

Inspection report for Sure Start Centre, Thorpe Hamlet & Heartsease Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	362587
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Julie Winyard HMI

Centre governance	Norfolk Local Authority
Centre leader	Elisabeth Chapman
Date of previous inspection	n/a
Centre address	63 Wolfe Road
	Norwich,
	NR1 4HT
Telephone number	01603 307680
Fax number	01603 307685
Email address	lchapman@surestartthorpeh.co.uk

Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Starting Out Day Nursery

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.

Published: *October 2010*

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 Additional Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, project workers, health visitors, parents, carers and users of services.

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

Information about the centre

Thorpe Hamlet and Heartsease Children's Centre was a trailblazer Sure Start Programme and was one of the first 60 to set up nationally. In early 2000 it was the first Sure Start Programme in Norwich and one of the first two in Norfolk. It later became the first Children's Centre to be designated in Norfolk. Governance is by Action for Children.

The area was identified as a top 20% most disadvantaged area. It covers a range of areas in the top 10% and 20% nationally for disadvantage. (IMD 2004). The original reach area was the old Thorpe Hamlet political ward and was extended in 2006 to cover the Heartsease area. Following ward boundary changes, the area now covers Crome Ward and parts of Thorpe Hamlet Ward. The Department of Work and Pensions 2007 report noted that there are 615 children living in families receiving workless benefits; 194 of these are aged nought to four. Some areas of Crome ward are in the 20% most disadvantaged nationally in relation to education skills and training (IMD 2007). Because of this a comprehensive adult learning programme is available as part of the children's centre services. This is housed in a separate building and is a unique feature of the provision. Courses are run by the Workers' Education Association and Adult Education.

The ethnic makeup of the area has changed over the last 10 years. For example, in 2000 only 6 families reported English as their second language. By 2010 82% of

children in the area are White British with 18% from minority ethnic groups. A further significant change in the area has been the increase in the birth rate which has risen from 181 new births a year in 2005 to 241 new births in 2009. There is no overall data about levels on entry in the Early Years Foundation Stage because this is not a requirement. The nursery gathers appropriate information from parents about their child's ability, preferences, routines and any fears or anxieties they may have before they start. Practitioners build on this information through regular observations around the six areas of learning and formulate individual learning plans.

The children's centre is the base for a large multi-professional team, which includes health visitors, speech and language therapists, social worker, teacher, project work team, administrative team, crèche and a 40 place day care nursery. Over the last five years the children's centre budget has reduced by 37%, consequently cuts and adjustments to service delivery have been made. The children's centre offers the full core offer.

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 users and the wider community

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Thorpe Hamlet and Heartsease Children's Centre makes outstanding provision for children and their families within the reach area. As a consequence, outcomes for all users are outstanding. Users speak with great passion about how the centre has changed their lives, for example one young parent described in graphic detail how staff had 'turned her life around.' This was echoed by everyone that the inspection team met and is due to excellent multi-professional partnership working and outstanding leadership, management and governance of the centre. All staff based at the centre go out of their way to ensure that every phone call or drop in is managed sensitively. The professional skill and expertise of the well-established team of health, social work, project worker and education professionals ensures that no need is too great, or too small, to be met with some practical action plan. For example, during the inspection a young mother arrived with her children on their first visit. She became very emotional and centre staff managed this extremely well so that she retained her dignity whilst receiving the support she needed.

All users', including children in the day care nursery, health and safety are paramount. The centre was designed in consultation with parents and successfully combines a very welcoming atmosphere with an extremely safe environment. All safeguarding and health and safety requirements are robust and exemplary. Children and adults are encouraged and understand how to live healthy lifestyles, for example through the delicious and nutritious food cooked and served on site. The enjoyment of all activities is palpable and courses are designed to meet the needs of the area. Because of this adults and children make good and sometimes outstanding progress in their learning. For example, in the very popular parenting course Little Angels, where parents welcome being videoed interacting with their children because they learn so much from this about how to manage their children's challenging behaviour. Users are fully involved in the running of the centre and take an active part in shaping services. For example, the Parents Forum has put together a very convincing business case for more nursery places in the reach area which is currently being considered by the local authority. The confidence that both children and adults gain from their contact with professionals at the centre and their good achievement means that they become better able to manage their lives, including their finances thus improving their economic well being.

Provision of every kind at the centre is outstanding. Health Visitors ensure that every family in the reach area, from pre-natal visits, are registered at the centre. Needs are very carefully assessed and contact is developed sensitively to ensure that those requiring services are drawn in. There are weekly team meetings where ongoing needs are reviewed. Achievement is celebrated formally and informally. For example parents recently received certificates to celebrate their success on courses at a special event hosted by Norwich City Football Club with presentations by one of the team. Every adult and child is valued as a unique individual and because of this holistic ethos, learning and development plans of every kind are personalised to the needs of that individual. For example, for children in the day care nursery this has had an outstanding impact on the progress they make. Key workers monitor the progress of their children and interventions are designed so that children of all abilities achieve their best including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Leadership and management of the centre are outstanding because of how the centre manager, supported by the very experienced area manager for Action for Children, ensures that every member of the team is fully committed to meeting the needs of all users. She has been instrumental in driving forward improvement, including managing continuous budget cuts, with great success. This combined with exemplary partnership working at every level, outstanding provision and outcomes for users means that the centre offers excellent value for money and outstanding capacity to make further sustained improvement. Evaluation at every level is outstanding and leads to continuous improvement. However, the formal self-evaluation document is overly cautious and does not give a precise enough or sufficiently well-focussed account of how centre provision impacts on outcomes for users.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that formal written self-evaluation is focussed precisely on how provision impacts on outcomes for users.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Children at the day care nursery have an outstanding understanding of how to live healthily. They have a real love of the outdoors thanks to the continuous access to the outdoor area and regular visits to the nearby woodland. Lunchtime at the day care nursery is a delightful, social time and children help themselves to a range of healthy foods. Young parents are keen to give up smoking and greatly value the smoking cessation courses run by the centre. Parents who have suffered from post-natal depression have found the support they have received from the multi-professional team at the centre to be invaluable. One parent said, 'I used to think I was useless and my children didn't need me. Thanks to the children's centre I know that my children need me!' All children and adults feel extremely safe at the centre. Parents talk with great conviction about the high level of trust they have in all professionals at the centre and have 'no worries' about leaving their children there. They also talk about how well child protection plans and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) are managed and their full confidence in these processes. Children's behaviour at the day care nursery and in all activities organised by the children's centre is outstanding. This is because children enjoy all the activities so much and are fully engaged in taking part. For example at a music session for toddlers and parents centre staff modelled good taking to parents who in turn followed suit. This enabled the children to know how they were expected to behave. They were very enthusiastic and this was balanced by their desire to join in properly.

The impact of the children's centre provision on children and parents' achievement is very strong. It also prepares them extremely well for the future and enables parents to manage their lives more effectively. Over the last three years, 40 parents have returned to full time work thanks to the interventions and support of professionals at the children's centre. Many parents who were completely unmotivated at school find that the Learning Centre facility gives them new hope. One parent said, 'I started by doing lots of short courses and that built up my confidence and now I am at college studying childcare and getting really good grades.' Parents appreciate the wide range of courses available and those who took GCSEs in mathematics and English in 2009 all achieved grades between A* and C. ESOL courses are well attended and parents from minority ethnic groups find these instrumental in improving their own and their children's spoken and written English. Headteachers of infant and junior schools in the reach area talk with great enthusiasm about how the children's centre has impacted on children's results at Key Stages 1 and 2. For example one girl whose attendance had dropped to 52% achieved Level 3 in her Key Stage 1 SATs thanks to the centre's interventions with her family; her attendance improved to 80% and her brother, who achieved Level 5 in all his Key Stage 2 SATs was less stressed and better able to concentrate on his school work. They also talk about how children's

centre interventions break down barriers with families who are suspicious of professional dialogue about their children. 'One parent refused to come through the school gates before the children's centre worked with her and her family. She is now very confident about supporting her children and talking to teachers.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
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 users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	1

How good is the provision?

1

The centre makes outstanding provision for all users serving all groups in the community exceptionally well. Health Visitors contact 100% of families and this ensures excellent knowledge of the centre's services. The Learning Centre provides a focal point for learning at the heart of the community and is very well used for courses. It is very well equipped with enough computers to run effective courses. There is free internet access which is also used by the wider community. For example, one local man has been able to find a job through using the internet at the centre. He commented, 'I would not have been able to find this job without the centre's facilities.' Users' needs are assessed very effectively because of the expertise within the multi-professional team based at the centre and because they know families in the reach area so well. There is very good liaison with local GPs through the health visitors and where staff expertise has been lost due to budget reduction, staff have stepped in to learn new skills so that services can be maintained at a high level. For example, when the clinical psychologist post was not continued one of the project workers trained in child psychotherapy. An example of the effectiveness of this provision was seen during the inspection when a father, taking an ESOL course, was called back to the crèche to see his child. The project worker encouraged the father to stay and play with his child rather than taking the child home, suggesting he comes regularly to a drop in and play session thus enabling his child to get used to centre staff and trust them as his carers, whilst his father is at the course. There is excellent planning of all sessions at the centre. For example, at the Young Parents group where children loved making a wall painting using house painting brushes.

The open plan office where the multi-professional team is based, was designed to aid

the sharing of experience. This has worked extremely well allowing many opportunities for professionals to share their cases informally and seek each others help and advice where needed. Good advice systems have been set up for adults. For example, Job Centre Plus staff, who come regularly to the Learning Centre, report that they get better attendance from users in the centre than they do in their main office.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The children's centre has exemplary procedures for safeguarding including child protection procedures. All required systems, including Criminal Records Bureau checks, take place as required. Intervention happens at the earliest stage and because the multi-professional team work so effectively together this has a huge impact on reducing the need to refer families to external agencies which can delay interventions and put families at further risk. For example, one of the project workers is trained in home visiting education and can deliver these services to local families. Because of the outstanding leadership of the centre manager there are excellent management systems in place enabling leaders and managers at all levels to be highly effective.

Evaluation is embedded in everything the centre undertakes whether it is asking for users' view of courses, making requested adaptations or through the business plan which is under constant review. A great strength of the centre is how flexible staff are in responding rapidly to the changing needs of the community. Occasionally, self-evaluation records do not always lay out totally rigorously how the impact on users is measured. Staff morale is exceptionally high and their drive and motivation is to constantly improve services. They share the same vision and commitment to improve the lives of vulnerable families. The Steering Group is chaired by a parent and she speaks very highly of the support she has received both as a user of services and in her role as chair. 'My confidence has been boosted no end and I have been able to give presentations to groups of 10 and groups of 200 people thanks to the confidence working with the staff has given me! They always listen to users' views and make people feel valued.' Partnership working is outstanding because of close

working relationships both with users and external services including the local authority who greatly value the centres work and have praised their implementation of the CAF.

Communication with users is highly developed and they are very pleased to receive text message reminders of courses and personal phone calls to check everything is okay. Users say there is no discrimination of any kind and everyone is treated the same. One commented, 'When a new person comes to a session and keeps to themselves, after a while someone goes over to them and starts chatting. It doesn't matter where they come from or what colour they are.' The centre has had a very positive impact on developing a real sense of community within the reach area. The parents' café, requested by users when the building was designed, is very well used and parents and carers are very happy to come in and meet their friends. The centre has also succeeded in building resilience amongst users because after working with the centre for a while they develop their own support networks and meet regularly outside the centre as well.

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	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	1

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

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Thorpe Hamlet & Heartsease Children's Centre on 6–7 October 2010. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We were very impressed with the warm welcome everyone receives and with how exceptionally safe everyone, including the nursery children, feel when they are at the centre. 'Trust' was a word we heard many times during the inspection and the extent to which everyone trusts each other is amazing. You are happy to share your problems with the staff because they really care about you and want to help you. Because of this you feel you can trust them totally with your own difficulties and with the lives of your children. It is wonderful to read the case studies and to hear from you how much your lives, and those of your children, have been changed by your contact with the centre. We have found that the reason you can be so confident in the centre is because of how exceptionally well the team of professionals work together to make sure you receive the help you need from the right people. They are also very good at getting extra training so that they can provide more services even when money is short.

There is no doubt at all that the centre is at the heart of the community and has the community at the heart of everything it does. It is great to see so many different training courses are available for you to take and to read about how well you do on the courses. I really enjoyed listening to some of the ESOL course and was very pleased to tell everyone what I had for breakfast in my best English! It is also good to hear about how so many of you feel your confidence has been boosted through your contact with the centre and that you are thinking about getting back into work. We enjoyed meeting the parent volunteers and hearing how they thought this was a great way to get experience of getting back into work routines as well as giving back something to the centre.

We think the leadership and management of the centre is excellent and that the centre manager does everything she can to help people to work together for you. Staff are constantly checking out that all the services they provide are meeting your needs and making sure things are changed quickly if they are not working as well as

they could. We were very impressed with the how hard you work to help the centre through the Parents' Forum and Steering Group.

Thank you all very much for the time you spent talking with us during the inspection. It was good to meet so many of you and to hear your views directly. There is only one point which we think the children's centre can improve on and that is to make sure that what they write down about the work they do gives a really clear picture of exactly how it improves yours and your children's lives.

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