

# Inspection report for Wisbech South Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Cambridgeshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	384226
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 February 2012
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Nene Infant and Nursery School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Little Owls Day Care EY409295

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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, parents and carers, the headteacher of Nene Infant and Nursery School and the manager of Little Owls Day Care. They met with representatives of the local authority, the library service, the Pre-school Learning Alliance, and with centre users and childminders.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The Wisbech South Children's Centre is a phase two centre. Although it was designated in September in 2008, its current premises were only completed in March 2010. It is located on the site of Nene Infant and Nursery School and is housed in a two-storey purpose-built building. It is governed and managed directly by the local authority. The centre has its own advisory board but, from March 2012, this will be for the three children's centres in the area. It currently has a temporary manager. The local authority has plans in place to recruit a permanent manager.

There are currently 881 children aged under five years living in the centre's reach area. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are below those expected for their age, particularly in their communication, language and literacy development.

The centre is situated on the outskirts of the Fenland market town of Wisbech. The centre also covers the rural villages of Elm and Friday Bridge. The reach area has high levels of unemployment, domestic violence, teenage pregnancies and lone parents. Cases of child poverty and the proportions of families on benefits are high. Housing in the area is mainly social housing. The local population is mostly White British with a small minority of families of Eastern European heritage. The percentage of families who speak English as an additional language is increasing.

## 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 Wisbech South Children's Centre is a satisfactory children's centre which has improved in the past year and is meeting the needs of the community which it serves increasingly well. The welcoming, safe environment and support from staff are highly valued by centre users. 'I enjoy coming here because we help one another and I can relax and so can my children because it's safe,' and 'You are never judged,' are just two of the comments made to inspectors by users which explain what the centre means to them.

Within the centre's work there are key strengths. The centre's care, guidance and support for the most vulnerable groups of users, including young parents and migrant workers, are good. Positive relationships make a tangible difference to the well-being of these groups. Timely and appropriate support is provided to help adults improve their emotional health and well-being. Safeguarding arrangements are strong and thorough. Any concerns related to children's safety are acted upon quickly and appropriately.

Governance and leadership are satisfactory and improving. Managers and staff form a highly committed team that is determined to improve provision and extend services to the wider community. The local authority is supporting developments and monitoring the outcomes for families adequately and there is a trend of improvement in the centre's overall performance. However, the advisory board is not fully functioning; it is currently without a chair and does not provide sufficient challenge to the centre. Data are supplied by the local authority, but the centre has yet to use these data to prove that it is having an impact throughout the reach area or that the needs of all children and families are being met through the activities which it offers.

The centre's capacity to improve is satisfactory. The centre manager has achieved much in a very short period of time. Important improvements have led to a stable and ordered centre that is establishing itself well within the community. The centre is reaching and engaging an increasing number of families. However, less than a quarter of families in the reach area are registered at the centre.

While the centre has quite rightly focused on developing parents' confidence and self-esteem, it is aware that it currently does not provide sufficient opportunities for users to develop skills such as numeracy and literacy. Some users are signposted to other appropriate organisations to attend accredited courses, but the centre does not collect robust data to track and monitor the progress of these learners and the number of referrals made is very small. Some users receive effective support to improve their economic well-being such as benefit and debt advice.

The centre promotes an inclusive ethos and is working hard to engage all groups from the community. It has had particular success in encouraging young parents and migrant workers to access services and become involved in the life of the centre. Parents who are new to the locality report that they appreciate the friends they make through attending the centre. The centre does not yet do enough to encourage fathers to engage with its services.

Partnerships are effective. The centre responds well to the views of parents and carers, tailoring and developing programmes, such as the young parents programme, and providing advice and support for weaning within the 'Stay and Play' sessions.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve the use of data to evaluate the quality of provision and increase the impact of activities and services on outcomes for children and families.
- Increase the number of children and families, including fathers, using the services provided or commissioned by the centre, with a particular focus on families whose circumstances make them vulnerable.
- Provide good opportunities for parents to participate in further education or training, including courses on literacy, numeracy and English as an additional language, and evaluate the impact of this work on the employability skills and economic stability of families.
- Improve the effectiveness of the advisory board so that accountability arrangements and governance contribute fully to improving provision and outcomes for children and families.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>3</b>
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Outcomes for users are satisfactory. The centre has limited statistical evidence to demonstrate precisely the long-term impact of the services offered. Practitioners at the centre work effectively together to promote positive outcomes for users. Families benefit from fun sessions such as 'Toddlers do lunch' and 'Boogie Mites' that promote healthy living. Universal health services, such as antenatal courses and health visitor

clinics, operate out of the centre which contributes to the early identification of health and safety concerns.

Several new initiatives have recently been introduced at the centre. In response to the low levels of breastfeeding, the centre has commissioned the National Childbirth Trust to develop a baby café to provide expert support for new and expectant mothers. Staff have recently received training so they can provide support to users on sexual health issues. It is too soon to measure the impact of these services.

Users say that they feel safe at the centre and the staff give some parents advice on health and safety in the home and outdoors. The centre, in collaboration with partner agencies, is effective in identifying and responding to the needs of vulnerable children and their families. Appropriate use is made of the Common Assessment Framework for recording and coordinating support programmes. Staff effectively build trust with families. This ensures that work undertaken with children who are subject to child protection plans and those who are looked after is well coordinated and sensitive to concerns. The centre is also working well with the local authority's children's social care service to deliver the 'Step-Down' process, supporting families as they progress and become less involved with statutory services. Some users report that their parenting skills have improved and that they have made positive relationships with others. Adults experiencing domestic violence are provided with satisfactory support to ensure they are safe.

Children and parents enjoy playing and learning together in a welcoming environment. Parents report an enhanced understanding of how their children learn. They value the social opportunities the centre provides, and many parents said they had made friendships which continue outside the centre. Consequently, their feelings of isolation have been reduced. Many parents attend on a regular basis and attend many activities. They confirm that their contact with the centre has enhanced their confidence and self-esteem. This is mainly due to the quality of interaction between staff and users. A good number of families have been supported in accessing free formal day care for their two-year-olds. As a result, children in most need receive early access to services to promote their development.

Although children achieve below the national average, the level of achievement has showed some improvement over time. The gap in attainment between children from families with low incomes and the rest is only slightly closing.

Some adults who attend the centre are supported to develop the skills needed to gain employment through access to training and volunteering opportunities. However, the centre realises that not enough adults are supported in this way.

The centre is becoming more established in the community, and more families are accessing its services. Children behave well and all at the centre show a high level of respect for one another. Projects such as 'Momentum Arts' have provided opportunities for the migrant population to work together with the local community. As a result, a greater understanding of each other's cultures and real friendships

have developed.

Users stated they are happy to speak to any staff member directly about any issues relating to the centre and are confident that their opinions would be valued and acted upon. Some parents share their views and opinions with the centre through the parents' forum, evaluating sessions and through parent questionnaires. These show that parents are satisfied with the services provided. However, the centre is aware there is little opportunity for parents to influence decision making due to a lack of parental representation on the advisory board.

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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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?

**3**

The quality and range of services are adequate and the centre is meeting the diverse needs of families, including the growing number of Eastern European families who are settling in Wisbech. Where intensive support or intervention is required, needs are assessed robustly and provision is good. Services are adapted to meet the needs of key targeted groups. However, there is insufficient provision currently for fathers and for some vulnerable families who are reluctant to engage with the centre.

The centre celebrates achievement for children and for parents, for example, with certificates at the end of each course. Staff promote the importance of learning and development of children. However, training for parents is not sufficiently addressed. Some parents are very keen to improve their education and qualifications. There is currently insufficient identification of individuals' potential. Consequently, the centre is not in a position to signpost parents to relevant pathways or monitor their achievement if they are already on a course of study. In addition, the centre does not provide English as an additional language courses.

The quality of care, guidance and support for families is good. Many parents said that they were helped in times of crisis. Families express high levels of satisfaction

with the level of care, guidance and support offered by the centre. They report that their lives are better for having had the help they needed, particularly at low points in their lives. Good-quality information, advice and guidance signpost families to the appropriate support services. The migrant worker has been successful in building trusting relationships with a number of families. Her ability to speak many languages is greatly appreciated by other agencies working in the area and has broken down the communication barrier for many families with little English. As a result, they have been able to access services which have improved their social and economic well-being. Family support workers provide very effective guidance, often in the families' homes.

Some outreach work in the more rural areas has enabled isolated families to access relevant care and guidance. The linked day care 'Little Owls' offers high-quality childcare for local families. There is a range of advice on parenting, smoking cessation, alcohol and drug misuse, and access to benefits through, for example, the 'Young Parents' project. If provision is not available at the centre, parents are signposted and encouraged to access services locally. The links with Jobcentre Plus are satisfactory and job vacancies are advertised clearly at the centre.

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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

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

**3**

All agencies and professionals currently involved in the centre praised the current temporary manager and commented on how the centre has changed for the better under her leadership. They said that they find her approachable, open-minded and motivated to provide the best possible services for families in the area. Under this leadership, the centre's overall performance has improved. However, the performance management systems recently introduced by the local authority have yet to become fully operational. Consequently, it is unable to monitor the centre's performance or track families fully and is unable to demonstrate that it has full knowledge of all the needs in the area.

The small centre presents an attractive, welcoming and informal environment for service users. Space is used well by the resourceful staff team. Some sessions are delivered at different venues which provide greater access for users. They have a number of new projects starting, however, it is too early to evaluate the impact of some of these new projects, but a strong sense of forward planning is clear. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.



Equality and diversity are promoted sufficiently within the centre. Programmes promote tolerance and understanding of different communities effectively. The centre works in conjunction with portage to provide services for children and families with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Comprehensive safeguarding arrangements ensure the safety of users. All staff, including volunteers, undergo appropriate employment checks. Routine risk assessments are undertaken for the centre each day and for all activities. All staff have undergone safeguarding training and demonstrate good knowledge of child protection and know well what to do should they have concerns about the welfare of children, parents or carers.

Partnerships contribute increasingly well to the provision available at the centre. Health visitors promote the centre to new parents and deliver, assisted by centre staff, a popular baby-weighing clinic. The centre has developed relationships with local childminders who use the centre to hold activities on a fortnightly basis. Relationships with the primary schools and Little Owls Day Care are satisfactory but greatly improving. This has resulted in better communications and a real desire to work together. This is particularly evident with regard to safeguarding families, access to outstanding quality provision within the day care for those in most need, and improving the planning of activities for children within the centre. Good transition arrangements are in place for children when they go to the day care and to school.

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 understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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</b>	<b>3</b>

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

Inspectors took into account the inspection report relating to the Little Owls Day Care which was completed in July 2011. This inspection report judged the childcare provision to be outstanding.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Wisbech South Children's Centre on 8 and 9 February 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The inspection team was made aware that the centre has had a number of significant issues to overcome since it first opened. Consequently, the centre has not been as effective as it could have been. However, it now has a stable staff team that is committed to improving the lives of families in the community, especially for those of you who are in most need. All agencies and professionals currently involved in the centre praised the current temporary manager and commented how the centre has changed for the better under her leadership.

Those of you we spoke to told us that you enjoy using the centre and that it has made a positive difference to your lives. You also told us that you find staff at the centre very friendly and welcoming.

The centre offers a sufficient range of services and activities for families in the area, which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals. Young parents are particularly well supported by the range of appropriate activities on offer to them. The migrant worker is supporting a number of you for whom English is not your first language. She is also providing valuable support to other agencies in the area that need translation services. Projects such as 'Momentum Arts' have provided opportunities for the community to work together. This has resulted in a greater understanding of each different culture, and real friendships have developed.

You told us that you think that the centre is a safe place for parents and their children. Safeguarding children is seen as a priority. The staff also help you to support your children's learning and development at home by providing services which encourage you to engage in play with your children at sessions such as 'Stay and Play'.

The temporary centre manager has only recently started her work with the centre but is already having a positive impact. As a result, more of you are using the centre and benefiting from the range of activities it now has to offer you. We have asked the centre to increase the number of children and families, including fathers, using the services which it provides or commissions, with a particular focus on families whose circumstances make them vulnerable at particular times in their lives. In addition, we have asked the centre to improve the use of data so that it can show the full impact of its work and help leaders to set consistently challenging targets when planning for improvement.

You told us that you know the centre has information on weekly job vacancies and that staff can support you or signpost you to organisations which can help you with issues so that you can obtain the benefits to which you are entitled. We have asked the centre to provide more opportunities for you to attend accredited courses such as those for literacy, numeracy and English as an additional language. A few of you have taken up the opportunity to volunteer within the centre. The centre values the work that you are doing.

Some of you are involved in the parents' forum and some have made suggestions about activities you want. We would like you to have more opportunities to be involved in decision making and evaluating the work of the centre. We have asked the centre to improve the effectiveness of the advisory board so that accountability arrangements and governance contribute fully to improving provision and outcomes for children and families.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honesty and openness helped us immensely during the inspection. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future.

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