

Inspection report for East Marsh Children's Centre

Local authority	North East Lincolnshire
Inspection number	362469
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Alison Veall HMI

Centre governance	North East Lincolnshire Council
Centre leader	Lisa Gregory
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked School, if applicable	Strand Community School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	First Steps Day Nursery and First Steps with Sure Start

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.

Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Early Year's Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, representatives from professional partnerships, representatives from the advisory board and the local authority, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's policies and self-evaluation form and data provided by the local authority. They also looked at minutes of the parents' forum and East Marsh United, a group of parents committed to fund-raising.

Information about the centre

East Marsh Children's Centre is located in a large, complex ward next to the port of Grimsby. It is housed within a two storey modern building. Attached to the building is First Steps with Sure Start Day Nursery. The centre provides the full core offer, including health services, education and training. It is run directly by the local authority and has its own advisory board. A wide range of services is delivered from Victor Street and its satellite venue in Strand Community School. Services are also delivered at Weelsby and St Mary's schools and Grant Thorold library.

East Marsh is among the 10% most deprived wards in the country. The majority of families using the centre are White British. The remainder are from a wide range of black and minority ethnic groups including Asian, Indian, Polish, Latvian, Tamil and Slovakian. The area is characterised by high levels of unemployment and social deprivation and has a very transient population. Most children enter the children's centre services with skills that are much lower than those expected for their age.

Childcare, crèche and regular stay and play sessions are provided through partnerships with First Steps Day Nursery, the Pre School Learning Alliance and Strand Community School.

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

East Marsh is an extremely successful children's centre that provides an excellent quality of service for all its children and families. The organisation of children's services at local authority level has a significant impact and ensures that families benefit from a wide range of integrated services. East Marsh is exceptionally well led and managed. Parents and staff unequivocally praise the commitment made by the children's centre coordinator. Throughout the inspection the only comments read or received were of a positive nature. Examples include, 'non-judgemental', 'very friendly place', 'without the children's centre help and guidance I would be struggling', 'they give so much help but they also make you aware of choices and consequences'. The centre adapts quickly to changing needs. Despite the transience of the population, highly effective tracking systems ensure that the most vulnerable families stay within the centre's radar.

The centre is attractive and welcoming. Displays of art work by both children and parents decorate the walls within the reception area. This hub of activity houses a wide range of good quality toys and equipment. These are well used by children when their parents and carers come in to attend courses, speak to staff or drop in for help and advice. Administrators play a vital role in supporting the delivery of services. They provide a warm welcome and ensure that all requests are dealt with immediately or logged for future action. A room leading off the reception area has a 'warm' telephone where confidential calls can be made free of charge and information and communication technology equipment to support job seekers. Washing and drying facilities are made available for use by parents and carers as centre staff recognise the difficulties faced by many low-income users in affording this day-to-day task. East Marsh's highly inclusive approach means that many of its activities are oversubscribed and occasionally names have to be included on a

waiting list. Equality is promoted sensitively and a very effective and robust approach is taken to challenge any form of discrimination at a community and multi-agency level. In this area of high unemployment, outstanding attention is paid to training and development within the centre. Users access a wide range of courses including GCSE mathematics and English; English for speakers of other languages; Level 1 and 2 literacy and numeracy, and a high number achieve qualifications. As a result of this, some parents and carers go on to gain paid employment and are improving their economic well-being. However, the numbers doing so are not yet significant.

Excellent relationships with health professionals ensure that new and prospective parents benefit greatly from onsite pre- and post-natal midwifery and health visiting services. Families arriving at times of crisis benefit from the children's centre staff's wide knowledge and contact base and are signposted to services which will support them within a very short space of time. Children and families make at least good, but most often outstanding, progress in their development of skills for life. In the case of families facing the most challenging of circumstances this is from a very low starting point. Healthy lifestyles are developing exceptionally well as a result of the consistent advice, support for the parents' allotment and the wide range of high quality courses aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles. Parents attending the Let's Start Eating and Balance Your Lifestyle courses were extremely confident that the advice they had been given had enabled them to have a much better understanding of eating healthily and ensuring their children do so as well.

Safety awareness is well promoted, with parents and carers developing a better understanding of how to keep their children safe and well. The centre runs many successful courses including the Family Links Nurturing course which is attended by both males and females. However, as the numbers of children in need, child protection rates and accidents within the home are much higher in the ward than elsewhere in North East Lincolnshire, this is an area that requires further development. Children's centre staff are well aware of this. Safeguarding arrangements within the centre are outstanding. An integrated approach and excellent knowledge of the Care Pathway scheme and the Common Assessment Framework ensure that services are exceptionally well targeted. Concerns are dealt with very effectively and referred to the relevant agencies without delay.

The centre demonstrates an excellent capacity for sustained improvement. Secure outcomes are obtained as a result of the leadership constantly monitoring the impact of services and identifying how they can be improved. This is commendable. The centre actively seeks and welcomes the views of users and the wider community. Children are imaginatively involved in evaluation and the centre meaningfully involves parents and carers in shaping the services of the future through the very effective parents' forum. The local authority supports the centre in evaluating its services through a wide range of data and robust challenge. The senior management team and the partner group, both made up of a range of external partners, further ensure a cohesive and community approach to evaluation and challenge.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that adult learning opportunities support increased numbers of parents and carers into paid employment and improved economic stability.
- Further develop parents' and carers' understanding of safety within the home.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

The children's centre is an extremely safe and secure environment where children's well-being is given the utmost priority. Staff successfully build secure relationships with children, parents and carers. A highly effective multi-agency 'team around the child' approach ensures that those subject to a child protection plan or Common Assessment Framework process are extremely well supported. Children, parents and carers are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and reduce risk. Parents talk positively about how the ongoing support and information from the centre, such as the Family Links Nurturing course, have helped them to think about child safety. They also express their appreciation of the time taken to explain issues during the training session on hazards within the home. Family resource staff and parental engagement workers provide excellent support to those who have been subject to domestic violence and abuse. The centre works well with agencies to resolve situations and to protect children as well as parents.

Parents who have accessed baby massage, baby yoga, adult keep fit classes and the Balance your Lifestyle course comment upon the positive impact this has had on their health and that of their children. The provision of breastfeeding resources and a support midwife have increased breastfeeding rates among users of the centre. Established mothers also help the centre in providing support to new and prospective parents at the Bosom Buddies breastfeeding group. Those attending the Let's Start Eating group learn about the healthy, as well as financial, benefits of making their own baby weaning foods and the appropriate time to begin weaning. The support given by the centre to the parents' wish to set up an allotment has resulted in a wide range of home grown produce being available.

Through an extremely extensive range of supported play and development opportunities, parents and carers are learning how to support their children's learning and development actively at home. High quality procedures to support children's transition into and out of other childcare and education provision mean that all settings are fully informed of children's development and individual needs, ensuring that they benefit from seamless provision. Children make outstanding progress from their very low starting points in developing the skills that will help them in the future. Staff at Strand community school comment that they are able to see how children who have been involved with the children's centre and its commissioned services now arrive at the school in a good position to learn.

Parents and carers undertake a wide range of courses including basic skills and GCSEs in English and mathematics. There is clear evidence that family learning is improving outcomes for parents and carers and for some is leading to paid employment and the setting up of new businesses. Centre users are actively encouraged to participate in the decision making of the centre. Their feedback on a range of issues and their satisfaction in the services provided are meaningful and regularly used to shape services.

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	2
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	2

How good is the provision?

1

The delivery of exceptionally high quality, holistic provision is made easier by the centre's knowledge and understanding of the community it serves. It demonstrates an absolute commitment to improving the life chances of children, parents and carers. The centre and parents have received local and national acclaim for their production of the Baby Weaning Guide and the Family Recipe Book. The children's centre coordinator is very proactive in her approach to community and national organisations, seeking additional funding in order to enhance the provision. On the one hand, the building is well equipped to put on family learning courses and activities for parents and carers and crèches for children. On the other hand, these have outgrown its capacity as a significant number of the centre activities are oversubscribed. However, excellent relationships within the community mean that some services are now delivered imaginatively and very effectively on other sites. This ensures there is a very good balance of universal and targeted services to meet the needs of the community.

The exceptional effectiveness of the centre's approach to care, guidance and support is clearly demonstrated in users' high uptake of its services. Parents and carers comment that the centre has made a big difference to their lives, explaining, for example, that, 'I have learnt how to be positive with my children', 'I feel respected

and cared about', and 'The centre helps us to celebrate our achievements and to feel proud'. Home visits by the parental engagement and family resource workers along with the play development worker and training coordinator very successfully engage families. They appropriately identify need, provide ongoing support and refer to other services. They are also very successful in tracking and monitoring families who move around the community and often place themselves in greater need of services. Strong relationships enable families to approach the centre with confidence, particularly during times of crisis.

All children who access the centre are tracked from their initial starting points so that their progress can be measured. Information is collated and used to provide a comprehensive report for whichever service the child moves onto. Strong commitment and highly effective partnership work are improving children's communication, language and literacy, social and emotional, and creative development. Staff see this as crucial to improving educational outcomes and narrowing the gap between those who achieve and those who do not. Parents and carers are given consistent messages and encouraged to support their children through regular play and stay sessions, by borrowing books from the centre library and by attending story and rhyme times at the local library. Commissioned services such as those from speech and language therapists and First Steps Day Nursery are fundamental to the progress children make.

Through excellent commissioning of services such as Barnardos and the Teen Pregnancy team the centre is working extremely hard to provide services to those who are generally hard to reach. Staff are also able to provide targeted support for parents and children with disabilities. Families within the black and minority ethnic community are also supported through bilingual workers and a wide range of translated materials. The training coordinator, ably supported by other staff within the centre, refuses to allow users to become disillusioned or to lose their commitment to training and development. The staff are resolute in their commitment to ensuring that as many parents and carers as possible access a wide range of courses, thereby increasing their chances of paid employment and suitable volunteering opportunities.

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

Senior managers at a strategic level demonstrate vision and an excellent commitment to the success of this children's centre. This, coupled with the imagination and sheer determination of the centre's coordinator and other senior managers, is providing excellent outcomes for users. Governance and accountability arrangements are understood by all. The local authority provides a wide range of data giving information on the centre's priorities and how well it is reaching them. This is used by the centre and its advisory board to plan and evaluate the delivery and impact of its services. During its annual conversation with the centre coordinator the local authority uses the data to challenge and support her in the development of the priorities for the following year. The centre and its partners use their critical reflection and evaluation exceptionally well to set meaningful targets for improvement in order to narrow the gap for the most disadvantaged.

The centre coordinator generates enthusiasm among her staff and centre partners. The whole staff team are unequivocal in praising the support they receive. They consider staff supervision to be of an exceptionally high quality. They are confident that they are respected and their own health, well-being and development are given very high priority. As a result of this, every member of the staff team believes that they play an important part in the children's centre and its delivery of a wide range of outstanding services. Their enthusiasm, commitment and dedication are obvious.

The inclusion of all families and children is exemplary and fully promoted in all aspects of the centre's provision to ensure that their diverse needs are supported with equal concern. One parent said that, 'The centre works with me and not against me, my life is improving and so is my children's.' Representatives spoken with from a range of agencies all consider that the children's centre makes an exceptional commitment to partnership working and to improving the life chances of children and families within the area. Senior leaders are highly effective in ensuring children and families are safe. Partly, this is through rigorous attention to child protection, vetting and recruitment procedures. Partly, it is through the sensitive approach to ethnic, cultural and religious differences.

The centre coordinator is determined to ensure the children's centre is sustainable. Resources are used and managed extremely efficiently, effectively and creatively to meet the needs of users and the wider community. The centre provides excellent value for money.

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

The inspectors looked at the inspection outcomes for the pre-school providers and schools with Early Years Foundation Stage children within the centre's reach area.

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

As many of you know, we inspected East Marsh Children's Centre on the 20 and 21 October 2010. As part of the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation and talked with a range of children and adults including: parents, carers, staff, and representatives from the community and partner agencies. The information given and the stories shared with us enabled us to judge that the centre is outstanding overall. To make sure that it stays this way, we have asked the staff to continue to help and support you in ensuring your children's safety and to continue to support you in your search for employment so that more of you can improve your economic well-being and independence.

You told us how your children's centre has supported you to set and achieve your own goals, and how you now have more self-esteem and confidence. It was evident that you are very proud of your achievements. Many of you talked about your involvement with the centre. You told us how it has become easier to ask for help and support as a result of the friendly welcome and good quality relationships that you develop. You also told us about the friends you have met as a result of your involvement in the centre's activities and outings. It was evident during the inspection that you feel welcome at the children's centre because so many of you were in and out of the building. It was reassuring that you were able to talk openly during the many activities and meetings when inspectors were present. Many of you who start by making contact with the centre become more involved than you expect to. We saw that for some of you, your contact with the centre has led you to develop new skills, go on to further training, gain qualifications volunteering and to find work. Some of you have also set up new businesses. Many of you said how this is improving your lives, and how much you appreciate the support and encouragement staff give you.

We recognise the excellent leadership and management that make the centre so successful. Within its leadership you have a dedicated senior management team with a considerable range of experience and expertise. The staff put their hearts into the work of the centre and, supported by the strong leadership of the centre coordinator, they provide you with a range of high quality services that are tailored to meet your individual needs. No wonder you trust them and use their expertise to support you when you need help. They use their links and influence to call on professionals from health, education, voluntary organisations and social care to make sure you get the best service. The local authority rigorously checks how well the centre is working.

We were impressed by how sensitive the centre is to the different needs and cultures of the different communities living within East Marsh. The centre works well for everyone in the wider community, irrespective of their origins and background, and in doing so it contributes very strongly to community harmony and cohesion.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you, sharing your stories and learning alongside you. We wish you every success in the future.

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