned to meet the needs of the families in the reach area, successfully improving outcomes for target groups. For example, obesity levels in Reception Year have almost halved within the reach area and are now below national, county and district averages.

The centre engages exceptionally well with families in the area, especially with those families in target groups. Most children and their families are registered with the centre.

The centre places a high priority on encouraging adults to develop their confidence and engage in learning. Seven parents currently participate in the centre's volunteer scheme. However, the centre recognises it has more work to do to ensure that those seeking employment have access to a wider range of provision, to support the further development of their employability skills and their access to jobs and work placement opportunities.

Lone parents and working families have access to weekend provision and a free crèche facility. Participation rates for most groups are excellent and continually improving. The proportion of fathers accessing programmes has increased significantly from 9% to 55% over the last two years.

Governors and managers very closely monitor the impact of the services and mount rigorous challenge to performance. Parents are very well engaged in the work of the centre with five parent governors on the full governing body of whom two are members of the children's centre committee, a subcommittee of the full board. Centre leaders have a highly accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement of the centre and make excellent use of data to measure performance and develop accurate targets for improvement. The centre has an outstanding capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work closely with partners to further develop a wider range of learning opportunities to improve the employability skills of users and those from target groups to improve their economic stability and independence, including access to training and employment.
- Improve further breastfeeding initiation and sustained breastfeeding rates.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Outcomes for families are excellent. The centre focuses extremely well on healthy pregnancies and healthy eating to provide families with an excellent understanding of what actions they can take to improve their health. As a result, obesity levels of children in Reception Year, within the reach area have reduced significantly to 7.8%, well below the average for the district, the county and nationally. Dental health is very well promoted through very effective work with the oral health team. Effective promotion of the National Health Service dentist scheme has resulted in 130 parents and 171 children signing up over the last 17 months.

The centre staff have exceptionally close relationships with midwives, complemented by a robust partnership with health visitors. For example, centre staff attend 'booking-in clinics' within GP surgeries to promote early contact with families. The number of parents accessing 'Bump, Birth and Beyond' classes has significantly increased and the centre is due to introduce a 'Blooming Bumps' group from 20 weeks into pregnancy to facilitate even earlier interventions. Most parents report that through centre groups they have learned how to keep their child healthy. Parents are cascading learning to others to promote good health in babies. Three breastfeeding support volunteers have recently started a breastfeeding peer support group at the centre called the 'The Ma's Bar' to promote breastfeeding. Although improving significantly, the centre acknowledges that breastfeeding rates remain below the target set by the county council and below national rates. Since September 2010 the breastfeeding initiation rates have significantly increased from 23% to 68%. The sustained breastfeeding rate has increased from 27% in 2008/09 to 37% currently, some 3% above the rate for the district.

Families feel extremely safe at the centre. Access to the centre is strictly controlled and thorough risk assessments are in place to ensure that adults and children work and play in a very safe environment. Through accessing the centre parents have made their homes safer and adopted safer practices. Children make exceptional progress from their starting points. Between 2006 and 2011 the number of children achieving at least 78+ points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales rose from 20.6% to 49%. The excellent links with the nursery school and the day care centre ensure a smooth transition and that children are extremely well prepared for school.

The centre has a well-planned volunteer programme, which has effectively developed the self-esteem and confidence of its participants. For example, seven parents currently participate in the centre's volunteer scheme and help in running groups at the centre. They develop their confidence, knowledge and skills and make a positive contribution through their volunteer role. Two volunteer parent governors are fully involved in the governance of the centre. The centre also has a parents' forum which is effective in feeding back parents' views and supporting the work of the centre. Some parents have been helped into further training and employment. However, the centre acknowledges that more work needs to be done to build on the recently introduced 'Job Club' to further enhance parents' employment prospects.

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	1
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	1
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	1
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.	2

How good is the provision?

1

The centre's attention to assessment of need is outstanding. The centre uses data extremely well to record the progress that children are making and to set clear targets for attainment. Staff work to highly challenging targets to further improve outcomes for families. Most parents significantly gain in confidence as a result of progression through courses offered. The wide range of learning opportunities is complemented by excellent care, guidance and support to significantly increase the numbers of parents engaging. The centre has an extremely high level of contact with targeted groups in the area, including families with circumstances that make them vulnerable accessing services. Of the 11 teenage parents within the reach area, nine are accessing services frequently and the other two are beginning to engage. Almost all children in the area are registered with the centre. The centre offers an outstanding range of provision which meets the needs of parents and children exceptionally well. One parent commented, 'They are fantastic, I could not do without them and parents feel welcome'. Outreach workers frequently accompany health workers and midwives during home visits to introduce parents to the services the centre can offer as early as possible. Parents greatly value the opportunity to access groups which help them stimulate their child's play and offer them respite. One parent commented, 'The centre is a godsend, it gives parents support and a break'.

The centre works seamlessly with the nursery school and day care provision to help children's transition to school. Extensive resources are successfully shared and deployed to benefit families. The centre very effectively meets the needs of the whole community whilst ensuring that those in most need of services remain high priority and can access the services they need. As one parent said, 'It is absolutely amazing, they turned my life around.' The centre systematically reviews its provision and uses feedback from families and parents particularly well to tailor services to ensure needs are met. Parents view the centre as being, 'exceptionally well run' where 'events are very well planned out'.

The centre's excellent links with other agencies and partnership working, particularly with health partners and midwives, help improve the quality of services locally. This has helped

outreach workers form a closer bond with parents and encourage them to attend the centre to access groups and activities. Provision for disabled children and their families is highly inclusive. Exceptional multi-agency working and coordination of services offers families in times of crisis excellent intervention and support for their emotional well-being.

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	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The leadership team are forward thinking and committed. Centre leaders and governors have high aspirations for the centre and a clear vision on how goals will be achieved. The centre leaders are extremely reflective and the self-evaluation process provides an accurate picture of the centre's performance. Monitoring and evaluation systems are robust and fully involve the whole staff team and users. The children's centre committee provides excellent challenge to the centre's performance, complemented by extensive local authority support and challenge. Parent governors are fully involved in the governance of the centre and help shape services. Families are actively involved through the flourishing Parents' Forum. For example, suggestions from parents resulted in the centre working towards securing access to a car park adjacent to the centre and taking action to ensure gates remain closed to keep children safe. Governors are now working closely with the head of centre, investigating further expansion of the centre by creating a first floor extension which will further improve facilities for families. The centre provides excellent value for money through the highly effective use of staff expertise, space across the centre, nursery school and day care provision and excellent partnership working.

The centre engages extremely well with all target groups including those from minority ethnic groups. Inclusion of children and their families is central to the centre's work. The Head of Centre along with team leaders use data about the community to track families with particular needs including those families with circumstances that make them vulnerable, to offer robust early intervention information. The centre has made significant progress in improving Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores and narrowing the achievement gap for the lowest achieving and the rest. It constantly seeks to identify and remove any barriers to achievement. Discrimination and inequalities are effectively identified, swiftly tackled and not tolerated in any form. Families with children with profound disabilities are well served through close work with specialist support agencies who provide highly valued multi-agency care where necessary. In addition, the centre's 'Aiming Higher' group provides purposeful support for families.

All legislative requirements are met or exceeded. Safeguarding arrangements are given the utmost priority at the centre. All required and relevant policies and procedures are ratified by governors annually. Robust vetting and recruitment processes ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children and vulnerable adults. Staff are extremely well trained and have high levels of access to professional support and training. Excellent partnership working enables the swift and robust use and exchange of information for children with circumstances that make them vulnerable, including those who are subject to the Common Assessment Framework and child protection plans. Arrangements for early intervention, multi-agency cooperation, emotional health and well-being and for dealing with domestic violence are excellent.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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	1
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.	1

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

Information made available from the recent inspection of The Teddy Club and Whitegate Nursery School was taken into consideration.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Whitegate Children's Centre on 27 - 28 June 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We would like to thank those of you who helped us with our work through your enthusiastic involvement in the inspection. We very much enjoyed our visit to your centre and meeting so many of you. It was really good to hear how important the centre is to you and the impact it has had in helping you and your families. You made us feel very welcome and we very much appreciated the amount of time you spent with us. We particularly want to thank those of you who welcomed us into your home.

You told us that the centre is very friendly and welcoming and values your views on its services. We certainly felt welcomed by the friendly and knowledgeable reception staff. We know that the centre has taken into account your views through the parent forum, the parent governors and through parent consultation and has acted upon this information to make changes to the services. For example, working towards the provision of a car park and taking steps to ensure the gates are closed. Parent governors reported being very involved in decision making and confirmed the board's commitment to continuous improvement.

The centre provides you with a wide range of activities which you told us you enjoy. We heard how much you enjoyed attending activities such as 'Inbetweenies' and 'Bump, Birth and Beyond' and how the groups had helped you develop ideas around play at home. You also told us how important the centre is to the community, particularly as it provides so many activities for you and your children, whatever their age. For example, many of you attended and enjoyed the Jubilee celebration organised by the centre.

We found that the centre staff are very good at assessing any difficult situations and provide you with excellent, practical support in times of crisis, including the provision of food parcels. The assessments they carry out are extremely well informed and lead to highly effective individual support from specialists. We were very pleased to see how the centre encourages you to become volunteers and prepares you well for your volunteer roles. We know this has helped some of you to go on to further training and employment and others have become volunteers within the centre or become parent governors to help in the running of the centre.

We know you fully appreciate how the centre has planned its provision well and how flexible the centre is in coming to visit you in your homes to provide help and to encourage your participation in centre activities, especially at times of greatest need. You told us that you

have particularly benefited from the 'Time for me' group and the 'Freedom' programme and how these groups have boosted your confidence and helped you and your families' progress.

We know that some of you have found the courses provided by the centre to be very helpful in developing your parenting skills as well as your confidence. We know that many of you went onto successfully complete adult literacy and numeracy courses to improve your English and mathematics. Those of you with disabled children and those with special educational needs told us what great support the centre had been and how this had benefited you and your child. We were extremely pleased to see and hear how the specialist support your child was given with speech, language, and behaviour helped prepare them for nursery school.

My colleague and I really enjoyed visiting many of the activities on offer. I was particularly impressed with those of you who were enthusiastically participating in the 'Job Club' and the way you supported each other. Everyone we spoke to explained that staff always listen to your views on what you like and your suggestions on how they could improve those activities that you feel are not so good. Throughout the inspection we were constantly told by children and parents of the difference that the centre was making to them.

Throughout our visit we noticed how careful all the staff were to ensure that you are safe both at the centre and at home, and how they encourage you to be more aware of healthy lifestyles. We agree that the centre is a very safe place to be. The centre managers make sure that staff working at the centre have suitable checks.

The centre works exceptionally well with partners and organisations to provide as many opportunities for you as possible. It works exceptionally well with midwives to provide excellent information for prospective parents and new parents about healthy eating during pregnancy and how to manage children's weaning and healthy eating habits. It is also very good at making sure you know about the entitlement to free vitamins. We have asked the centre to improve further breastfeeding initiation and sustained breastfeeding rates.

The Head of Centre, staff and governors are committed to providing you with the very best services possible. They know exactly what they want to do to make sure the centre continues to improve. They measure the impact carefully and plan how to further improve their services to benefit even more people in the community. The centre has an excellent understanding of how much difference the provision makes in helping families to move forward in their lives. We have asked the centre to develop even more activities and opportunities to support those of you seeking employment to improve your chances of getting a job or work placement opportunity. Staff had already started working on this before we visited the centre through the newly introduced 'Job Club'. They have some excellent ideas about how to improve this further by increasing the range of courses and through close work with local education providers.

The enormous effect that the centre has had on the lives of you and your family and how it has helped you to turn your lives around is inspirational. It is very obvious that the centre is

hugely important to all of you who use it and to the wider communities of Gawthorpe and Hapton with Park. Thank you once again for your time and enthusiasm in talking to us.

We would like to wish you all the very best in the future.

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