

Inspection report for Carterton Children's Centre

Local authority	Oxfordshire
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Centre leader	Joanne Smith
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Edith Moorhouse Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	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.

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, the headteacher of Edith Moorhouse Primary School, members of the steering group, parents, representatives from the local authority and the health service, and a range of other partners who work with the centre. Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Carterton Children's Centre is a phase two centre, designated to provide a graduated range of services in 2007. These include health, parenting courses, 'Stay and Play' sessions, a tea-time club, summer holiday programme, outreach provision, and employment and benefits advice. The centre occupies a space at Edith Moorhouse Primary School which has been converted to provide an open-plan play area, baby changing facilities, small kitchen and office, and an outside play area. The centre is managed by the governing body of the school and has a steering group with representation from a range of partners, including parents. The centre manager is line managed by the school's headteacher, who was new to post in September 2011.

The centre's reach area is the town of Carterton itself. Most families are of White British origin, with a very small number of Eastern European and other minority ethnic backgrounds. The town's population has more than trebled in size during the last 30 years to a present total of around 16,000. One thousand new homes, for private ownership and social letting, have been built in an area known as Shilton Park. This area has been designated as a 50–70% super output area. Families who

are relocated to Carterton into social housing often have no extended family support. The number of lone parents and young mothers is average but increasing.

The number of workless households and those who receive childcare benefits and tax credits has increased by 50% in the past year. However, in Carterton, approximately one third of families are employed with RAF Brize Norton. The number of service families in the area is increasing with the closure of RAF Lyneham. A high number of parents are temporarily 'lone' while partners serve overseas. A high number of children of early years age enter and leave the reach area on a regular basis, meaning that data relating to progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the narrowing of the gap between the lowest 20% and the rest fluctuates. Data for 2011 showed there were 1,155 children in the reach area aged between 0 and four, the large majority of whom were under three years of 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Carterton Children's Centre provides a good service for the families in its area. The number of children with whom the centre has direct contact is increasing well each year and outcomes, overall, are good. The centre's focus on the development of children's early social and communication skills is improving young children's achievements, and school readiness is good. The centre builds parents' confidence to help their children learn at home. In evaluations, parents write 'I like using phonics to teach the letter sounds' and 'I have more knowledge about teaching my child to read and write.' The proportion of children who reach a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved in the last two years from 46% to 62%, which is just above the national average.

Safeguarding has high priority, especially as many children move in and out of the area on a regular basis. As the town has grown, staff have developed a very good knowledge of the different needs of its families, and are particularly aware of the emotional and mental health problems suffered by many of the young and/or lone parents. While focusing many of the sessions in Shilton Park where there is the most identified need, the centre also works effectively with partners, including the

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA), to support services families. These factors mean that staff target their care, guidance and support well, and parents feel well included. One parent, having received help to get back on track and continue her studies, commented, 'The centre has had a massive impact on my life.' Others speak of 'happy, healthier and safer family lives' as a result of the practical parenting advice and emotional support they receive.

The centre rigorously uses parents' evaluations of each session to shape activities. Data show that the very large majority of parents feel that they are consulted with well. As a result, parental satisfaction with the centre is high. Many praise the quality of emotional support for them and the trust they have in staff as they gain confidence to improve their parenting skills through the parenting and nurturing courses. The increasing number of workless households is a new target group for the centre. While a comprehensive range of information and advice is provided through noticeboards, regular visits from an adviser and signposting to the Carterton Job Club, the centre is not able to provide explicit evidence of improved outcomes. The local authority recognises this weakness and plans to help the centre access data so that it can evaluate better how well it supports adults' economic well-being.

Leadership and management are good overall, with strengths in the leadership of key staff, particularly the centre manager. Although the governing body oversees the centre's premises, its strategic role in shaping and developing the centre for the future, alongside the steering committee, is not clearly defined. The partners in the steering committee are keenly aware of the importance of matching provision to families' needs, and are effective in seeking improved outcomes and value for money in all the centre's planned activities. The centre's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is accurate and its capacity to improve, as a result, is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop a system to evaluate the effectiveness of the advice and guidance given to the increasing number of workless families, to ensure that their economic well-being is fully supported and improved.
- Define the roles and responsibilities of the governing body of Edith Moorhouse Primary School, in partnership with the centre's steering committee, so that it plays a more strategic role in the future development of the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families learn to make healthy choices which have a good impact on their lifestyles. Breastfeeding initiation is lower than in other parts of the locality but the number sustaining breastfeeding at eight weeks is above average because of good support in the breastfeeding support group. There is high attendance at 'Stay and Play' sessions when health visitors give advice on weaning. Obesity rates are average but many parents struggle to provide healthy food for their families. 'Simple Home Cooking'

courses improve parents' confidence and 86% of parents say that their child has tried food that they would not usually eat. The centre has good plans to teach less confident parents, through outreach work, how to prepare simple meals at home.

There is strong support to improve families' emotional and mental health. The 'Tea Time Club', run in partnership with Edith Moorhouse School, the home school link worker and the Witney Early Intervention Hub, provides an excellent setting for lone parents and children to enjoy good food and fun activities together in a safe, social setting. Parents say how much the club has helped them to overcome this stressful part of the day. Parents suffering from mental health problems, often as a result of isolation, appreciate the 'friendly' atmosphere of the 'Yo-Yo Club', where they make friends, learn skills such as scrapbooking, and receive good care from staff and a MIND support worker.

Systematic use of the Common Assessment Framework helps to prioritise services and secure the well-being of the most vulnerable. Parents say that they are happy that their children are safe and well cared for in the centre. Risk assessments are comprehensive and thorough. Parents appreciate the guidance given in 'Safety Weeks', saying their children are more aware of dangers, such as roads and not being safely buckled in the car. Emergency hospital admission rates are low. Children learn to behave well and play safely together because staff are excellent role models and promote positive relationships amongst all who visit the centre. The majority of parents say that they feel more confident in managing their child's behaviour as a result of attending 'Stay and Play' sessions and that home is a calmer place to be. Parents say how they trust the staff and can share concerns with them. They say that they feel free from any form of discrimination and appreciate that their views are valued and acted upon.

The range of activities in the centre enables children to enjoy activities and achieve well. Parents report that the 'Baby Movers' and 'Toddler Groovers' groups have a beneficial impact on developing their children's speech and language. The majority of parents attending 'Babes in Arms' report that they better understand how their baby communicates and the large majority attending the 'How Children Learn' course report that they have increased understanding of how their children learn through play. Case studies show that increasing confidence amongst some parents leads them to take up further education or apply successfully for jobs. The centre signposts parents to a range of advice and guidance to support their economic well-being but it has not assessed finely enough how effective this is in meeting the needs of the increasing numbers of workless families in the area.

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	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2

The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
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?

2

The centre uses its knowledge of the reach area well to assess the needs of the most vulnerable families and to target services with precision. The centre has overcome challenges, such as the accommodation limitations placed on it due to the withdrawal of space allocated in three schools over four years. It has located services well in the community centre at Shilton Park and the nearby Catholic church hall. The positive partnership developed with the Willow Tree Children's Centre at Bampton has enabled both to signpost and share each other's services effectively, such as the support group for postnatal depression.

Good outcomes stem from the consistently good-quality care, guidance and support. The staff's proactive approach to identifying where problems lie means that they have secured a high level of confidence by families. This approach has led to good improvements in the way families understand how to care for their children, and to well-targeted support for specific groups such as parents with twins, and young mothers. There has been a 50% increase in teenage mothers attending the centre as a result of good-quality outreach work which has given them the confidence to attend 'Stay and Play' sessions and health visitor clinics.

The promotion of learning and development is at the heart of the centre's work. Take-up of parenting courses is high and is sustained. Parents are proud of their own progress, such as one describing how they no longer are annoyed by their child's behaviour but understand how he learns when he spins car wheels and empties boxes of toys. As another said, 'I enjoy my children's play now.' The centre's focus on promoting children's language and literacy skills is well judged and very well received by parents who are fascinated to share simple books with their young babies, help them explore with shiny materials and reflect their sounds as they see themselves in a mirror. Effective partnerships between local nursery settings and childminders also help the youngest children to become independent learners and ready for school.

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre manager has effectively harnessed the expertise of the staff and partners to tailor services. The staff have a shared commitment to the centre's future development and morale is good. Staff have clear lines of responsibility and roles, and the centre is led and managed successfully on a day-to-day basis. Regular and effective supervision supports the personal and professional development of staff who say they feel valued and supported in their role. Opportunities for training are carefully focused on meeting the development needs of the centre, but also on improving the qualifications and expertise of staff.

Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and ensure that all who use the centre are well protected. All partners engaged in the centre's work are suitably vetted. Safe recruitment practices are adhered to. There is good cooperation between various agencies to ensure that vulnerable families are supported and protected. Although the number of children subject to child protection is lower than the county average, the centre takes its responsibilities seriously in ensuring that children are kept safe through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process.

The centre is careful to assess the impact of its work in promoting equality and diversity through ongoing evaluations of its sessions, an annual impact assessment and key questions to each member of staff at their annual performance review. The centre's inclusive approach builds unity between families from all civilian and services backgrounds, and makes a positive contribution to community cohesion. Where needed, specialist support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is sought.

The steering committee makes effective use of its local and professional knowledge to make sure that resources are used efficiently to achieve best impact and good value for money. Good systems are in place for holding the centre to account through local authority monitoring processes, and regular checks on the development plan make sure that actions are making a positive difference. Self-evaluation is accurate but there are gaps in the availability of data to assess how effectively the centre improves the economic well-being for families from workless homes. The headteacher is developing her understanding of the centre's work and recognises that the strategic role of the governing body requires better definition.

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 secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
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	2

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

Inspectors also took into account the findings of the inspection of Edith Moorhouse Primary School which was inspected at the same time as the children's centre.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Carterton Children's Centre on 23 and 24 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

First of all, we would like to thank those of you who took the time to speak with us during the inspection. It was very helpful to hear your views and how much you value the services offered by the centre. These views have helped us to make our judgements about how well the centre is meeting your needs. During our visit, we looked at your centre's documents and spoke to a number of people working with the centre, as well as the staff and representatives from the local authority. We also

visited several activities, such as 'Stay and Play' and the parenting course. We were just sorry that we were not in the centre when 'Baby Movers' and 'Toddler Groovers' were taking place, because we know that a lot of you attend these sessions and the photographs of your activities look like you all have a lot of fun!

Those of you we spoke to were full of praise for all the centre has done for you and your children. Many of you told us how the centre has changed your lives because of the support you had been given by staff. You told us how you have been helped to understand how your children learn through play. You say that you enjoy playing with your children more now because you know they are exploring and learning, not just being naughty, when they tip things out of boxes or line cushions up on the floor! It was lovely to see you playing with your babies during 'Stay and Play' and seeing their enjoyment as they crinkled the shiny paper and looked at themselves in the mirrors. I know that you really appreciated the advice on weaning that the health visitor gave to you at that session.

The centre works very hard at linking you to all the services it can to make sure that your needs are met, even when it cannot provide things directly itself, such as providing support for those of you with postnatal depression at the Willow Tree Children's Centre in Bampton. A lot of you live on Shilton Park, and we think it is really good that the centre manages to do some sessions there and also have the health visitors there for you to attend baby clinic and seek advice. Some of you told us that the centre has been really helpful in supporting you to get back to work or to carry on with your studies. We think that the centre gives you the advice you need on benefits, housing or jobs, and tells where you can find more information, such as at the Carterton Job Club at the Town Hall. However, we do think that the centre needs to be able to know whether the advice and support you receive is actually helping you. There are more families who are not in work in Carterton than there used to be and so the centre needs to know if it is helping to improve things.

We have seen the impact of the centre's good care, support and guidance in the way it helps you to bring up your children healthily and safely. It develops groups so that those of you who are alone at home have somewhere to go for advice, to meet other parents and carers, and to see a familiar, friendly face. It is good to see that the centre works well with the preschools and childminders in your area. It recognises how important it is for your babies and children to develop good speaking skills and interest in reading and writing at an early age in readiness for going to school, and helps you to help your children learn at home, perhaps learning some of the letter sounds. It is so good that you are learning to share books with your children from a very early age.

We think that the staff know what works well and what they need to work on next to improve the centre even more. All the people who help support the centre, such as the health visitors, workers from MIND and the staff from SSAFA, are careful to check that the outcomes for you and your children are as good as they can be and that there are no gaps in what they provide. They listen carefully to what you have to say about the sessions provided, and your views are really important in deciding

what else the centre might need to provide to help you. The governors at the school are pleased to have the centre on the school site and have made sure the building is looked after properly. We have asked them now to work alongside the other leaders and managers so that they are more involved in making decisions about the centre's future. Please do continue to tell the centre what you think. Your views are the most important of all.

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