

Inspection report for Market Rasen Children's Centre

Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	384006
Inspection dates	7–8 March 2012
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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	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.

Report published: March 2012



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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 representatives from the local authority and the National Health Service, centre staff, representatives from services that work in partnership with the centre and users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

This is a phase two children's centre designated in 2008 and providing the core offer to the Market Rasen and Wold View wards. The centre serves one of the 30% most deprived parts in the country. Within the reach area, there are five lower super output areas. The centre serves a large, sparsely populated rural area. In 2011, there was a reorganisation of the management arrangements of Lincolnshire children's centres. Currently, the centre manager manages four centres in the East and West Lindsley districts. Universal services offered by the centre are delivered by private organisations commissioned by Lincolnshire Local Authority. There are separate line management arrangements for different local authority services. There is private childcare provision within the centre.

The very large majority of the population are White British. The skill levels of the majority of children on entry to early years provision is below typically expected levels. The rate of unemployment and the proportion of families in receipt of benefits is similar to Lincolnshire overall.

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 overall effectiveness of the children's centre is satisfactory. However, some features of its work are good. Good care, guidance and support and safeguarding have resulted in good, safe outcomes for children and their families. As one parent reported, 'Staff here are really lovely and it is a safe place to come'. Good quality activities for children within the centre and effective links with other childcare provision in the area have resulted in the good enjoyment and achievement of users. Assessment information demonstrates that children make good progress and the large majority leave Early Years Foundation Stage settings with skill development that is at the expected levels.

The centre users are unanimous in their appreciation of the improvements to their lives as a result of taking advantage of the services and activities provided. The impact of these services on outcomes overall is only satisfactory because there are some families and children in the community who are not yet taking advantage of them. Outcomes for children in all areas are stronger than for other users. The centre is effective in ensuring that children are well prepared for learning when they enter school. Adults benefit from and enjoy the courses to improve their parenting skills and courses to develop safe and healthy lifestyles. However, the numbers embarking on further training and employment preparation courses are fewer than they could be. Recently, only a few parents have embarked on voluntary work or taken responsibility for shaping the work of the centre by becoming involved in the parents' forum or the partnership board. This is because the pathways and partnerships with other agencies to promote further training for users are not sufficiently well developed. Health services have had a strong impact on some areas, such as the increase in the rate of breastfeeding. However, in others the impact has been weaker. For example, steps taken to encourage families to stop smoking have had much less impact than in other local areas.

The reorganisation of centre management at a local and strategic level has recently slowed the development of the centre services. However, the good quality of services such as that for under fives and the family support service have ensured that families, in particular those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable,

are well looked after during this period of change. By prioritising the need to maintain the good quality of its most important work and successfully achieving this aim, the centre demonstrates satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement. Separate local authority line management procedures ensure that different agencies carry out their work to a level that is at least satisfactory. However, because these procedures are separate, communication between some agencies, such as between the health services and the children's centre, are not as effective as they could be. The local authority accurately commissions services where they are needed at a district level. However, the centre does not evaluate or assess the needs of a few users in its target groups sufficiently well to ensure that the services reach them, rather than families who are in less need of them.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that more parents engage in the governance of the centre and embark on voluntary work and training for employment by:
 - better promotion and celebration of the work of the centre and what it can offer
 - strengthening the links between partners who provide these services.
- Ensure that more users take advantage of the services on offer in the centre by:
 - making better use of the available information about a few users, in particular in isolated parts of the reach area, to accurately target services to meet their needs
 - making sure that partners promote all aspects of the centre's work in addition to the services they provide.
- Strengthen leadership and governance both at a centre and local authority level by:
 - ensuring line managers work together closely to facilitate more productive communication between different agencies such as health and other centre services
 - ensuring that centre leaders make better use of evaluation procedures to target commissioned services to the families that will benefit most.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre is successful in ensuring that vulnerable families are well supported by family support workers and the Common Assessment Framework procedures known in Lincolnshire as 'Team Around the Child' arrangements. The emotional well-being, safety, health and financial security of these families are much improved by the effective partnerships these procedures and services facilitate. The few children who are subject to child protection procedures and those who are looked after are well supported by the centre services. Social services report that families prefer to hold meetings at the centre because they recognise it as a place of safety.

Children with speech and language delay make good progress because of the

generally effective work of speech therapy services. As one parent reported, 'My child refused to talk, but after a year working with the centre her speech has improved, she is much more confident and she talks all the time'. Young parents report how much they appreciate the courses to improve their parenting skills and their ability to adopt a healthy lifestyle. One parent reported that, 'Before I came to the centre I could not even boil an egg, now I know how to cook healthy meals'. Other initiatives such as those that encourage exercise are improving the health of families that use the centre, but it is unclear whether they are having an impact on the obesity rate of children in the reach area. Initiatives such as the Baby Café encourage parents to breastfeed and contribute to the steady rise in the proportion that now breastfeed which is higher than in the rest of Lincolnshire.

The centre has successfully promoted good behaviour and respect amongst all users, and in particular the achievement of children. Parents and children thoroughly enjoy the activities such as 'PEEP' and Home Start. Effective links between the centre and the private childcare provision have helped to ensure the good progress of children. For example, the 'Every Child A Talker' initiative promoted by the centre and adopted by the private childcare is ensuring good progress in the development of communication, language and literacy skills.

Centre records and users' reports show that until the re-organisation in September 2011, parents made a good contribution to the work of the centre. For example, activities such as the breakfast club and improved outside facilities for play were established at the request of, and in partnership with, the parents' forum. Currently, adult users still regularly comment through the evaluation of activities about where they would like to see improvements, but the parents' forum has been less effective at influencing the centre's work because too few have been encouraged to take part in it. Adult users are signposted to adult learning courses run by partners and a few have gained employment as a result of the supportive work of the centre. The centre and its partners encourage a few users into voluntary activities. One particularly successful example is the group of volunteers that have been trained to supervise the Home Start activities.

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	3

stability and independence including access to training and employment	
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How good is the provision?

3

The centre has been successful in ensuring that the large majority of families with children under the age of five register with the centre. It is more successful at engaging users in close proximity to the centre, but less effective at providing outreach services for users who live in the more rural parts of the reach area. Most activities are well attended, such as the parenting activities, but a few others have not been successful because of poor attendance. As one parent reported, 'I feel that the centre does not reach all the people that could benefit from the services provided'.

Some of the centre services and partnerships are very effective, such as those provided by the under fives service. The centre's work to improve the well-being of young parents and those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable so that they can care well for their families are its strength. Some partnerships and commissioned services such as those to promote the engagement of users and to establish pathways into employment have been less effective. Occasionally, the centre misses the opportunity to celebrate the successful achievements of users that would promote its work and encourage more to take part in courses and activities.

All users who enter the centre receive a warm welcome. The consistency of the good quality care, guidance and support offered by centre staff ensures that users, particularly those who are vulnerable, build up secure and trusting relationships with staff. One parent reported that, 'I felt isolated, a member of staff came to my house to help me with my problems, and she really helped me. I now have much more confidence and want to put something back into the community'.

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

Some of the line management procedures, such as the supervision of the family support workers have resulted in families in need receiving swift and effective support. Others are not as effective in promoting the partnership work of the centre. For example, the centre expects and depends on health services to promote the centre to new users who are pregnant or have recently given birth and to encourage them to register. However, a few parents spoken to report that they did not receive this advice. The centre does not have line management responsibility over health

services which make it more difficult to investigate or remedy this situation. Meeting minutes prior to September 2011 show that the partnership board, made up of users and partners, was effective in overseeing the strategic development of the centre. The effectiveness of the partnership board has been limited recently due to reorganisation, but plans show that its increased effectiveness is a priority of the centre.

Some services are highly effective at using data to identify where to make improvements, such as the recently improved provision for boys to strengthen their writing skills following accurate identification of this need by staff. Evaluation of the needs of the district based on data about users have accurately identified where services need to be commissioned. Sensible checks are in place to ensure these contracts are delivered. The extent to which the resources of the centre are managed efficiently and effectively is satisfactory because at a local level, leaders in the centre do not always evaluate as effectively as they could whether the commissioned services are delivered to the right users. For example, in one of the smaller rural locations in the reach area it was identified that speech and language support was needed for a few children. A service was delivered to this community. However, leaders in the centre are unaware if those who attended were the children who most needed the support.

All staff are well trained in safeguarding and health and safety procedures, such as the recruitment checks on staff, are well established and robust. A main strength of the centre is the way it ensures that vulnerable families with a range of complex needs who have experienced danger in their lives are well protected and effectively enabled to develop safe lifestyles. The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The centre and its partners provide appropriate services for the few children with disabilities, for parents with disabilities and for other target groups such as lone parents. However, the centre has experienced difficulty demonstrating its effectiveness in engaging the large majority in these target groups because some of the data provided by the local authority is inaccurate. Staff present very good role models of behaviour. Users who very occasionally make inappropriate discriminatory comments are challenged expertly so that their self-esteem is not undermined, but that they are educated to understand that the comments are not acceptable.

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 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

Inspectors looked at the inspection outcomes for local Early Years Foundation Stage settings.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Market Rasen Children's Centre on 7–8 March 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us. Your views were very helpful to the inspection. We agree with you when you told us how helpful the care and support you receive from the centre and the services are. The range of services and activities on offer is helping you to improve your parenting skills, and preparing your children well for school. Those of you who are experiencing difficulty in your lives are well supported to make your families and children safe and healthy. The centre has helped some of you who have experienced difficulties in the past to be much more confident and able to look forward to a brighter future. We watched you thoroughly enjoying the activities, such as 'PEEP', where you talked to each other and played with your children. A few of you have successfully started voluntary work, training courses or gained employment, but more of you could be encouraged to do so. More of you could be involved in the work of the centre, particularly by joining the parents' forum or the partnership board.

You told us that one reason why you like coming to the centre is because of the helpful and friendly staff who work there and we agree. They try their best to help you to make improvements to your lives. For example, the family support workers are doing well. They expertly help you to decide on the services and activities that you need in order to make improvements to family life. They then work well with other agencies like the health service and social services to make sure that the help is just right for you and your family. We agree with one parent who told us that the

services available are good, but it is a pity that not enough people in the area are taking advantage of them. This is the case for parents who live outside of Market Rasen who may have difficulty travelling to the centre. While the centre is working hard to try and improve this, it has not yet demonstrated that all who could benefit from its services are able to do so.

The centre has experienced many changes in the last six months. It has largely maintained the quality of its most important services during this period of change. For example, the centre leaders have been successful in safeguarding the families that use the centre. The centre is good at checking that its services meet the needs of those of you who may be experiencing difficulties. It is not as good at ensuring that for others, all its services are just right, nor that they result in the expected improvements. Some partnerships of professionals work well. Others, such as those between the health services and the centre, could be strengthened to promote the services of the centre more effectively to users.

We have asked the centre to make some improvements by:

- encouraging more of you to engage in the governance of the centre and to consider voluntary work and training for employment
- making sure that all of you who want to are able to take advantage of the services on offer
- strengthening the partnership work between agencies.

Many thanks again for making us feel so welcome and we wish you and your families a successful future'

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