

Inspection report for Greenstead and Wivenhoe Children's Centre

Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	366079
Inspection dates	23–24 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Julie Winyard HMI

Centre governance	Ormiston Children and Families Trust
Centre leader	Audrey Haggis
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Nanna's Neighbourhood 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 senior practitioners, users of centre services, the centre manager, the area manager for the Ormiston Trust, health professionals, social care professionals, a representative from the local authority, headteachers of local schools, members of the partnership and advisory boards.

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

Information about the centre

The Greenstead and Wivenhoe Children's Centre is a phase one centre which provides the full core offer. It is one of seven centres in Colchester managed by the Ormiston Children's and Families Trust on behalf of Essex County Council. The Ormiston area manager is a member of the Children's Trust Board. There is a strategic management board for Colchester and Tendring children's centres. Greenstead & Wivenhoe Children's Centre has a joint advisory board with St Anne's and Castle Children's Centre. Both boards have a varied membership including health, education, early years, voluntary sector, National Child Minder's Association, Youth Enquiry Service, social care, Jobcentre Plus, local councillors and phase three children's centre representation.

The Greenstead estate is an area with the highest level of disadvantage in Colchester and placed in the top 10% in the country. The area originally had only social housing, but as the population has expanded, so has the incidence of private housing. The majority of families are of White British origin. The minority ethnic population is increasing due to the close proximity of the University of Essex and an influx of Eastern Europeans into the Colchester area. The children's centre area includes the wards of St Andrews, Wivenhoe Cross and Wivenhoe Quay. Essex rate the six super output areas in St Andrews ward between the highest disadvantage

level of 2% to 25% with four rated in the top 10%. There are high levels of unemployment with 350 children living in workless households. Figures show that 325 families are receiving benefits. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with attainment well below that expected for their age. The Wivenhoe areas are less disadvantaged but there are few services for young families. The centre is supported by a community based early years teacher.

Services are delivered at the Greenstead centre, health clinics in Greenstead and Wivenhoe, the designated nursery setting at Nanna's Neighbourhood Nursery, and Scout and Guide hall in Wivenhoe. There are four primary schools in the children's centre area. Other agencies use the Greenstead centre to run groups and activities. Social care professional use rooms to accommodate contact visits; Jobcentre Plus hold interviews with local people seeking work; counselling appointments are held and courses are run in conjunction with partner agencies. The children's centre is a ten-minute bus ride from the town centre with a stop outside the centre building. Family support is offered in family's homes in the local community.

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

The Greenstead and Wivenhoe Children's Centre is a good children's centre whose provision enables all users to achieve good outcomes in most areas of their lives. Users say the centre and its staff are very welcoming and that they feel safe and relaxed coming to the centre. Both targeted and open access courses and activities are well attended and most users complete set programmes. Having attended with their first child, many users return to activities like breastfeeding support and courses like 'All About Ones' with subsequent children because they value the good support and advice they receive from senior practitioners and other professionals who work in partnership with them. However, some users expressed concern that not all courses are inclusive. This is because childcare is not available for older siblings which means that users cannot attend some of the groups. Lone parents say they feel the centre does not cater for their needs effectively. These issues have been raised with practitioners. However, there is no formal forum for users to express their views and no user representation on the advisory or partnership boards. Thus,

whilst there is no unlawful discrimination and all users say they feel valued and supported, because there is no substantive means by which users can make known their wishes, equality and diversity are currently only satisfactory.

The children's centre has good partnerships and it works effectively with many different agencies and third sector organisations. There is an outstanding partnership with social care professionals who have great respect and praise for the work of senior practitioners in supporting families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. For example, the lead social worker explained that he has complete confidence in passing cases to the children's centre manager to allocate to her team and is extremely impressed with the outcomes for these families. The success of this partnership is due to the detailed protocol developed between social care and the children's centre, supported by the Ormiston Trust. The children's centre manager is also very skilled at matching the practitioner to the family and takes careful account of the specific needs of the family as well as the expertise and personality of the senior practitioner. The success of these interventions is evident in the good progress families have made in coming through times of crisis. Many go on to attend services at the children's centre thanks to their improved confidence and self esteem.

There are good relationships with most health professionals who work with the centre and there is an agreement that health visitors and midwives will pass information to families they visit about centre services. However, users report that these contacts are not successful and often they hear about the centre from other sources. Some health professionals do not have a clear understanding of what the centre can offer and say they do not have time, for example, to register families and pass contact cards back to the centre. There is no consistent information coming to the centre about women who need support in giving up smoking during pregnancy or how many breastfeed their babies beyond six weeks. There is no consistent representation from a senior health professional on the partnership board which has the strategic overview for all children's centres in this area of the local authority. Inspection evidence indicates that there is a lack of consistency of approach and understanding of the children's centre's purpose and core offer and that this has an impact on the success of the partnership particularly at grass roots level.

There is no day-care or nursery provision at the children's centre. This is offered in partnership with an outstanding nursery close to the centre, Nanna's Neighbourhood Nursery. The children's centre fund a community early years teacher who works very successfully with the Nursery and with local primary schools. For example, the work on the 'Forest Schools' initiative has contributed to the outstanding personal development, communication skills and behaviour of children in the Nursery and has been adopted by the nearby primary school. It has been implemented through their Early Years Foundation Stage. The children's centre teacher works in partnership with the primary school's parent support worker in running well attended parenting courses. The headteacher reports that these are making a significant contribution to improving behaviour of young children and their older siblings at the school.

There is good leadership and management of the centre by the centre manager with

good support from the Ormiston Trust area manager. The team of well-trained senior practitioners make good relationships with users at all courses and activities, and users describe them as 'brilliant!' Centre staff are very reflective and there are good systems in place for evaluating their work and for professional supervision.

There are good systems and procedures in place to ensure users are safeguarded. These fully comply with requirements. The centre knows its strengths and weaknesses and the actions to take to improve services further. However, improvement planning is not clear or incisive enough and the new Chair of the advisory board and centre manager have recognised that this is an area for improvement. The data about the reach area provided to the centre from the Ormiston Trust data manager is excellent and continuing to improve. Essential information is extracted from the primary care trust and the centre is now able to pinpoint most families with 0-5 year olds. It is currently in the process of refining the data further so that the centre knows which families are accessing which services at which children's centre in the area. It is envisaged that this will enable even more efficient targeting of services. Governance of the centre is good and the advisory board has become more proactive since the new chair was appointed. The governing body now makes regular visits to groups and activities as do members of the partnership board. Because of the good leadership, good management and governance of the centre, the high uptake of courses and good outcomes for users, the centre has a good capacity to make further improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure consistency in the partnership with all health professionals at grass-roots level as a matter of urgency.
- Extend the ways in which users can share their views so that all have a voice in the development of services to meet their specific needs.
- Ensure all improvement plans have precise targets that are time limited, measurable and sharply focussed on improving outcomes for users.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

There are good health outcomes for users who access the children's centre services. Users are very pleased with the support they receive from the speech and language therapist and say that courses such as, 'Ready Steady Talk' has helped them identify better ways to communicate with their babies and young children. The lunch club has been instrumental in moving users away from jars of baby food. For example, one user said that she is much more confident at cooking for her baby: 'I feel this is healthier for my family. We get to cook the same as is in the jar from scratch and we got to taste both. I was really surprised that I liked the cooked from scratch best.' Another said, 'It's half term this week and I've cooked every day.' All users enjoy coming to breastfeeding support group and say 'I wouldn't still be breastfeeding if it

wasn't for this group.' Immunisation clinics are held at the centre and all children who come are immunised. This is beginning to have an impact on the low uptake of vaccination in the area due to parents' concerns about side effects. This is because they feel more at ease in a non-clinical environment and can talk to other parents about their concerns. The children's centre referrals to the Children and Adolescence Mental Health Services are timely and effective. Because younger children are identified early, this can also lead to older siblings being referred. The 'Wriggle and Jiggle' group encourages users and their children to be active and many say they now continue active play at home and in the park. The good support for teenage parents has enabled those in need to receive counselling.

The safety of users is paramount at the centre. This is evident in how confident users are to let their children play in the attractive outside area or on the play mats provided or take their first unaided steps in the family room during a drop-in session. Children's behaviour at the centre and at centre activities is excellent. For example, users were keen for their two- and three-year-olds to take part in 'Forest Schools' activities and were amazed when their very young children responded without question to the teacher's red flag boundary system in the wooded area they were exploring. Children with child protection plans are carefully monitored, and users find the centre a warm and friendly environment for supervised contact visits. Women who have suffered domestic violence find the women's group a great support. Their improved confidence and self-esteem is evidenced by their willingness to act as mentors for the next group of women on the course. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used effectively where the centre is the lead professional. Other agencies say how well the centre contributes to the Team Around the Child (TAC) groups where they are not leading the CAF.

Children make good progress in all the areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage at the nursery and in groups at the centre. The centre signposts adult learners to courses but does not follow this through to see how successful learners have been or invite them back to talk to other users about how they managed their learning. Parenting courses run at the centre are well-attended and users appreciate the celebration on the last session of the course and the certificates they receive. The centre has some strategies to enable users to give feedback on activities and courses, for example, the 'Parents Have Your Say'. The centre then highlights parents' feedback and what has been done to improve services in the newsletter and on the centre notice board. Most users are confident to access services at the centre. Those who attend enjoy activities and there are excellent relationships between users and senior practitioners. This has an impact on users' ability to relate to other professionals their families work with. For example, one user became more open to advice and engaged with professionals because of the excellent support she had received from a senior practitioner.

Children are developing outstanding skills for the future through the day-care provision. The Youth Enquiry Service has supported four teenage users to do a Level 1 course in parenting and money management. Senior practitioners are trained to give welfare and benefits advice and this expertise has ensured that one teenage

user knew whether or not she would be better off if she went to work. The Jobcentre Plus adviser has supported three users to return to work and one user back into education. Some users feel there are insufficient opportunities for adult learning at the centre. Nevertheless, there are case study examples which illustrate users who have gained qualifications and are now working. For example, one user who attended the women's group learnt how to make jewellery and is now supplying a shop run by a co-operative in the town centre.

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 their personal and social development	2
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

The children's centre has good systems in place and works effectively with other agencies to ensure that users' needs are assessed and appropriate action is taken to meet those needs. For example referrals are made from health, social care, homestart, schools, the Youth Enquiry Service, from other children's centres and very occasionally from local doctors. Users are also able to self-refer. Following the referral, the children's centre manager contacts the lead agency and provision is made in consultation with them and with the user concerned. The designated senior practitioner makes contact with the family and then develops a programme of support based on the recommendations given to her. A consent form is always signed at the time of the referral. Case study examples also support good inter-agency working in referrals made. Where a family has children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, local specialist agencies are called in to give support. The need for specific groups and activities is currently assessed through informal discussion with users and courses like child development and learning to play with children have been put on as a result of this. There are isolated examples of where the centre has helped adults to improve their learning in particular through parenting courses and other targeted courses, for example, baby massage. One case study describes how a user attending lunch club was inspired by this activity and through improved confidence was able to complete a food hygiene course. However there is not a systematic approach to tracking how well users get on when signposted to education and training courses so it is difficult to evaluate the volume

of success or otherwise.

The centre uses special consultation days well to consult users in an informal way and thus identify new needs within the local community; for example the 'Family Fun and Fitness Day' and the re-launch of children's centre following its re-decoration. The Ormiston Trust is also using the five priorities for Colchester and is currently analysing which of these is relevant for the reach area. Evaluation is used well during courses and users are able to have input into the next course.

There is good care, guidance and support for children in the centre with some outstanding features; for example, the excellent work by senior practitioners on a one-to-one basis in users' homes. Users and professionals praise this work and talk about marked improvement in the confidence of users and in their ability to cope with family life. In the words of a social worker, 'They support families with putting in a structure like regular mealtimes and bedtimes.' The children's centre sends referrals to the Jobcentre Plus so that interested users are able to receive advice and guidance on how to write a curriculum vitae and approach employers when seeking a job.

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

There is good leadership and management at all levels within the children's centre. The centre manager has high expectations for all staff and, as a result, senior practitioners are dedicated and highly motivated to make every effort to work effectively with the families and the courses allocated to them. Staff work effectively as a team with a shared vision of valuing users and improving services. The advisory board has recently been re-launched with a new chair and this action has already improved the attendance and commitment of professionals from other agencies to the centre. A management toolkit is used well to evaluate courses and activities with practitioners and is beginning to be introduced with users. Planning for courses, especially open access groups, is comprehensive. However, sometimes the aims and objectives are too generic for practitioners to be able to evaluate how well children and adults have achieved by the end of each session. The Ormiston Trust provides good governance and has a clear focus on improving the quality of services the provided by their centres. For example, it recently commissioned research on

provision for fathers. Researchers placed provision and outcomes at the mid-point of their evaluation scale. The specific recommendations made to improve this aspect of the work are beginning to be implemented.

Resources are used well to meet the needs of the community, and the centre provides good value for money. The children's centre also promotes good community cohesion through its work with the community centre with which it shares a building. For example, at its recent re-launch, a wide range of agencies attended bringing expert advice into the heart of the community. The event also included members of local churches, the police community support officers, Colchester Borough Council and, in particular, the street wardens who encourage people to tidy the environment with litter picks and painting out graffiti. There was a large turnout for this event with several hundred people attending from the local community.

Risk assessments are fully in place and the children's centre building is safe. For example, there is always a general risk assessment prior to a home visit and, for the first visit, senior practitioners go in pairs. All staff and volunteers have had an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check to make sure that they are suitable to work with children, and they all receive regular child protection training. Staying safe in the home is a regular feature of all courses. Information leaflets about sun safety and road safety are available in open access groups, and the road safety officer, local police and fire service give talks at the groups. Safeguarding policies are comprehensive. Parents have a booklet of outline policies and are signposted as to where to get the full policy. There are appropriate notices in the children's centre about who to approach if a user has a concern but these are not always displayed at groups and activities outside the centre.

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	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which 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	2

commissioned to provide	
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

Nanna's Neighbourhood Nursery in all aspects was outstanding at the time of its last inspection in November 2009.

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 Greenstead and Wivenhoe Childrens Centre on 23–24 February 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us and helped us to get a clear picture of what the children's centre is like; the good parts and where you would like to see improvements. We found that there are good outcomes for everyone who uses children's centre services. The senior practitioners provide an excellent service for you at home and at the centre. All courses are popular and well attended. It was wonderful to see how relaxed you are and how much you trust staff with your children and to help you through times of difficulty. It was good to hear about how the courses have inspired you. For example, we found out about the mother who has discovered what a good cook she is, and another mother who said she liked the taste of baby food so she cooked some from scratch and thought that it was better than baby food in jars. However, a group of you told us that courses are not inclusive. You told us that when you come to a course for very young children, you would like the centre to help with childcare for older siblings not yet of school age. Some of you said the centre did not do enough for lone parents. We have asked the centre to make sure there is a forum where you can express your views, and several of you told us you would like to be part of this and to join the advisory board.

The centre has an excellent partnership with social care. Those of you who have worked with senior practitioners told us that you have really appreciated their help

and support. However, there is not such a consistent picture with health professionals because they do not receive enough clear guidance from their managers and some do not understand or appreciate the services that the children's centre offers. We have asked that this is addressed by the partnership and advisory boards.

The centre manager leads and manages her staff and the centre very well. She is determined that you receive the best service the centre can give you. The Ormiston Trust provides good governance of the centre and gives good support to the centre manager. While the centre has a good understanding of its strengths and most of the areas for improvement, written improvement plans are not good enough. They do not have clear targets and definite dates by which improvements will be made. Procedures for making sure you and your children are safe at the centre are good.

Thank you again for your help during the inspection. We would like to wish you every success in playing your part in what services are provided, how the children's centre is run and in helping the centre to be even better.

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