

Inspection report for The Acorns and Ings Children's Centre

Local authority	Kingston upon Hull
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY 349651 Westside Day Nursery

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 covers 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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, a representative from the local authority, members of the advisory board, and a range of providers, centre users and centre staff. Inspectors observed the centre's work including provision at the centre and other sites. They looked at relevant documentation including the centre's operational plans, self-evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Following local authority re-organisation in 2010, the Acorn and Ings Children's Centre is the amalgamation of two centres. The Acorn Centre was designated as a phase one centre in 2005. It serves an extensive urban population across two separate housing estates in East Hull. A high number of properties are council-owned. The families in this area, around 500, live in one of the 13% of most deprived areas in the country. The centre is located in premises that house a church and day nursery for children up to the age of five. Much of the centre's provision is planned in partnership with other centres to maximise services for families; families from further afield attend activities at the centre regularly. The local area is socially very mixed and densely populated. An above-average proportion of families claim benefits and worklessness amongst the adult population is around 50%. Most families (95%) are of White British heritage. The remaining few represent a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds but very few are new to speaking English.

Within the reach area a high proportion of the 1048 children who are under five years of age enter the Early Years Foundation Stage of the centre with skills, knowledge and abilities that are below those expected for their age. Families in the local area experience significant levels of extreme poverty, unemployment, poor health, high levels of drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and low levels of literacy and numeracy.

The centre is governed by the local authority and offers a range of health, social care and family support services. It accommodates private registered childcare for up to 46 children who are under five years of age. Crèche facilities are arranged to support activities on site.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The centre's overall effectiveness in meeting the needs of users and families is satisfactory. Provision and overall outcomes for families are satisfactory. The centre manager and staff work effectively together and have established appropriate partnerships with other providers. Centre staff provide good one-to-one support and advice to families in times of crisis and promptly share any concerns with relevant agencies. Families benefit from this closer working relationship in that requests for support and guidance are followed up promptly and this is raising confidence in the community that help is at hand. Parents said that they and their children are safe at the centre and that the support they receive helps them to stay safe. With all policies updated regularly, safeguarding procedures, including the recruitment and vetting of staff are satisfactory.

Children's achievements, as demonstrated by their results in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, have improved significantly in the last year. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is narrowing at a faster rate than seen nationally. Schools confirm that those children who attend activities at the centre achieve well in all areas of learning. However, this affects only a small minority of the children from the families with greatest needs in the reach area. Adults improve their parenting skills through the good support and the activities at the centre. Adult education partners provide a range of learning courses. The number of adults attending has risen markedly in the last year, with a notable increase in accredited courses. Case studies indicate that some adults gain qualifications and progress to employment or further education and training. However, the centre does not have sufficient information on adults' achievements or progression to plan and monitor provision more accurately, particularly for the many in the reach area who do not attend.

The centre promotes healthy living through its on-site services and clinics and its effective partnership with health professionals. As a result, families increase their understanding of how to stay healthy. With no recent healthy cooking activities, the good habits promoted through breastfeeding, weaning, and cooking for young children are not sustained to secure

long-term lower obesity levels. Working with its partners, the centre offers a satisfactory range of services across the locality. The centre has been particularly effective in encouraging fathers and teenage parents to engage with the centre. Families enjoy the learning and development sessions provided and benefit from outreach support in times of crisis, for example regarding housing, benefits and health issues. Response to the centre's school holiday provision was particularly encouraging with over half of those participating coming from the key target groups. Engagement of families and key target groups is satisfactory overall. While the promotion of home safety is very good, particularly for key target families, the centre does not have relevant data to show how their hard work has impacted on reducing emergency admissions to hospital.

The centre has a clear focus on supporting all children and families and meets the duties that apply to it for equality and diversity. Families where children or their carers have special needs or those who need help to learn English are supported well. However, equality and diversity is no better than satisfactory as the centre does not always analyse the data it has to assess the full impact of its work, particularly on the families who do not access services. Evaluation activities are systematic but there is insufficient challenge and rigorous analysis of outcomes to help the centre develop more precise, measurable and ambitious targets. Leaders and staff are committed to improving provision, building on its strengths and reaching more of the target families. Staffing levels are barely sufficient and deployment across the two centres limits the centre's ability to sustain every activity. To tackle this, a good volunteer programme is promoting self-help effectively. The centre encourages users to voice their views about the centre regularly. However, parents are under-represented on the advisory board which is composed mainly of professionals. An improving trend in performance outcomes for families, together with satisfactory quality of provision and leadership and management, demonstrate a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The leaders, managers and advisory board should improve the analysis of data to assess the impact of the centre's work and set precise and more ambitious improvement targets for all groups.
- Do more to engage with families with the greatest need who are currently under-represented in many activities, but particularly in education and training.
- Increase the number of parents represented on the advisory board.
- Provide more activities to promote long-term healthy eating habits in the community.

How good are outcomes for families?

Families, particularly those in the key target groups, benefit from advice and the promotion of safety through activities at the centre and home visits. As a result, they have a better understanding of how to keep their families safe. As one parent said, 'I couldn't have coped without the centre when things got really bad for my family- it's the only place I feel really safe and valued'. Referrals from all partners are followed up promptly and swift action taken particularly where there are child protection concerns.

Generally, children who use the centre make good progress in their personal development and their learning and achieve well when they enter school. The emphasis on promoting children's personal development and communication skills is a significant factor in helping to improve the life chances of these children. Results for children at the end of their Early Years Foundation Stage, at around 65% achieving six points or more on the Foundation Stage Profile, rose last year because of the good-quality activities the centre provides to prepare children and their families for school. Children and parents enjoy the fun sessions that the centre provides in and around the area. Activities, such as swimming and keep fit, provide families with good opportunities to meet others while improving their fitness regimes. However, the centre does not know how many of the families maintain the good habits they acquire long term.

Adults users benefit from the courses and sessions that develop their parenting skills because staff model good practice that parents can replicate at home with their young children. One parent said: 'The centre has really helped me understand how my children learn and how to manage behaviour- things are much better at home as a result'. Case studies show that some parents acquire a range of skills that enable them to seek employment and access further education and training, but the numbers remain low.

The centre promotes healthy living through a range of mechanisms. Attendances at clinics and rates of immunisation are high. Breast feeding rates, at 29%, are close to average and have improved significantly due to the added impact of the centre's breast feeding peer mentors. The centre's data shows that nearly 50% of pregnant mothers were encouraged to give up smoking and that of the 30 teenage pregnancies in the area, 25 of these, as mothers, sought advice and support from the centre. Data indicate that the number of children who are obese by the time they reach Reception Year at school is reducing and at seven per cent is below the average for Hull. However, these results are not sustained as by the time children reach Year 6, obesity rates increase significantly to 22%.

Children attending centre activities behave well and develop valuable skills for the future, such as co-operation and independence; families develop respect for others and appreciate that the cultures and values of others are integral to good community relations. Parents form trusting relationships with staff and feel confident that they are respected and valued. Many talk confidently about how their children have improved in their behaviour and

learning, because as parents they have better parenting skills. There are opportunities for users to make a positive contribution through evaluations, consultations and the parents' forum. These can result in the modification of provision, such as the development of holiday activities and trips. By being involved in influencing decisions, parents develop confidence and self-esteem; consequently more are attending activities at the centre and other venues. A significant number volunteers support to sustain provision; some activities are now led by well-trained and enthusiastic members of the community, for example, mother and toddler sessions.

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	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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	3
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?

3

Activities are delivered at a range of venues including schools, leisure centres, and library and community halls so families have relatively easy local access. Childcare in the on-site nursery is good. Good links exist with a number of schools, the church, health services, sports development and social care to ensure that provision is relevant to local needs. Every effort is made to consult with families that use the centre to modify activities. Case studies demonstrate that one-to-one support has made a marked difference to families who, due to their circumstances, are particularly vulnerable. With increased referrals and regular marketing, more families with specific needs are targeted but the numbers who engage in activities regularly to ensure long-term benefits remain an issue.

Informal assessment, user feedback and targeted planning enable the centre to develop its provision. The range of services provided by the centre generally meets the needs of most users who access it and as a result, participation rates are satisfactory. Families have sufficient access to appropriate advice and guidance on issues such as employment, benefits and housing.

The centre promotes learning and development through parent and child sessions, such as 'Creative kids', 'Toddler Play' and parenting courses such as 'Triple P'. Typical feedback from

parents includes comments such as: 'We enjoy coming here, my child loves playing with other children', and 'It's somewhere friendly and fun to go – it is helping my child to learn.' Local primary school headteachers recognise that support from the centre gives children a head start and helps children's smooth transition into school. Pre- and post-natal support is good; the centre is vigilant in supporting families identified as needing more than the initial help. Young parents are integrated well in activities. Additional support is targeted at fathers and a good number attends evening and week-end activities, including parenting courses and 'five-a-side' football, so that they can contribute more to supporting their children. While the promotion of home safety is very good, particularly for key target families, the centre cannot successfully show the impact this has had on reducing emergency admissions of young children to hospitals.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre manager and staff have established a good reputation in the local area. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities and are appropriately supervised. Day-to-day management is good and feedback from users reflects good community relations. The centre meets its statutory duties for promoting equality and celebrating diversity. Action to promote equality has resulted in satisfactory engagement with some key target groups such as lone parents, children with disabilities, fathers and teenage parents. Although numbers of users are increasing, the centre does not engage sufficiently with enough of the families that are identified as most in need.

Staff and partners have a clear understanding of policies and procedures to ensure the protection of all users. Systems to record and update information regarding the vetting and recruitment of staff are effective. Staff understand their role in identifying and reporting concerns and do so promptly. The centre has appropriately prioritised staffing to support families in times of crisis and to promote safety. All staff have had training in safeguarding; new staff receive appropriate guidance. Safeguarding meets current statutory requirements.

Partnerships with other services contribute to the satisfactory outcomes for users. The centre is moving well towards establishing a one-stop service to its community. Services are generally well integrated, some more embedded than others, but improvements are evident. However, some partners do not evaluate the impact of their work or sufficiently share information so that the centre can do more to improve outcomes in the local area.

Governance and accountability arrangements are satisfactory; there are clear links between strategic planning and service provision. The local authority and the advisory board monitor the centre's work regularly. The roles of the advisory body and delivery group are not wholly clear and parental representation in decision-making is limited. The centre's on-going evaluation of its activities has resulted in an increase in users' attendance overall. However, with limited data from other providers until recently, the priorities for improving outcomes overall in its delivery plan, although appropriate, are not sufficiently precise to measure the five outcome areas rigorously. Target-setting, while improving, is not sufficiently challenging, particularly in increasing the engagement of key target families to help improve their economic well being.

The centre uses feedback from users and providers satisfactorily to develop its provision. However, the centre has not had enough time since its establishment to build up closer relations with all its partner providers, volunteers and the community to maximise resources so that more families, especially those most in need, benefit fully. The investment in volunteers is proving beneficial in raising user outcomes and aspirations. The centre's overall effectiveness is satisfactory and signs of improvement reflect some good practice. The centre gives 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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
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	3
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.	3

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

This report includes findings from the inspection in 2011 of the Westside Day Nursery which was graded as good overall.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected The Acorns and Ings Children's Centre on 11-12 January 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for taking the time to talk with us, sharing your views and contributing to the inspection of your children's centre. Those of you who use the centre receive a satisfactory range of services. It is a warm and welcoming place and it offers you practical help and advice on safety that you value because you say it makes a difference in the way you support your families at home. Those of you that attend parenting courses and activities appreciate how these help you to manage your children's behaviour. You said that you feel safe at the centre and that your children are safe too. We found that staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures and that they are well-trained.

You enjoy sessions such as 'Creative Kids' and parents' and toddlers' groups with your children. We found that children benefit from the many activities the centre offers as they help them learn and make progress. The centre works with adult education providers so you can improve your own education and future employment opportunities. A number of you have benefitted from this by gaining qualifications or moving on to further education or training. In order to help target the provision, we have asked the centre to work harder to encourage more people to attend, particularly those who do not have the skills they need to move into employment or training.

Your children behave well and you learn more about how to stay healthy. The number of children that are obese by the time they go to school is reducing. The centre is promoting breast feeding and fitness well; an increasing number of pregnant mothers stopped smoking last year. However, although the centre offers support and advice to mothers about breast feeding, weaning and cooking for young children, it does not do enough to help families maintain healthy eating habits as their children grow older; a higher than average number is overweight by the age of 11. We have asked the centre to offer more activities to encourage healthy eating.

We have asked the centre to gather the information it needs to monitor its work more

closely and see where improvements need to be made so that more families benefit. The centre listens to you and asks you what you think of the services and activities it offers and changes some things because of what you say. For example, we found that you had a significant impact on holiday provision and trips that were organised for the community last year. Some of you are involved in making decisions about your centre through being on the parents' forum or attending planning sessions. The chair of the advisory board represents parents satisfactorily but we have asked the centre to increase the opportunities parents have to join the advisory board and influence the centre's work further.

We found that centre staff try hard to make everyone feel included. They are keen to promote equality and diversity and they ensure that families in crisis get the support they need. Despite reduced levels of funding last year, the centre has worked hard to carry on organising activities and is doing well in recruiting volunteers to run some of the activities so that everyone continues to benefit as much as possible. We have asked the centre to try even harder to engage with those families in the area who have most needs and are not yet making best use of the services provided.

The local authority and the centre staff want to improve the work of the centre. The centre is improving and generally knows what it needs to do to improve further and we are confident that it will continue to do so.

A special thank you to those of you who took the time to come in and talk with us and for letting us join you in some of your sessions. We wish you all the best for the future.

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