

Inspection report for East City and Framingham Earl Area Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	365777
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Christopher Parker

Centre governance	The governing body of Cavell Primary and Nursery School
Centre leader	Simon Wakeman, Carla Nichols and Simon Kett
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Cavell Primary and Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Cavell Primary and Nursery School

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 maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website, www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one early years inspector and one additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with parents, the executive headteacher, the operations managers, family support workers and health workers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The East City and Framingham Earl Area Children's Centre opened in 2008 as a phase two children's centre to serve the areas of Tuckswood and Lakenham to the south-east of the city. It is an area of predominantly local authority housing, and has higher-than-average levels of social deprivation, worklessness and families on benefit. Children's levels on entry to early years provision are below expectations.

The children's centre has recently had its reach area extended to include the more rural areas of Framingham Earl, Brooke, Poringland, Rockland St Mary, Stoke Holy Cross, Surlingham and Trowse. The whole area includes about 1500 children and their families. Around a third of the children and their families are from minority ethnic groups.

The children's centre is a hub for the delivery of a range of services and runs other services at several venues within the locality. The full day-care element of the children's centre's core offer is based in the school's nursery, and offers four spaces in the morning and four in the afternoon for children aged three to five years old. The health visiting service and midwives also provide services at the children's centre.

The centre is governed by the school governing body which has a committee specifically charged to oversee the work of the children’s centre.

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 centre meets the needs of its community well. Its work is widely appreciated by the parents and carers who use the broad range of services it provides to improve the lives of their children. They speak warmly of the consistently effective support and advice that they receive, particularly at times of family crisis. On more than one occasion, parents said that the centre had ‘kept the family together’. Parenting classes and advice are particularly successful in this respect.

The leadership team of the executive headteacher and two operations managers have high expectations and clear development plans to extend and improve the services which the centre provides for families. They are effectively supported by a well-trained and enthusiastic staff team which works very successfully in partnership with other agencies.

Safeguarding is given a high priority. Posters, leaflets, policies and procedures are evident at every turn, reminding all of their responsibilities to keep children as safe as possible. Good arrangements are in place to ensure that risk assessments are carried out for every activity that the centre offers. Parents and carers who use the centre say that they feel safe, and enjoy the welcome that they receive and the stimulating environment which the centre provides for their children.

A committee of the governing body meets frequently to review, monitor and evaluate the work of the centre. It is particularly well focused on ensuring that services are effective and provide good value for money. The leadership team and the committee of the governing body have an accurate view of the impact of the centre’s work on the families and children who use it. However, they are at the early stages of establishing a data collection and analysis system that will give them a longer-term evaluation that is specific to the area which the centre serves. Nevertheless, the monitoring and evaluation carried out through, for example, case studies have

resulted in services being more precisely tailored to meet users' needs. This illustrates well the centre's good capacity for sustained improvement.

While parents and carers are very positive about the centre, strongly value its work, and offer their views in satisfaction surveys and consultations, they are not involved in shaping the direction of the centre or in decision-making. The centre is currently striving to recruit volunteers to revitalise the 'parents' involvement committee' which has not functioned effectively for some time. Similarly, those who participate in adult learning, for example to improve their information and communication technology skills, highly value the courses and tuition, but the take-up of places is relatively low. In this respect, the centre is not as successful in enhancing the economic and social well-being of adults as it is that of children. Children who attend the many sessions on offer make consistently good progress in all areas of learning.

The centre staff know the families in the area well and are constantly seeking to engage those that are hardest to reach. The successful work carried out on a Traveller site in the area illustrates very well the centre's strong commitment to equality and diversity.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Extend the involvement of parents in decision-making and in shaping the future direction of the centre.
- Increase participation rates in training and adult education courses.
- Develop the use of measurable data to evaluate the longer-term impact of services on the lives of families in the area.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Parents and carers have good access to services that help to improve their health and well-being and that of their children. All of the evaluations of the impact of these activities show positive benefits, resulting in greater awareness, increased knowledge and improved confidence. The introduction to healthy activities leads, in some cases, to quite marked changes in lifestyle, for example, whereby those attending aerobics classes are guided to and participate in smoking cessation support and, as a result, stop smoking. Many of the centre's activities such as baby massage, 'Giggle, Yell, Move', and 'Ready, Steady, Cook' enhance children's health and well-being. The midwife and health visitor provide twice-weekly sessions which are very well attended. The strong links with the centre result in referrals which lead to new mothers benefiting from involvement in other activities provided by the centre.

Both of the centre's operations managers act as lead professionals, and family support workers play a full part assessing and supporting the needs of families whose circumstances make them vulnerable through the Common Assessment Framework. Case study evaluations highlight the work of the centre in successfully

supporting such families to the point where their children are no longer at risk. First-aid courses, modified following evaluation, focus on increasing parents' knowledge of providing first aid to children. In some cases, this extends to home visits where a family support worker provides advice on ensuring that children are kept safe in the home, thereby reducing accidents.

All parents and carers say that they and their children enjoy attending the centre and the activities provided there, and at the many other locations used to host sessions. They consistently report that they feel safe and welcome. Sessions such as 'Mini Music Makers' develop the children's confidence, language and movement. Number rhymes such as 'Three Little Ducks' are well pitched at the children's stage of development and help them to make good progress in counting.

The children behave well. Parenting classes are particularly successful in promoting positive relationships and good behaviour. Work to support Traveller families has resulted in increased take-up of pre-school, Nursery and Reception places by children from Traveller families.

Children make good progress in developing skills for the future through the broad range of activities provided by the centre. This prepares them well to enter the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre has evidence to show that the gap between the lowest-achieving children and their peers is closing. However, data to show the impact of its work on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage across the extended area that the centre now covers have only recently become available, and cover only one year. The impact of services on adult future economic well-being is satisfactory. Of those who have benefited from the centre's services, a few have achieved employment or are seeking employment, but the uptake of courses – for example, to develop information and communication technology skills and write curriculum vitae – is quite low.

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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The leadership team and staff of the centre are particularly good at accurately assessing the needs of families in the area. They are constantly working to extend the centre's influence and to engage more families and children. Staff have carried out a wide-ranging consultation to establish the needs of parents and carers by talking to them 'at the gate' of all the schools in the centre's extended area. The centre provides sessions such as 'One World' that engage families from minority ethnic groups. In these sessions, parents and carers from diverse backgrounds, and their children, share elements of their culture and develop their English language skills. The centre has also established a base on a Traveller site to ensure that these families can access the centre's services to meet the needs of this group.

Because the centre assesses needs so effectively, participation rates among the centre's target groups are generally good. The centre can point to particularly striking examples of where family support workers have made a considerable difference to the lives of families in crisis. One parent commented, 'I would be lost without the centre.' This is because the staff at the centre are not only skilled, but also very committed to helping these families. As one father remarked, 'They are always willing to listen; and if they can't help, ninety-nine times out of a hundred they know who can.'

The centre successfully promotes purposeful learning and development through all of the activities that it offers. Many sessions are wide ranging, giving the children opportunities to learn and develop across all areas of learning. Sessions are carefully planned, and risk assessments ensure that they take place in a safe environment. Children's achievements are celebrated. For those children attending 'Under 2s', a record of their achievements is being kept to show the significant steps forward that they make.

The good care, guidance and support provided by the centre permeate its work. The centre has recently taken over support for teenage girls who become pregnant, because the organisation which formerly provided this has closed. The manner in which in the centre has introduced one teenage girl and her mother to the range of services that it can offer, and increased her confidence to access them, is testament to the good quality of support and guidance that it provides.

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
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How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The executive headteacher and the operations managers are leading the centre effectively. They are very ambitious to extend its influence and its impact on the lives of children and families in the area. Since the centre's area was extended to include rural locations, they have been successful in working with many schools and organisations to provide services which families across the area can easily access. In a relatively short period they have established a broad range of services which are well attended and well received. They are aware that provision for adult training is not yet as successful. They know this because of the good monitoring and evaluation arrangements that are in place. The centre has only begun to develop systems to collect and analyse data about the long-term impact of its services over the last year. Nevertheless, well-established systems for evaluating the impact of individual services and activities, and in-depth case studies of work with individual families, provide valuable information which is used well to plan for future development. Partnership work is particularly effective. Partnerships with Barnardo's and the local high school are establishing a 'base' that will provide some of the centre's services for families once their children reach five years of age. Many other partnerships are well established, most notably with health services. Equality and diversity are strongly promoted. Home visiting by the portage services, and early support, are provided to families where children have disabilities.

The governing body and the committee which oversees the work of the centre provide clear direction, and a critical eye which examines the cost-effectiveness and impact of the services that the centre provides. As a result, the centre provides good value for money. Governors receive regular written and verbal reports which allow them to monitor all aspects of its work. They are rightly taking steps to be more actively engaged in monitoring some services, by visiting them to find out at first hand how effective they are.

The centre has good arrangements to check the suitability of all adults who work with children. Staff are appropriately trained in child protection, health and safety, and first aid. Staff development is strong, and family support workers value the opportunities and encouragement that they receive. Training often leads to extending the services that they offer, and better meeting the needs of families and their children. All users engage with the centre confidently, and parents and carers are happy to provide their views on the services which the centre offers; however, they are not currently involved in guiding or shaping the work of the centre in a more formal way. The centre advisory board, made up of representatives of its partners, provides additional information about families in the area and helps to evaluate the impact of services.

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 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 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	3

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

Cavell Primary and Nursery School.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the East City and Framingham Earl Area Children's Centre on 22–23 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We are very grateful to those of you who spoke to us about the work of the children's centre. You told us how much you value the support that you receive, particularly when you are faced with difficulties. Many of you appreciate and enjoy the sessions you attend, and welcome the positive benefits for yourselves and your children. We agree with you that the centre meets many of your needs well. Children who attend the many sessions on offer make consistently good progress in all areas of learning.

The leadership team is very keen to extend and improve the services that the centre provides for you. The staff are well trained and enthusiastic, and work well with a variety of agencies to provide a broad range of services. The centre is a safe place, which is something that you value. It makes the safeguarding of children a high priority. The staff carry out checks to make sure that everything is as safe as possible before every session.

A committee of the governing body does a good job of overseeing the work of the centre. They do a lot of checking to see how well things are working. They are very keen that the services they pay for should be worthwhile and should provide good value for money. The leaders of the centre also keep a close eye on all that the centre does, so that they know what is working well and what can be improved. They have introduced a swipe card system in the last year to help them to collect information about the services you value, and to judge the longer-term effect on families and children's well-being; but it is at an early stage. They know there is a lot to do to use this information to get a full picture of the centre's effectiveness. We have asked the centre to continue this work and make as much use of the information as possible to make sure that it continues to develop and improve.

While you strongly value the work of the centre, and many of you offer your views in satisfaction surveys and consultations, you are not involved in making decisions about the centre's future. The centre is currently trying hard to get some of you to volunteer to form a new 'parents' involvement committee'. We have asked the centre to do all it can to get this group up and running again, so that you have a say in the decisions made about the services that the centre provides in the future. The number of adults taking part in courses to develop their skills and increase their chances of getting a job, or of moving to a better one, is quite low. We have asked the centre to take steps to increase the number of adults attending these courses.

The centre staff know the families in the area well, and are constantly seeking to work with more parents, carers and young children, and particularly those experiencing difficulty. The centre has a strong commitment to equality and diversity.

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