

Inspection report for Vancouver Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	365868
Inspection dates	16–17 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Smith HMI

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Eve Harris
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Fairstead Community Centre
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Gaywood First Steps 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.

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 representatives of the centre's management group, the local authority, the management committee, partnership agencies, members of staff and users of the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre.

Information about the centre

Vancouver Children's Centre is a Phase 1 Sure Start Children's Centre that has developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. It was designated in April 2006. It is operated and governed by the charitable organisation Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. It is co-located on two sites and provides the full core offer. The main building is placed centrally in the Fairstead estate in part of the community centre. The other site is Gaywood First Steps Nursery.

The reach area has high levels of lone parents, teenage pregnancies and children in families' dependant on very low incomes or workless benefits. The main issues affecting the area are poor social housing with higher than average overcrowding issues. Children's levels on entry to early years provision is lower than expected for their age particularly with regard to communication, language and literacy.

Although the area has traditionally comprised of mainly White British families, this has been changing over the last three years and there is also a diverse range of minority ethnic groups. Families from Asian, Eastern and Western Europeans and Chinese have moved into the area. The percentage of families where English is not the first language is increasing.

The centre's full day-care provision is delivered by Gaywood First Steps Nursery. The nursery has separate inspection arrangements to the children's centre and was last inspected in July 2006. The inspection report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. The centre premises are used to provide a range of activities including meetings, consultations and community activities.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Vancouver Children's Centre offers good support to families and young children. Its atmosphere is warm, welcoming and calm, but it has a buzz of purposeful activity. Users, parents and carers appreciate the work of the centre fully. It is highly regarded and is increasingly playing a central role within the community. Many parents told inspectors that the centre staff were 'always there when they need them'.

Information from case studies shows that families, especially in times of difficulty, have received good support from a wide range of services within, or coordinated by, the centre. The good leadership and management and the re-location of the health visiting team into the centre has resulted in the number of users accessing the centre increasing rapidly over the past two years.

Staff have a thorough knowledge of the community and some have been established in the locality for many years. The emphasis the centre places on reaching out to the community and forming positive relationships with all users and services is crucial to its success. Staff demonstrate significant skills and invest considerable time in gradually building the trust of children, parents and carers and the community. This provides a safe base for them to feel confident to share their problems and ask for help, often in times of crisis. Supporting children and their families during times of change and transition to ensure continuity, engagement and progress is a significant strength of the centre.

Parenting courses and a range of provision to enhance family relationships and

children's play and communication skills from birth have high levels of attendance. The centre has been pro-active in its response to data which indicated that communication skills are particularly low for children in the Kings Lynn area. Speech and language therapists are based at the centre who offer effective support for children, often within the home environment. They also provide training for childcare workers to develop their skills in promoting communication skills with children. The centre has been very proactive in promoting the 'Two-year-old pilot scheme' which has resulted in a high level of younger children attending childcare. Data supplied by the local authority indicates that a significant number of children who attended the early years services achieved levels above the national average, especially in personal, social and emotional, and communication, language and literacy by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Staff are enthusiastic and work well as a team. They are involved in the self-evaluation process that leads to the setting of future targets. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve further is good. The centre has begun to track the longer-term impact for its users, for example, by tracking the Foundation Stage Profile scores for those children who access services at the centre. They are not yet systematically using available data to analyse and track the impact services provided are having for all users.

The centre advertises the full range of services. Attractive leaflets are displayed at each locality building and through its own website. Staff can point to several examples of how individual families have been supported across the full range of provision. However, there is lack of a strategic approach to providing employability and adult education services and only limited evidence was seen of language courses for those who speak little or no English. Evidence to prove the centre's impact on reducing unemployment or increasing involvement in training and education for all families in the locality is thin.

Safeguarding is given a high priority, with effective and rigorous policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety and health of all users, staff and services. Staff are confident to follow these procedures and skilled in identifying any issues, swiftly referring users to other agencies where necessary.

There are good systems in place for gathering the views of users, and many positive changes are brought about as a result of users' suggestions. This promotes a very inclusive service which places equal value on everyone's contribution.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve self-evaluation by focusing more rigorously on the impact of the centre's work in increasing outcomes for children, adults and families over time.

- Strengthen links with Jobcentre Plus and adult education providers to improve the economic well-being of users.
- Improve the system for collecting data with regard to adults who successfully gain or undertake further training and employment.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre offers a good range of child and family services which promote children's, parents' and carers' emotional well-being, physical health and understanding of how to adopt healthy lifestyles. Staff provide strong role models that successfully support children's positive behaviour, and a culture of respect is evident throughout the centre.

The centre staff are knowledgeable about the range of services and provision in the area. There are strong links with an extensive range of other agencies, and the links with health visiting team, speech and language therapists and midwives colleagues are a particular strength. Staff are easily able to seek advice and guidance from health professionals due to their accessibility in the same building. This enables effective sharing and gathering of information. In addition, the health team and speech and language therapists are able to be present at activities that the centre staff offer to promote specific support relating to their particular expertise and to allow users to begin to build a trusting relationship with them.

Parents' understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle for their whole family is developing well. They participate in activities that promote cooking healthy foods such as 'The Joy of Food'. Children learn about food that is good for them as they eat healthy snacks during activities and in the early years settings. Adult access increased opportunities for exercise through group activities such as netball and running and walking groups. Centre staff and partner agencies are exploring ways to support the uptake of breastfeeding as numbers remain low.

Children and families say that they feel safe at the centre. Users are supported well to recognise their own skills and build confidence in parenting and developing safety for their children at home and outdoors. Staff and partners effectively engage and support families with a range of issues such as behaviour management and worries about parenting skills. Children with child protection plans are well supported and families are helped to understand how to keep their children safe. The centre is able to signpost parents and carers to other agencies who support those suffering from domestic violence.

Parents speak highly about the courses available to them. They access a range of learning opportunities to enhance family life such as The Solihull approach – 'Understanding your child's behaviour', 'Speakeasy' and 'Do something different'. They report that they feel less isolated, have more confidence and make new friends because they are emotionally and socially well supported. As one parent put it:

'Coming to groups has helped me make friends which improve my social life as I meet them outside of the centre. This has given me a support network when the centre is closed.'

Users have a range of ways to make a positive contribution to the work of the centre, including being part of the parents' forum and through the advisory board. The use of volunteers within the centre is a good example of the staff's commitment to developing users' confidence and supporting them to move into further training, education or employment. However, the lack of basic language, numeracy and computer skills are a potentially significant barrier in preventing families from gaining economic stability. The centre provides opportunities to teenage parents to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, but this is not extended to other users. The centre does not provide enough opportunities for families to gain these skills. Staff signpost users to specific classes. However they do not monitor how many users have been referred and whether or not they partake on a course.

Children enjoy attending the centre and benefit from the good range of activities available such as 'Tiny Tots', 'Sandwich/Soup and Scroll', 'Up 2 Ones', 'Stay and Play' and 'Kraty Kidz' which make a good contribution to children's development in their early years. They play cooperatively with one another and build positive relationships with each other and with centre staff. Staff set clear expectations of the children in order to keep them safe, for example, by encouraging them to sit down to eat fruit. An increasing number of children are achieving 78 or more points on the Early Years Foundation Stage profile and six or more points in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development. The good early years' provision means that children are well prepared when they move to school or other early years' settings.

Teenage parents are provided with very good support through the 'Bumps 2 Babies' and 'Beyond the Bump' programme. This enables them to develop their life skills as well as well prepare them for parenthood.

Users' levels of confidence and self-esteem are significantly raised through the support provided by staff and opportunities that the children's centre opens up for them. They report that their contact with the children's centre has raised their expectations and aspirations. For example, 'I want the best for my children', was a comment made by one user and reflects the views of many.

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	2
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	2

their personal and social development	
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
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?

2

All provision is of good quality and helping to improve the outcomes for children, parents and carers who come to the centre. A good range of services and activities are delivered by the centre or on their behalf, to ensure there is a good balance of universal and targeted services provided to meet the needs of the community. In their feedback to the inspectors, parents and carers are clear that provision is making a real difference to their lives.

A range of case-study evidence demonstrates how the centre has supported many families facing a range of issues. Staff often play a leading role in implementing the Common Assessment Framework with good interaction with other agencies. Such accurate assessment enables the centre to provide appropriate services and support, particularly for those with the greatest need. Centre staff are sensitive to the needs of families and family support workers often go the extra mile to support parents in times of crisis.

Assessment is used effectively to record children's progress and to inform teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. These strengths mean that the centre very effectively promotes the learning and personal development of children. Parents also talk highly about the positive impact of the play sessions on their own learning and enjoyment. Several targeted sessions are run at centre locations to help parents and carers develop their skills in supporting the emotional, social and educational development of their children. Good-quality resources and equipment are available at these events.

The health-visiting team, midwives and family support team have been instrumental in the drive to increase the number of families, including some harder to reach families, registered with the children's centre. The fully inclusive approach and very welcoming environment ensure that once users are registered with the centre, they go on to engage with many different services.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. The centre's involvement in the local community has increased considerably in the last two years and staff are engaging with a significant number of families in the reach area. Centre staff and outreach workers develop good relationships with users. They use their good knowledge of the needs of the community and their influence to encourage service users to engage with a range of professionals in order to improve their life chances. Many families are offered continuing long-term support in order that they are able to

make permanent, positive changes to their lives.

Staff constantly seek ways to identify the needs of specific groups and to tailor activities accordingly; for example, by recruiting a family support worker to lead on supporting dad's and by introducing the group 'Tiddlywinks' to provide support to children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their parents, and by introducing a group for Russian speaking mothers. This ensures specific support is available to those users who need it the most.

There are many good examples of quality outreach work, including events in the local schools and other community locations. Working with families in their home is an established strategy which is appropriately and effectively used by many of the staff linked to the centre. The specialised midwife team have an assertive approach to outreach work with women in the community who are made vulnerable by their circumstances to ensure that receive the services and support they require.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The leadership of the centre is good. The centre manager is highly respected by professionals and parents. The centre uses its resources very well and there are clear examples of activities being adapted or developed in response to parents' requests and needs.

Governance arrangements are well established and the lines of accountability are clear to ensure good value for money. The advisory board is chaired by a parent and has an appropriate representation from professionals working in the area. Members of the advisory board receive reports on a regular basis to raise their awareness of the centre's work and developments. They are developing a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development.

The centre manager has high expectations of the staff team and service partners. Together, they demonstrate genuine commitment, dedication and determination to improving outcomes for all children and their families. Relationships are good and staff are enthusiastic and positive about the work they do. They are proud of the impact they have on the lives of the children and families who attend.

The centre is using innovative ways to develop its services, such as involvement in the pilot project for the 'Do something different' programme. This enables users to take control and make life chances that they may have been promising themselves to do for a long time become a reality. It is also involved in a research project undertaken by Kings College London to explore the role of children's centres operated by Action for Children in the outcomes for children and families through local service systems.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. Child protection arrangements work effectively and ensure children are kept safe. Risk assessments are rigorous and monitored to a good standard. The centre has a nominated officer for safeguarding and the vetting of staff is secure and training is up-to-date. Recruitment procedures fully comply with requirements. All appropriate policies and procedures are in place and up-to-date. Staff understand their duty to safeguard every child and are effective in ensuring their ongoing safety, emotional health and well-being. Effective procedures and protocols for sharing information, together with strong partnership working, ensure that children and families at risk and in need are prioritised for support.

The centre is collecting a wide range of data and this is developing. This data is analysed effectively. However, on occasions this analysis is limited as many reports cannot be populated by the software currently being used. This inhibits the managers' ability to carry out systematic reviews of impact and use this information to support the self-evaluation of the centre. Despite this, gaps in service are identified and ambitious targets are in place to drive further improvement.

The views of users are sought regularly through, for example, evaluations from those who have attended courses. The parents' forum provides an effective link between users of the centre and the advisory group. The centre has a strong commitment to providing an inclusive environment and removing barriers to learning.

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	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
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	2

adults	
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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	2

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 Vancouver Children's Centre on 16 and 17 February 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Staff place the utmost importance on you and your families and always provide a listening ear for you. They are passionate about creating a welcoming environment where you feel at home and are able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you told us that you value the centre, which means you have no hesitation in using the services regularly. You are actively encouraged to contribute your views and your feedback is used constantly to develop the services provided to ensure they reflect any changes in your needs.

The centre offers a good range of services and activities for all families in the area, which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals. All centre staff are good at guiding you and referring you and your children to other activities and services they think you would also benefit from and enjoy.

You told us over and over again that coming to the centre had increased your confidence and self-esteem and removed the feeling of isolation. This is because centre staff and professionals from different agencies work closely with you and with

each other to find out exactly what help and support you and your family need and they make sure that this is provided.

Many of you stated that you had made many friends though attending the centre and this provided you with support when the centre was closed.

You told us that you think that the centre is a safe place for parents and your children. The centre is also very good at helping children in need to be safe by working well with other agencies such as the health service and social care professionals. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy by promoting healthy eating.

The centre encourages you to engage in play with your children from a very early age at sessions such as 'Up 2 Ones' and 'Stay and Play'. The speech therapists are helping you to support your children's communication skills at home.

Several of you have become volunteers at the centre and some of you now have the confidence to do this and you have developed skills which have enabled you to lead groups.

We have asked the centre to strengthen links with Jobcentre Plus and adult education providers so that it can provide further support to you to gain qualifications and employment. We have also asked the centre to improve further the system for collecting data with regard to adults who successfully gain or undertake further training and employment. We have asked the staff to focus more rigorously on the impact of the centre's work in improving outcomes for children, adults and families over time. The leadership team has appropriate plans in place to address these issues.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honesty and openness helped us immensely during the inspection. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future.

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