

Inspection report for Wishing Well Children's Centre

Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	365835
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Kubiak HMI

Centre governance	4Children
Centre leader	Kay Mitchell
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Waterman Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

INTRODUCTION

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, the deputy head of children's services from '4Children' and the partnership board, members of the centre's focus group, parents, and partners from organisations who work with the centre. They visited 'Music and Rhyme', 'Wriggle and Rhyme', the multiple births group and the breastfeeding support group.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation, delivery plan, action plan, planning sheets for groups run at the centre, its policies and procedures, data about the centre and case studies. They looked at documentation relating to the governance of the centre including notes from the parents' forum, focus group and partnership board.

INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTRE

Wishing Well Children's Centre was designated in 2008. The centre's staff are employed by '4Children', who are commissioned by the local authority to provide this centre and a number of others across the county. Various partner organisations use the centre's building but are not based on the site. The centre coordinator manages two centres in the Rochford area. There is a small staff team that consists of a family outreach worker, a children's centre support worker and a part-time teacher. Their

work is supported by a part-time administrator. The centre's staff team has recently gone through some changes.

The centre's catchment area is varied in terms of deprivation. There are 695 children within the reach area and just over 400 families are registered with the centre. The local population is mostly White British. Around 21% of children under five in the area are living in workless households, which is slightly above the national average. The number of families receiving benefits is about 12%.

Children's skills, knowledge and experience on entry to the nursery is below average. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage around 57% of children achieve at least 78 points across the Foundation Stage Profile.

The centre is open all year round, from 8.30am to 5.00pm weekdays, and for specific groups on some Saturdays and evenings. Groups are run within the centre and outreach takes place within the community. The qualified teacher supports the work of the centre.

The centre is based within Waterman Primary School and an entrance is shared between the school, nursery and centre. Access to the nursery is through the centre. The centre's facilities include a 'drop in' area, multi-purpose training room, small meeting room and reception office. Additional space to run crèches is available in the nursery. The centre is fully wheelchair accessible. The centre is also able to use some spaces within the main school site.

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 overall effectiveness of the centre is good. The centre has established itself as an integral part of the community. Due to its location within the school building, users benefit from the good links the centre has forged with the school and the day nursery. Parents and carers feel welcome at the centre. They say that they value the opportunity to receive support and have fun with their children in a safe and stimulating environment. A number of groups are offered within the centre, with some additional groups and outreach services offered within the community. As space and resources are limited, the centre regularly reviews its work to ensure that it is continuing to meet the needs of users. Parents and carers are able to access other children's centres within the reach area. The sharing of resources, such as outreach workers, ensures that work is targeted and focused. Recruitment

procedures for staff and centre volunteers are rigorous. Staff who run the crèches for the centre follow the same recruitment procedures. Safeguarding procedures are devised by '4Children' and are understood by all staff. Training on safeguarding has a high priority, especially for new staff, and this ensures that children are protected.

Leaders have an understanding of the centre's strengths and areas where further improvement is needed. Self-evaluation and plans for improvement are in place. However, these lack sufficient rigour to bring about sustained improvement. Effective data systems have been introduced and staff are using data in a meaningful way when reviewing and planning their work. Case study information effectively demonstrates where the centre's work is having an impact on improving outcomes for centre users. The governance arrangements have recently been reviewed and modifications to the structure are still embedding. However, current arrangements do not set sufficient challenges to enable the centre to improve its work or hold it to account.

Outcomes for users of the centre are good overall. Parents and carers report that they enjoy attending the centre and that it makes a difference to their lives. They have the opportunity to sit on the parents' forum where ideas and suggestions are discussed. The centre has had some success in supporting parents and carers in accessing further training and education. However, this is not consistent and centre staff do not always promote high aspirations for users and celebrate achievements.

The early intervention work for children and families who need it most is making a difference. Parents benefit from the centre's strong links with other key professionals. Access to services for advice and guidance supports them in improving outcomes for themselves and their families.

The centre staff have a good understanding of the community and are effective in signposting users to a range of resources. The centre has developed particularly strong links with the library service and the provision of books for children and adults is improving language and literacy skills. Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily at the centre, but the centre does not fully reflect and celebrate the diversity of the wider community.

The centre has clear management and staffing structures. Regular reviews of the various groups are undertaken but these are not systematic and are not fully evaluated against the centre's overall priorities. Supervision arrangements are good and there is clear evidence of individual targets being set for the staff. All staff demonstrate a commitment to the centre and work well together. The space at the centre is limited, but it is used creatively and effectively. Crèche facilities are provided within an area of the day nursery which is sited within the same building.

The centre's managers are aware of its strengths and areas for development. They know the staff well and support them in developing their skills to best support the families. Resources are well used and targeted where they will have the most impact.

As a result, the centre's capacity to improve further is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the rigour of self-evaluation and planning by involving users, staff and partners in the process and by identifying relevant targets and quantifiable success criteria for the centre.
- Embed equality and diversity across all aspects of the centre to ensure that they are reflective of and meet the needs of the wider community and ensure diversity is celebrated.
- Strengthen the governance arrangements to ensure that the centre is set challenging targets and is held to account, linked to improving outcomes for children and families.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The outcomes for users are good overall. The centre brings people together from the community and all are treated with respect. Attendance rates are good and parents make effective use of the 'drop-in' area when groups are not running.

Groups such as 'MEND' (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do It) have been run to encourage families to become healthier. The breastfeeding support group also encourages new mothers to continue with breastfeeding their babies and so breastfeeding rates are high. Physical exercise is encouraged through the 'Music and Rhyme' and 'Wriggle and Rhyme' sessions. These sessions are popular with children, parents and carers, and children enjoy action rhymes such as 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' and 'Head, shoulders, knees and toes'. Parents and carers are signposted to information on smoking cessation and individual support is offered at the centre. Healthy snacks provided by the centre and health-related information encourage users to adopt healthy lifestyles.

Users report that they enjoy attending the centre and feel welcome, and that it helps them to make new friends. This makes a good contribution to developing their well-being. Programmes, such as those to develop parenting skills, are showing a positive impact. As a result, parents and carers say that they are better equipped to manage their children's behaviour. Parents take responsibility for their own children at the centre and staff act as good role models. Parents' and carers' views and comments are obtained informally at the centre. However, these are not always captured effectively. Parents and carers also have the opportunity to contribute to the work of the centre and to have their views heard through the parents' forum. The centre is developing ways to capture the views of children who attend the centre.

The centre staff support users in accessing courses to develop skills to improve their employability. The centre has good links with Adult Community Learning to which parents and carers are signposted to access training. Events such as those focused on employment and training show some success in supporting parents and carers to

develop their skills. Progression routes through training are not always clear and there are missed opportunities to raise the aspirations of centre users. Children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are integrated effectively into the centre and, in the past, the centre has provided a group, with health colleagues, to support their needs.

Effective partnerships and joint working ensure that support is identified for families who may be at risk of harm. Centre staff build up good relationships with the families so that they feel safe and are able to access the support available. There is evidence of the Common Assessment Framework being used appropriately, and a multidisciplinary approach to working with families is improving outcomes for children.

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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre staff use their knowledge of local resources to successfully signpost parents to a range of community resources and information. They are aware of particular needs within the community and build effective links with specific agencies, for example, with the local women's refuge. This ensures that families who are experiencing domestic violence can receive support and guidance.

Regular assessments of the groups run at the centre are undertaken to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the community. However, the rigour and regularity of the assessments are variable. The centre works hard to assess the needs of centre users. Case studies demonstrate the positive effect of outreach services on improving the outcomes for the families who access them.

The centre offers an effective range of services based on the limited space and staffing resources available. Parents are able to access the services of any of the local children's centres. Parents enjoy attending the centre and are treated with respect; for example, one parent commented that staff, 'talk to me nicely.'

Children enjoy their time at the centre and participate well in the groups. Achievements are celebrated at the end of some sessions by children receiving a 'magic moment' which includes a photograph and details of one thing the child has achieved during the session. Children are also awarded 'star' stickers for good work.

Data is used to identify areas or groups who are not accessing the centre and appropriate action is taken to address this. The centre uses a range of strategies to follow up any issues and then looks at ways to better meet the needs of these groups.

There are limited opportunities for outdoor play as the centre has no dedicated outdoor area. Outdoor play space is available during the school holidays in the grounds of the primary school, and the centre is working with the school on the possibility of developing an area for the regular use of the centre.

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 centre coordinator and staff work well as a team and have built purposeful links with a range of key agencies and partners within the community. Users are seen as individuals, and packages of support are provided specific to their needs. The impact of the work with individual families is evaluated through individual supervision and case studies. Group case supervision allows outreach workers to share good practice to improve the service to the families.

The centre's self-evaluation, delivery plan and action plans ensure that its leaders are aware of the priorities for the centre. These documents have recently been revised but there are no clear links between the different documents which limit their ability to bring about rapid improvements. Staff are aware of the documents and had some input although have not been actively involved in their creation and therefore do not feel ownership of them. There are good examples of specific measurable targets being set and progress regularly reviewed within other documents; however, this is not yet consistent across the whole centre.

The centre uses data effectively as a way to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness.

Staff are able to produce data reports and are developing skills in using data routinely within their work to review and plan resources linked more closely to users' needs. Data is used appropriately as a tool in supervision to review the centre's effectiveness. The centre ensures that resources are allocated to where they will have the most impact. Groups are regularly reviewed to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the community and ensure that they provide value for money.

Staff have a comprehensive induction when they join the centre. Professional development is given a high priority and staff are well supported in undertaking relevant training that will equip them to better support the families with whom they work. All required policies and procedures are in place and are produced centrally by '4Children'. Safeguarding procedures are robust and recruitment procedures are rigorous in order to safeguard children. Staff do not commence work at the centre until all checks have been successfully completed. Regular safeguarding training ensures that staff have up-to-date knowledge. The centre has a small number of volunteers and they follow the same recruitment process.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily at the centre. Displays and images around the centre reflect some of the diversity of the community. There is evidence of signs and information in different languages although this is very limited. Publications in the centre are not available in community languages. There are some books available for families which reflect the wider community and are in dual languages, but the centre is not proactive in promoting them. Festivals and events that mark the rich diversity of the world are not celebrated by the centre or used to develop the knowledge of users and value their specific backgrounds. There is evidence that the achievement gap is closing between the most disadvantaged children and other children by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The centre encourages feedback from parents, users and partners and this information is used to shape and improve services. For example, following feedback from parents, the music and movement group was changed to two different groups with separate sessions for younger and older children. Formal feedback is captured well. However, informal feedback is not recorded. Systems for ensuring that information is effectively communicated to users are not systematic.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
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	3

statutory duties	
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	3
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

The inspectors considered information from the most recent inspection of Waterman Primary School which was judged to be good.

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SUMMARY FOR CENTRE USERS

We inspected the Wishing Well Children's Centre on 2–3 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

The centre is based within Waterman Primary school and provides you and your children with a safe environment where you are made to feel welcome and where the friendly staff are available to support you. There is limited space within the centre but staff work hard to ensure that you and your children have the opportunity to attend groups such as the 'Music and Rhyme' and 'Wriggle and Rhyme'. Your children enjoy these sessions and the physical activity is helping your children remain healthy. You report that you enjoy attending the centre and that staff are friendly and supportive.

The parents' forum meets regularly to look at what the centre is doing and to receive feedback from you. The staff talk to you about the work of the centre and listen to your views and take them forward. The parents' forum contributes ideas to other groups that are responsible for governing the centre. The governance arrangements

are not sufficiently developed in order to set targets for the children's centre or to hold managers to account for the work that they are doing.

The centre has produced a range of self-evaluation and planning documents that are designed to improve its work. We have asked the staff to look at how these documents can be more closely linked so that they bring about improvements. We have also asked them to think about how you can be more involved in the process of evaluating the centre and contributing to improving it.

Those of you who have accessed the outreach service benefit from its work. Staff use their knowledge of different agencies and community resources to help you to gain support and guidance. Case studies show that the outreach work is making a big difference to the families who use the service.

The centre is limited in how successfully it promotes equality and diversity. There are some books that represent the wider community and the diverse society that we live in. The centre has been proactive in obtaining books in different languages when children from various cultural backgrounds attend. We have asked the centre to be more proactive in looking at the range of resources that it provides and how it promotes equality and diversity.

Thank you to those of you who took the time to come and talk to us. We wish you and your children all the best for the future

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