

Inspection report for Diss Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Diss Infant and Nursery Community 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 members of the advisory board, a group of governors including the Chair of the Governing Body, the centre coordinator and deputy headteacher of the school, headteachers from cluster schools, managers of private early years settings, family support workers, parent support advisers, and representatives from the local authority and social services. Inspectors also met with health professionals, portage workers, a representative from Diss Jobcentre Plus, the area manager for Child Minding Matters, a group of childminders, the manager of the women's refuge, members of the Polish and Gypsy Traveller communities and other users of services provided by the children's centre.

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

Information about the centre

Diss Children's Centre is a purpose-built centre on the site of Diss Infant and Nursery School. It was fully designated as a phase two centre in February 2007. It is situated within the town of Diss in South Norfolk. It has a reach area of approximately 85 square miles which includes a number of small rural villages. The area also includes communities of Gypsy Traveller and Polish families. There are 888 children aged nought to five in the area 26% of whom live in the 30% most disadvantaged part of the reach area. Governance of the centre is through the governing body of Diss Infant and Nursery School. Some users are represented on the advisory board.

Within the reach area, children of a similar age enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision at different stages of development. Data indicate that 142 children live in workless households receiving tax credits and that 11% of parents in the area are lone parents.

The leadership of the centre has undergone considerable change since September 2011. Following a successful commissioning bid, Diss Infant and Nursery School continues to lead the centre and is contracted to do so for the next four years.

Diss Children’s Centre works closely with a number of professionals, including a named health visitor, portage service, dental hygienist, school nurse, parent and infant mental health team, the local women’s refuge, the alcohol and drug abuse service and midwifery team. This enables the centre to provide a range of support for families, including medical checks for two-year-olds, a baby clinic, provision for disabled children and those who have special educational needs including speech and language therapy, C-card registration and pregnancy testing. The centre has close links with the nearby health centre and Jobcentre Plus.

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

The Diss Children’s Centre is a good children’s centre. It works exceptionally well to ensure all users in the reach area are safe. There are a few satisfactory aspects including users’ contribution to the centre’s development. The wide range of provision enables all users to achieve good outcomes in most areas of their lives. The staff are very welcoming and users say they feel safe and relaxed coming to the centre and to the centre’s activities. All courses and group activities, such as drop-in sessions for parents with children under five, are very well attended and all users complete the courses they choose to take. There is no unlawful discrimination and all users say they feel valued and supported.

The nursery at Diss Nursery and Infant School was judged to be outstanding at the time of its last inspection and current school data highlight the excellent progress children continue to make from their very low starting points. Headteachers of cluster schools and managers of private, voluntary and independent nurseries within the reach area confirm that the children’s centre has a good impact on young children’s readiness for learning, because they develop good personal, social and emotional skills thanks to the children’s centre’s activities. As a result, the centre’s activities are successfully contributing to closing the gap between those whose

circumstances make them vulnerable and other children in the reach area. Children in the nursery and at the centre's crèches and activities behave well. This is due to the effective support from centre staff and the impact of parenting courses. The children's centre has a good working relationship with the local authority early years teacher who works very successfully with private, voluntary and independent nurseries across the reach area. For example, she ensures that all disabled children and those who have special educational needs who are not within the maintained sector, are rapidly identified. She liaises closely with the children's centre to ensure they receive appropriate and carefully targeted support including speech therapy.

Health professionals give good support to children's centre activities and this is having a positive impact on outcomes, for example, increased confidence in breastfeeding and a significant reduction in teenage pregnancies. However, the health service is not giving a sufficiently clear steer to professionals regarding their role in registering families with children from nought to five in the reach area. The local authority confirms that this is part of a strategic service level agreement but this is not evident across the reach area of the Diss Children's Centre.

The centre manager and deputy headteacher of Diss Nursery and Infant school provide good leadership and management of the centre overall. There is good support from the executive headteacher of the Diss Nursery, Infant and Junior Schools, family support workers and administrative staff. The recently appointed data analyst is beginning to gather relevant and current local data to inform management decisions about the deployment of staff and services. This work is at a very early stage and, although the local authority has given some general guidance, the data are not sufficiently targeted on the reach area. The children's centre team works well together and with the other professionals working with the centre. For example, the family support workers work very closely with the parent support advisers employed by the cluster schools resulting in outstanding support for the most vulnerable families in the reach area. Users describe staff as 'brilliant!' Centre staff are reflective, and there are good systems in place for evaluating their work and for professional supervision. However, the centre's self-evaluation is not sufficiently focused on the outcomes and impact of the centre's interventions, resulting in the development plan for the centre having too many targets that do not state next steps for development clearly enough. This is partly due to the recent successful commission bid which focused managers' attention on provision rather than outcomes and also because the local authority has not had an annual conversation with the centre since 2009.

Good systems and procedures ensure users are safeguarded and meet statutory requirements. Governance of the centre is satisfactory. Some users of services are on the advisory board. However, they are not fully representative of the different community groups, including those from minority ethnic groups within the reach area. Not all users are aware of the advisory board or what it does, and they do not understand how they can have a voice in the centre's development plans. The school governors and advisory board have not been fully involved in monitoring the centre's activities. Centre staff work hard to develop positive relationships with the wider

community and, as a result, parents from many different backgrounds and ethnic groups meet at children's centre activities. Although aspects of leadership and management remain satisfactory, there are many good aspects. While written evaluations and plans are weak, centre managers articulate a very clear vision and ambition for the next steps in the centre's development. Because of this, and the good outcomes for children including their good behaviour and the outstanding work in ensuring all are kept as safe as possible, the centre has a good capacity to make further improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve self-evaluation by ensuring:
 - key priorities for improvement are derived from a careful analysis and evaluation of current data
 - there is robust monitoring of children's centre services and outcomes by members of the advisory board and school governors
 - all groups of users are represented on the advisory board and have a strong voice in the shaping of services.

- Work with the local authority and health service to ensure that both are fully engaged with the children's centre at a strategic level by:
 - embedding an annual conversation that challenges and supports children's centre development
 - ensuring that health professionals have a clear and consistent understanding of their role in registering all families in the children's centre's reach area.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Children and families are increasingly adopting healthy lifestyles thanks to the positive and supportive interventions of the children's centre. The proportion of mothers who continue breastfeeding their babies is above the county average. Health professionals report that this is having a positive impact on babies' development, especially their good progress from their birth weight. Child obesity levels are low within the reach area. The headteacher of the high school confirms that there have been no incidents of teenage pregnancy this year and says this is directly due to the children's centre support for sex and relationships education including the C-card programme which focuses on preventing conception. The highly effective and much appreciated portage programme ensures that disabled children and those who have special educational needs are rapidly identified and effectively supported.

Children and vulnerable adults are kept outstandingly safe within the reach area. This is because all services work exceptionally well together to identify those in need rapidly and put appropriate support in place. For example, social workers talk about how effectively family support workers take on the role of lead professional within

the Common Assessment Framework and, because of this, families at risk do not need higher level interventions. During the inspection, there was a family crisis and support services responded exceptionally rapidly, as well as sensitively, to meeting the immediate needs of the children. Users say how much they value parenting courses in developing a consistent approach to managing their children's behaviour and this is evident in the good behaviour seen during the inspection.

Adult learning is available at the children's centre and a number of users successfully complete courses in English and mathematics. Their success is celebrated in centre newsletters. Childminders have good access to children's centre activities and also receive training through the centre. This has had a good impact on their performance as evidenced by the improved effectiveness recorded in their inspection reports. Headteachers report that children's centre interventions have a positive impact on developing children's communication, language and literacy skills. This is due to the high emphasis given in all activities to speaking clearly and listening attentively and the manner in which children's centre staff model carefully how to speak clearly. They also say that children's behaviour has noticeably changed for the better thanks to carefully targeted parenting courses. There are good opportunities for users to contribute to course development through informal discussion and end-of-course evaluations and these are carefully analysed. However, the children's centre is occasionally surprised by negative feedback too late in the course to investigate why this is the case or make suggested improvements. The centre's good work with the Polish community has resulted in improved language skills for both adults and children. The centre has successfully gained the confidence of the Gypsy Traveller community who speak enthusiastically about the courses they attend at the centre.

Thanks to the centre's excellent partnership with Jobcentre Plus, users say they receive good advice about additional help with their children at home as well as training, volunteering and job opportunities. There is a good take-up of employment advertised through children's centre newsletters, noticeboards and flyers. For example, one user who started as a volunteer at a 'Stay and Play' group, successfully applied for a job as a play worker and is in the process of completing an early years professional qualification. The start-up grant that the children's centre offers for childminders, combined with the excellent support given by Jobcentre and Child Minding Matters, has resulted in a significant increase in the number of childminders in the reach 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	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal	2

and social development	
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The good outcomes evident for users within the reach area, including for those in most need of support, are due to the good provision made by the centre which also meets the needs of the wider community. A few users expressed concern about the lack of activities in their part of the reach area. However, the centre is attempting to meet this need given the constraints of budget and rural transport. All users appreciate the holiday activities and trips. Some groups are disappointed that they have not been able to meet as often as they would like, and the centre has successfully bid for additional funds to increase provision thus meeting this demand. There is good provision for fathers to meet and take part in activities with their children at the centre. Where possible, they also attend courses during the daytime and did so during the inspection. Users taking courses at the centre, for example the well-attended parenting courses, are highly appreciative of the positive impact they have. The 'Wiggle and Jiggle' and 'Stay and Play' sessions held around the reach area are very popular. They are carefully planned to ensure children and adults learn from well-structured activities and can further develop their children's skills at home. One user was very pleased with the wide range of good-quality toys available, and another said she enjoyed having a set time to enjoy sharing books with her children.

Users receive good care, guidance and support both on visits to the centre and in the home visits made by centre staff. Users, including those who have specific problems such as drug or alcohol abuse, receive expert advice about a whole range of issues to improve the quality of their lives. The children's centre makes good use of advice leaflets which users say they find helpful. These are available at all the outreach venues as well as at the centre.

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 school governing body provides good oversight of the children's centre budget. Inspection evidence indicates that resources are used well and that the centre provides good value for money because the centre's good provision results in good outcomes for users of its services. The advisory board meetings are a good opportunity for professionals to network and discuss how they can work together to give the best possible support for families in most need. However, time is very limited for professional discussion either before or after the formal meeting. The centre coordinator and deputy headteacher have recognised this.

The centre works well with all groups within its reach area celebrating different cultures and promoting equal opportunities for all. For example, good relationships have been built up over time with the Gypsy Traveller community. This has resulted in their good attendance at courses due to their trust in children's centre staff. The centre has supported their integration within the community and this has resulted in improved attendance at local schools because parents value the opportunities their children have to learn basic skills. However, they remain concerned about their children entering high school and the children's centre is aware that this is an area for further development. They recognise that the celebration of Gypsy Traveller history month provides an opportunity to include all schools. Safeguarding processes and procedures are robust and benefit from the support given by the nursery and infant school. Risk assessments for the centre itself and all outreach venues are thorough.

Good partnerships enable the centre to meet its core purpose well. However, there is a lack of strategic support from the local authority and the health service. Some partnerships are outstanding, such as the relationship with social care services. There are two others of particular note. The first is the partnership with Jobcentre, which ensures that all the families in most need are registered at the children's centre. This ensures that all users in workless households or on low incomes receive outstanding guidance on benefits available to them including Home Start. The other outstanding partnership is with Child Minding Matters. The area manager for this charity cites their work with Diss Children's Centre as an exemplar of good practice due to the improvement in the quality of childcare and the increase in the number of childminders. She is also thrilled that the children's centre uses childminder support to enable parents to attend courses at the centre and elsewhere. Representatives from Jobcentre and Child Minding Matters attend the advisory board.

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	2

effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	
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	3

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

The findings of the last inspection report for Diss Nursery and Infant School were taken into consideration when making judgements about the children's centre.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Diss Children's Centre on 28–29 March 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

My colleague and I very much enjoyed our visit to your children's centre and would like to thank all of you who very kindly gave your time to come and speak to us so that we could get a clear picture of how well your centre recognises and caters for your needs.

We enjoyed working with the centre coordinator and deputy headteacher of Diss Nursery and Infant School and think that they provide a good lead for the centre. However, we have found that the centre needs to give more time to writing down what is good about what it does and precisely how it could be improved so that managers can give a clear report to the advisory board and school governors. This would help them to have a better idea of how effective the centre is at meeting your needs. We think they also need to listen even more carefully to what you are saying about the quality of services and that more of you need to be part of the advisory board so your views can be heard.

It is wonderful to see how well professionals from all agencies work together to ensure the best outcomes for everyone. The outstanding collaboration between all those who ensure you are kept safe is highly effective at ensuring you receive help in a sensitive as well as a supportive manner. We were also very impressed with the excellent advice you receive through Jobcentre and the quality of care childminders provide in the area. You told us how useful it is to have specialist health groups located at the centre, for example, the two-year-old checks and baby weigh clinic. However, we were disappointed that midwives and health visitors are not working with the centre as effectively as they could. This is due to lack of clear guidance from managers within the health authority and we have asked the centre to work with the health service to improve this aspect of their work. We think it will help the centre to reach even more people in the area.

You are very fortunate to have good nursery and early years provision across the area and we enjoyed meeting the headteachers of local schools and managers of private nurseries as well as childminders who all told us what good support and advice they receive from the centre. It is particularly good that, through the groups for very young children and the parenting courses, the centre is contributing successfully to closing the gap between those whose circumstances make them vulnerable and other children.

You told us that you like all the courses and groups the children's centre runs and that you would like more of them around the area. We understand this and feel the centre is doing its best given the funds it has and the difficulties with public transport in rural areas. We were pleased to hear that, following the concerns raised by young parents and by the Polish group, the centre is bidding for additional funds to enable these groups to meet more frequently.

The centre ensures that you and your children are very safe and has good procedures to ensure that any concerns are dealt with effectively.

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