

# Inspection report for On Track Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	384041
<b>Inspection dates</b>	11–12 January 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jon Bowman HMI

<b>Centre leader</b>	Charlotte Tillbrook
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Not applicable

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, representatives of the local authority, partners, parents, front line staff and volunteers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Haverhill is a small town in western Suffolk close to the borders of Cambridgeshire and Essex. On Track Children's Centre is a phase two centre providing the full core offer. The children's centre campus consists of a suite of adjacent premises in Strasbourg Square.

The centre is led by the local authority and governance is through an advisory board shared with the Cartwheels Children's Centre. The manager was appointed in December 2010 and she is responsible for managing both centres serving the Haverhill cluster area. Services are delivered by two play workers, one and a half full-time equivalent support and information officers and two family support workers.

There are 801 children under five years of age living within the centre's reach area. The area has one of the highest percentages in Suffolk of people of a working age claiming benefits. Levels of deprivation are high. Unemployment is high and both adult literacy and numeracy levels are low. There are also high rates of teenage conception.

A high proportion of families are of White British heritage with an increasing population from minority ethnic groups including Polish, Portuguese and a small community of families from the Philippines. Housing in the area is a mixture of private and social housing. Industrial estates on the outskirts of the town employ a

large number of people. On entry to school, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age.

## Inspection judgements

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

### Overall effectiveness

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

<b>2</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>2</b>
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## Main findings

On Track Children's Centre is a good centre. It is a safe place that parents, carers and children enjoy attending and rate highly. They accrue a wide range of skills and knowledge and achieve good health and educational outcomes. Many develop improved skills as parents and a greater understanding of their children's behaviour and development. Children develop well their skills and abilities through taking part in the good range of programmes that are available. Users play an important role in the life of the centre and their views are accounted for well in shaping provision. While some users receive effective support to improve their economic well-being, the centre lacks an effective strategy to ensure that support to help them gain employment or training is comprehensive and effective. Much is achieved through good partnership working that improves the range of services on offer at the centre.

Provision for children and families who become vulnerable is good. The care, guidance and support given to service users is outstanding and enables those experiencing difficulties in their personal lives to successfully overcome these, develop their abilities and further fulfil their ambitions. Staff are skilled in identifying and securing additional help when children and adults need it. Users place a high level of trust in the centre's staff.

The centre is led and managed effectively. Governance arrangements support the development of the centre well. Leaders, managers and staff hold high ambitions for the centre. The centre's written self-evaluation, whilst accurate, does not always detail the evidence sufficiently to reflect the grades awarded. There is a strong desire to continually improve what is on offer at the centre and the impact that this has on the lives of users. Much has been achieved already through the good leadership of the centre manager. Provision is now tailored well to the needs of the community and is of a good standard. Development plans for the centre accurately reflect the main areas for improvement. Key health and education indicators are improving. The

centre is reaching and engaging increasing numbers of children and families and has engaged approximately half of all children under five years of age in the last year. New groups have been developed that respond well to both local and national priorities. The centre has good capacity to make further improvements.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop a robust strategy and coordinate action between partners to better support training and employment outcomes for service users.
- Ensure that judgements in the written self-evaluation are consistently supported by all of the available evidence so that the evaluation is comprehensive.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>2</b>
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A wide range of programmes effectively promote healthy lifestyles and the well-being of users. At the antenatal group 'From Here to Maternity', expectant parents receive practical help to prepare for their new baby. The use of songs and rhymes at the 'Talking Tots' session ensure the development of good early language skills. Healthy snacks at sessions and popular buggy walks support regular exercise and a healthy diet. Children's physical development is good through active play sessions. Childhood obesity in the area is reducing and is now below the national average. Children with disabilities are helped to develop through access to groups at the centre and specialist provision at the neighbouring centre. Support is available at the centre for parents whose children have been diagnosed with autism. Through this support, parents and carers learn new activities that they use at home and forge important social networks that help reduce feelings of isolation. The support offered by breastfeeding volunteers is effective. Counselling services support users effectively in becoming more independent.

Users feel safe through programmes and activities that promote the safety of users well. There is a good focus on and effective work with target groups and families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Those with child protection plans and children in need receive excellent support from family support workers. The number of families receiving direct support in their homes is increasing. Many are engaged over-time with the centre and benefit from both the specialist support available and through taking part in the centre's broader programme. Those experiencing domestic violence have good access to specialist services. The Common Assessment Framework is used well to ensure that users gain timely and effective access to services. Over-time many achieve good outcomes.

Users enjoy attending the centre and taking part the programmes on offer. As one said, 'It's a fun place to be for me and my child.' Parents and carers learn new activities with their children that they can use at home at low costs. They gain good insight into their children's development and behaviour and develop good skills and

knowledge so that they are better able to support them at home. As one stated, 'I spend more time playing with my child now and less watching television.' Another added, 'I respond to my child's tantrums better.' Trips and activities outside the centre enrich and enhance the experience of users. Activities are well planned through good use of information on children's achievements at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The close eye that is kept on children not achieving their developmental milestones means that those who need it receive specialist help. The proportion of children reaching the nationally expected level at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is improving. The attainment gap between the lowest attaining children and the rest is closing well.

Staff and users enjoy good relationships with each other and children play cooperatively together. Parents and carers are effectively involved in the development of the centre. The centre responds to feedback from users and when new activities are planned their views are routinely considered. However, a few parents who met with inspectors did not always know how their feedback had been used. Well trained community parents undertake valuable volunteering roles, playing an active part in sessions. Through undertaking this role they have developed clear personal goals and career aspirations. Those families on low incomes and those who are vulnerable are supported well in accessing childcare. While some users are effectively supported in undertaking training and moving into employment, such as young parents, concerted action to secure employment and training outcomes for users is less well prioritised by the centre and partners.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

**2**

The centre meets the needs of individuals and the community well. Needs assessment is comprehensive and services are purposefully located in areas of greatest need. A range of good quality community facilities are used. The programme responds effectively to new needs. Groups are adapted to better

accommodate local lifestyles, for example by ensuring that the timing of specific sessions fit in with the working patterns of fathers. The centre has established itself well within the local community. Groups are very well attended and the centre is reaching and successfully engaging an increasing number of families. Users actively promote the centre to their friends and hold the centre and its staff in high esteem. Those families located on the outskirts of the area are beginning to be engaged successfully through outreach work.

Groups are lively and purposeful. They focus effectively on the learning and development of children, parents and carers. Their progress is recognised well during sessions and the 'wow board' celebrates children's successes. Parents who complete courses receive certificates. There is a strong and effective focus on early intervention.

The care, guidance and support provided by staff are excellent, particularly for users who experience crisis and for those who need on-going additional help. Users have a very high level of trust in staff and many report that they 'go the extra mile' for them. Staff know users very well and are alert to their individual needs and circumstances. Practical support delivered is of the highest quality. Family support workers act as very effective advocates for parents. One parent described her worker as, 'My guardian angel.' Over time, parents who have experienced significant trauma and crisis are able to take greater control of their own lives and provide better support for their children. With increased self-esteem, skills and knowledge they become more confident and effective parents. Parents could not value the help they receive more highly, as one said, 'It's absolutely fantastic! We'd have fallen through the cracks without it.' Another added, 'I have become a stronger person and a better mother.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

Governance arrangements are good. The local authority provides good leadership and management oversight of the centre. Partners, including parents are well represented on the advisory board which meets regularly. They consider information on the performance of the centre routinely. Performance data provided by the local authority are of good quality. Careful consideration of data, together with user feedback and a good understanding of local needs, ensures that managers have a sound understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the centre. Self-

evaluation is accurate although the written self-evaluation does not marshal fully all of the available evidence to consistently demonstrate the good performance of the centre. Planning for the development of the centre is thorough.

Day-to-day management is good. Staff are strongly supported through regular supervision and there is a good focus on training and development. Staff are experienced and competent in their roles and deployed effectively. Financial management is good and oversight of budgets is routine. When planning and reviewing activities, consideration is given to whether value for money is being provided. Services focusing on those families with higher level needs are invested to good effect. Facilities and resources are of good quality and the available space is used well. Consequently, the centre provides good value for money.

Equality and diversity are promoted well. All users are made to feel welcome at the centre and all activities are free. The centre reaches a good proportion of families from minority ethnic communities. Users from different backgrounds mix with each other and play and work well together during sessions. Different cultures and beliefs are celebrated through displays around the centre and resources used reflect a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Safe recruitment and selection procedures are adhered to. The necessary checks are made on all staff, including volunteers, prior to commencing employment. They have taken part in safeguarding training and fully understand what action to take should they have concerns about the safety and welfare of users. Appropriate policies and contingency plans are in place to safeguard staff. Comprehensive health and safety risk assessments are undertaken on all sessions. The good partnership with children's social care ensures that the centre is involved effectively with children and families who have higher levels of need. Partnerships overall are effective. Collaboration between partners extends the breadth of services and ensures that a wider range of support and help is available for users. Specialist support for those experiencing domestic violence, those in acute poverty, or in debt is enhanced by effective partnership working. Partners work well together in utilising their respective expertise to ensure that those families with more complex needs receive comprehensive support at times when it is needed.

Users engage well with the centre and have good opportunities to feedback on the quality of services they receive and suggest improvements. A parents' forum is active and new groups have been launched as a result of parental feedback, such as 'Buggy Buddies' which promotes physical exercise. Where the wishes of users cannot be translated into action this is skilfully explained to them by the centre manager. Consultation has resulted in a more structured and purposeful approach in sessions which are tailored effectively to learning and development.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and</b>	<b>2</b>
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<b>understood</b>	
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

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

None.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the On Track Children's Centre on 11 and 12 January 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We very much enjoyed our visit to your children's centre and would like to thank all of you who gave your time to speak to us and tell us your experiences of using the centre. Your views have helped inform us of how well the centre is doing and we have mentioned some of your comments in the report.

On Track is a safe and enjoyable place that is well established in the community. It provides a wide range of services and activities that are fun and promote learning and development well for you and your children. Healthy lifestyles are promoted to good effect. More specialist services are also available and these provide good support for those of you who need them. The staff provide excellent care, guidance and support, particularly for those of you who need additional help at times of crisis. Your views are considered well when changing the content of sessions and in

developing new programmes. The centre is led very well by the centre manager and she receives good support from the local authority to do so. The range of services is enhanced by partners who deliver services with or from the centre.

The centre does most things well but there are two areas that we feel could be improved. Firstly, for those of you seeking employment or training, more effective action is required to support you to achieve your goals. Secondly, while managers know the strengths of the provision and where improvements are needed, these are not always supported by good evidence in the centre's written evaluation of its performance. In these areas, we have made recommendations for further improvements.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).