

Inspection report for Watton Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Westfield Infant and Nursery 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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, partner agencies, parents and carers, the headteacher of Westfield Infant and Nursery School, representatives from the governing body and from the advisory board. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Watton Children's Centre is based on the site of Westfield Infant and Nursery School, in an independent building integrated with the school. Governance of the centre is the responsibility of the governing body of Westfield Infant and Nursery School. An advisory group also supports the centre.

It is a phase two children's centre, designated in February 2008, and provides services to meet all elements of the core purpose of children's centres. Since the centre opened, there has been substantial housing development in the area, which has increased the amount of social housing available and a significant increase in the number of families living in the area.

The centre covers the large geographical area of the Wayland High School cluster. This includes the town of Watton and the outlying villages of Caston, Griston, Great Hockham, East Wretham, Great Cressingham, Hilborough, Ashill, SahamToney, Carbrooke, Ovington, Thompson and Scoulton.

There are 862 children in the reach area. The majority of children are from White British backgrounds. However, there is an increasing proportion of children from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, including Polish, Portuguese, Lithuanian, Latvia and Russia.

The centre does not provide early years childcare, but offers advice and guidance to parents and carers on the day care and childminding facilities available within the local community. There are pockets of deprivation in parts of the reach area but also areas of affluence in other parts of the community. A number of children come from homes claiming benefits. Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age on entry to the Local Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

Watton is a satisfactory children’s centre. It is an inclusive and welcoming place run by dedicated staff who aspire to serve their community well. Families warmly appreciate the good quality care, guidance and support the centre provides and the difference it makes to their lives. Their positive comments strongly reflect this. ‘The children’s centre is like an extended family’ and ‘I cannot praise staff enough in helping me to access services for my family and always being there for reassurance’ are typical examples. This is because staff develop warm and trusting relationships with parents who are confident to approach them and talk freely about any problems or issues they face.

Although anecdotal evidence of individual cases often shows improving outcomes, the centre’s use of data to demonstrate wider impact is at an early stage. Information is not yet collated in a format to show the full impact of the centre’s work and help leaders to set consistently challenging targets for improvement within planning.

The centre places a high priority on safeguarding families. Staff work effectively with other agencies to reduce risk of harm to children. Agreed and well-understood procedures to follow up or share concerns with other agencies as appropriate support the centre’s good safeguarding procedures. The centre is committed to supporting all families where there is a need. Consequently, the centre is quite rightly recognised by users as a place of safety.

Children are well behaved, developing respect for others and play well together.

They benefit from the smooth transition, to either the on-site nursery school, other nursery provision or into schools in the reach area. The centre demonstrates good success in lifting parents' confidence and extending their parenting skills and in children's achievements. However, provision for adults to pursue further learning is currently limited. Therefore, some parents still lack aspiration to pursue further training and job opportunities.

The centre has developed good partnerships with a range of other agencies which ensure effective working practice, such as the signposting to each other's services and service delivery. Those who use the centre feel involved in it. However, some parents are not aware of the community forum and parent representation on the advisory group is low. As a result, the involvement of parents and carers in governance is limited.

The governing body provides sound governance for the centre. The headteacher and centre manager work well together to provide suitable management to ensure the day-to-day running of the centre is smooth and efficient. The local authority has provided adequate support to the centre; however, it has not held an annual conversation with the centre within the last two years to monitor its performance.

Centre leaders have a broadly accurate view of its strengths, though without enough evidence of impact, their self-evaluation lacks rigour. Despite this leaders are realistic about what is required to improve the centre's overall effectiveness. They have focused on improving key aspects resulting in satisfactory provision and outcomes overall, though there are areas of strength. Staff understand the priorities well and are motivated to build on what they have already achieved. Consequently, the centre has shown that it has a satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Analyse available data to accurately identify under-represented groups among service users and ensure robust systems are in place to monitor the quality of activities provided through the centre.
- Improve the effectiveness of self-evaluation through regular and rigorous evaluation of information and data that shows the full impact of the centre's work and helps leaders to set sharp, measurable targets for improvement within planning.
- Provide more opportunities for users to attend adult education classes and monitor the numbers of users who attend these classes.
- The local authority to implement a robust system of monitoring that offers strong guidance and support to the centre and drives service improvement.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre works effectively with health professionals to provide health support and advice for families. Resources such as baby weighing scales are well used by parents

to monitor their babies' weight. This alerts parents to any potential development issues with their child and promotes early intervention by professionals. The breastfeeding café is enabling mothers to meet with other breastfeeding mothers in a supportive and informal environment. The 'Little Diggers' group only started in January 2012 but is already encouraging parents to grow vegetables with their children and eat fresh vegetables.

Parents comment positively about the safe environment at the centre and how their awareness of safety issues has increased. Safety for families at the centre and in the home is well promoted. For example, health visitors and family support workers give families helpful advice about safety at home and safety equipment is made available to those in most need. The centre responds well to families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The Common Assessment Framework is used very effectively to identify the needs of families in relation to safeguarding issues. Consequently, the outcomes for children in need and those subject to child protection plans are generally good and numbers on such plans are relatively low.

Children and their parents enjoy attending the centre. Parents who may be socially isolated talked positively about how these sessions had enabled them to meet other adults, develop friendships and encouraged their children's interaction and social skills. The well-resourced toy library is helping parents to use a wider range of toys and resources with their children at home to promote their learning. Parents are, therefore, increasingly able to contribute to their children's school readiness. Advice for parents seeking childcare is strong and the centre has developed good relationships with childminders and childcare providers in the area. Childminders comment that the centre is 'a hub for networking' which enables them to share good practice with each other. Consequently, childminders say they feel more skilled at using child observations to inform their planning which promotes children's development.

Transition to schools in the reach area is good for children. Data for the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores shows an improving trend of achievement and that the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children who achieve 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest is narrowing. 'The centre has helped me to become a much better parent' was the comment from one parent which illustrates the impact of the centre in helping parents to improve their parenting skills through attending parenting courses offered by the centre.

The centre has been responsive to need by helping some parents progress to further education, to volunteering and to employment. Links with Jobcentre Plus and the Citizens Advice Bureau are positive and cases studies also show how some families have been supported to obtain the benefits that they are entitled to. This promotes the economic well-being of the family. However, currently the centre has no effective system in place to track families that have been signposted to these other agencies.

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	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	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

Centre staff and their professional partners understand the challenges they face in meeting the needs of a socially diverse community. However, in the absence of reliable and up-to-date data, they use what data they can obtain and also local knowledge to assess the needs of the community. As a result, the centre is successful in delivering a satisfactory range of services and activities and ensures there is an adequate balance of universal and targeted services. Some of the centre's services are provided in school premises throughout the reach area. This enables families to access services where transport links are poor. Outreach work is effective in providing one-to-one support for the most vulnerable families within the area.

A range of recent initiatives, such as the appointment of an inclusion worker and linking with other agencies to run community events to publicise services, are proving successful in engaging harder to reach families. In addition, the health visitor and other partners promote the centre's services at every available opportunity. The 'New parents' group' is a good example of the developing partnership working with health visitors. It is offering valuable advice and support for new mothers as well as providing opportunities to socialise and have fun with their babies. However, for many of these activities, it is too soon to measure the longer term impact they are having.

Staff have been supported well in developing their knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Programmes are now well planned and structured and there is good consideration of how they can best support children's development. Staff are skilled and they work hard to meet individual needs. They act as very good role models and help parents learn how to support their children's learning effectively. Sessions observed by inspectors were of good quality; they were resourced well so as to be enjoyable and satisfying for all users.

Families receive good care from the centre. For example, case study evidence

demonstrates that some families have had to overcome significant barriers to reach the point where they have the confidence to travel on their own to the centre. During times of crises, families feel well supported. One parent said about the support she received from centre staff, 'I'm not sure how I would have survived without their support.'

Parents are signposted for advice and support to enable them to access services, such as housing benefits, health services and childcare provision. Individual testimonies and case studies show that some parents have successfully moved into learning, training and employment. However, the centre is unable to confirm how many have accessed these services due to the lack of robust tracking systems.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre manager provides satisfactory leadership and management for the centre. She is supported by a very committed and enthusiastic team whose expertise and skills are being used well to ensure that services improve. Professional supervision and performance management are regularly undertaken and valued by staff. Personal development targets are agreed as part of the annual appraisal. In recent times, the local authority has not provided sufficient monitoring of the centre's performance. Despite this, governors are highly supportive and have a strong commitment to the centre and to the ongoing development of its role within the community.

The centre works productively with a wide range of partners who are well represented on the advisory group. Partners talk highly of their links with the centre. It is clear from the testimonies of partners that the centre plays a pivotal role in bringing services together to improve the lives of the community.

The centre recognises the need to develop the robustness of data gathering from all sources to ensure the analysis of the reach area is accurate and resources are targeted where they are most needed. Leaders are also aware of the need to ensure rigorous monitoring, evaluation and target setting are in place to secure improved outcomes for all families.

The centre has effective procedures for safeguarding and risk assessment. Staff have

completed relevant safeguarding training as appropriate to their roles and statutory requirements are well met. Early intervention is used to ensure problems for families do not escalate. Information sharing and referral mechanisms work well. Criminal Records Bureau and other recruitment checks are carried out on staff and volunteers as appropriate.

The centre provides various activities in outreach venues, such as schools, and makes good use of available space and resources within the centre itself. However, the main room within the centre is currently used by the school in the afternoons which means all activities at the centre have to be offered in the mornings only. They have a number of new projects starting, however, it is too early to evaluate the impact of some of this work, but a strong sense of forward planning is clear. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Parents' views have been sought over many aspects of the centre's work and this has led to modifications of provision and timings of activities. For example, parents expressed that they wanted sessions to be more focused, so from this term the centre has changed the 'Stay and Play' session to a 'Story Café' with a focus on reading stories. However, too few users have a more formal lead in sharing their views through representation on the advisory group.

The centre promotes equality and diversity, and tackles discrimination adequately. It ensures equal access by all groups known to the centre, to provide specialist help for parents with children who have a disability, translators for those who speak English as an additional language and well-targeted support to narrow the gap for the most disadvantaged groups. This promotion of inclusion has ensured that the centre is a cohesive community.

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	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	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the	2

integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	
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

The inspection took account of the findings of the most recent inspection of Westfield Infant and Nursery School inspection report which was judged to be good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Watton Children's Centre on 22–23 February 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The centre offers a sufficient range of services and activities for families in the area, which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals.

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. You appreciate the good quality of care, guidance and support the centre provides. You made positive comments such as, 'The children's centre is like an extended family' and 'I cannot praise staff enough in helping me to access services for my family and always being there for reassurance'.

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 'Messy play'. The toy library provides you with a good range of quality play resources that you and your children can enjoy in your own home. The centre has taken on board suggestions you have made such as providing more focus to activities. Many of you commented on how your confidence and parenting skills have improved through contact with the centre.

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.

A range of recent initiatives, such as the appointment of an inclusion worker, and linking with other agencies to run community events to publicise services are proving successful in engaging harder to reach families.

In recent times, the local authority has not provided sufficient monitoring of the centre's performance. Despite this, governors are highly supportive and have a strong commitment to the centre and to the ongoing development of its role within the community. We have asked the local authority to implement a robust system of monitoring that offers strong guidance and support to the centre and drives an improvement in services.

In order to develop the centre further, we have asked the centre leaders to improve the system of evaluating its performance to show the full impact of the centre's work and help leaders to set consistently challenging targets for improvement.

You told us that you know the staff will support you or signpost you to organisations best place to offer you help 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 literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology.

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.