

Inspection report for Village Rise Children's Centre

Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	367871
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Smith HMI

Centre governance	Great Yarmouth and Waveney Primary Care Trust
Centre leader	Samantha Ewing
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Benjamin Britten High School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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, representatives from professional partnerships and the local authority, parents and carers.

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

Information about the centre

Village Rise Children's Centre is a purpose-built, phase two centre which was designated in March 2008 and is situated in the grounds of Benjamin Britten High School.

The manager was appointed in September 2009. She also manages the two other children's centres serving the North Lowestoft community which are located less than two miles apart in a densely populated area. Most staff are deployed to provide services at all three centres, and many families in the Village Rise reach area access services at the Ark and Roman Hill Children's Centres.

Lowestoft is a coastal town with high levels of social disadvantage and deprivation. The reach area has high levels of unemployment, teenage pregnancies and poverty. It covers densely populated and rural areas. The local population is mostly White British with smaller percentages from other minority ethnic groups including those from Asian, Portuguese and Eastern European communities. The percentage of families where English is not the first language is increasing. The skills, knowledge and understanding of children on entry to early years provision are generally below those expected nationally.

The centre is run by Great Yarmouth and Waveney Primary Care Trust, which is working towards becoming a social enterprise, on behalf of the local authority.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory. The centre has yet to establish itself fully as an integral part of the community. Due to its location, many families choose to use the Ark Children’s Centre which has been in operation for longer and is easier to access as it is on the main route into town. However, parents and carers say they are happy with the services provided at all three children’s centres in the local area.

The work by the Well Family Support Workers is a particular strength of the centre and is making a significant difference in improving the lives of families who use the service. They work tirelessly and against many barriers, to try and help families improve children’s outcomes. Sound assessment procedures for all referrals for outreach work ensure that services are targeted effectively at those families most in need. Users truly value the advice and guidance provided by staff. This is illustrated by one user, echoing the views of many, who said, ‘I wouldn’t have managed without them’.

Where data are available, they demonstrate the positive contribution the centre is making to improve the outcomes for its users through good-quality services. These services are provided across a range of different centres that the users access, and enable the centre to secure good outcomes despite its own provision being satisfactory. This was confirmed through discussions with users who stated they were very satisfied with the services provided by centres in the North Lowestoft area. However, it was not always clear which specific centre they were referring to.

Parents and carers have good access to services that help to improve their health and well-being and that of their children. The centre is very good at supporting

parents to become volunteers and recognises their value as good role models in the community. The centre is enabling parents and carers to enjoy learning, make good progress and celebrate their achievements with the award of a certificate at the end of a course. Aspirations are successfully raised due to the good levels of support provided to those users who are seeking training and/or employment.

Parents and carers feel welcome at the centre which provides an inclusive environment. They say that they value the opportunity to receive support and have fun with their children in a safe and stimulating environment. Children make encouraging progress in developing skills for the future as a result of the early years activities. Staff model good practice at all the groups and encourage parents to acquire the skills to continue to support and develop their children at home.

Some groups and outreach services are offered within the centre, with many additional groups and outreach services being offered at the other children's centres within the cluster. The sharing of resources, such as outreach workers across the three centres, ensures that these services are accessible for parents and carers in the densely populated areas of North Lowestoft. The centre recognises that it does not do enough to engage families who live in the more rural areas of the centre's reach area and to develop the services offered from the Village Rise centre premises.

Safeguarding procedures are understood by all staff. Training on safeguarding has a high priority and this ensures that children are protected. All procedures and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children and their families are up to date and meet statutory requirements. Case study evidence indicates that families have received well-integrated and sensitive support in times of crisis. The centre is used by social care to provide a secure environment for families undertaking contact visits with their children.

The centre functions efficiently on a daily basis because the staff team are motivated and intent on improvement. Teamwork and morale among staff are positive. There are clear lines of responsibility. The centre manager has faced a number of challenging issues since her appointment which she has given priority to addressing. The centre has satisfactory management systems in place. Data are increasingly being used to target families and to provide universal services. It is acknowledged that service planning and self appraisal are currently interwoven with the other two centres for which the centre manager also has responsibility. Consequently, they do not distinguish clearly enough between the work of Village Rise Children's Centre and the work of the other two centres. The centre is beginning to develop effective mechanisms for measuring precisely the impact its services have on outcomes for users. This demonstrates the centre's satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement. The primary care trust and the local authority monitor the centre effectively and provide some challenge to the centre manager. They recognise that providing more challenge is an area to develop to ensure that the centre continues to operate successfully.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the effectiveness of self-evaluation through regular and rigorous evaluation of information that show the full impact of the centre's work and is specific to Village Rise Children's Centre.
- Develop the centre's improvement plan so that it contains sharp, measurable targets which are specific to Village Rise Children's Centre.
- Strengthen governance arrangements to provide more challenge to the centre's leader.
- Increase outreach work in the wider reach area and ensure that the range of services provided is based on a sound analysis of needs.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Healthy lifestyles are promoted well throughout the centre. Activities and services such as breastfeeding support at the baby café, baby massage, weaning advice and antenatal drop-in clinics are having a positive impact on the health of young children and babies. Families are engaged with universal and specialist services as appropriate, and the take-up of immunisation is very high, helping to ensure the welfare of young children. Children learn about food that is good for them as they eat healthy snacks during activities. Speech and language therapists hold drop-in sessions at one of the centres in the area thus enabling families to make referrals as well as the more formal referral route from professionals. Health service data show that this has increased attendance and improved outcomes for users. Physical development has been given a high priority at the centre and staff incorporate this aspect successfully into activities that they offer. This raises awareness with parents and carers about the importance of physical activities for their children's development and encourages them to go out and explore the local community.

Staff are committed to promoting safety at the centre and, as a result, children and families feel safe when accessing the centre. There is some evidence of improving outcomes for children on child protection plans. Staff are becoming increasingly familiar with the Common Assessment Framework procedures. Home safety is discussed at home visits and packs are available to parents and carers that include safety equipment that can be used in their homes.

Children actively engage in and enjoy the variety of activities available across the group sessions. They are inquisitive and participate enthusiastically, interacting with each other and adults confidently, develop good social skills and becoming independent learners. Parents value activity sessions such as 'Mucky Ducks' and 'Little Lambs'. As one user stated, 'There is so much for my child to do and learn.' 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 and are more confident in promoting their child's learning in the home environment.

The centre staff successfully support many users in accessing courses to develop skills to improve their employability. The personnel development worker works across all three centres and offers a package of effective individually tailored support and guidance to users. The community parent programme is a good example of the commitment to developing users' confidence and supporting them to move into further training, education or employment. There are many individual cases of parents being helped into accredited training and employment.

The centre is beginning to collect the views of parents through questionnaires and satisfaction surveys at the end of courses and events. A parents' forum does not currently operate but parents do feel confident to give feedback directly to the staff. Adults who were initially lacking in confidence and self-esteem are now among the most vocal in the centre. They happily express their views, thoughts and opinions with the staff. One parent volunteered to take up the role of chair at the advisory board which provides some opportunity for users of the centre to be involved in decision making and development planning. However, some users reported that they did not know about the advisory board.

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	3
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	3
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?

3

There is a sufficient range of services and activities that meet the needs of those users who currently access the centre. Groups are well attended and attendance levels are increasing steadily. Services have been developed based upon staff's understanding of the community through their work at the Ark Children's Centre which was the first centre to be provided in the cluster area. Centre staff know their families well. They are sensitive in their approach to engaging parents and carers within the centre's activities. For example, those who may feel anxious or nervous about attending the children's centre are supported sensitively when making their

first visit. The centre is developing systems to review the range of services that it offers to ensure that services are meeting the needs of all groups of users, especially those who are currently under-represented such as fathers and young parents.

Sound partnerships exist with a range of key agencies such as the health services and social care. This means that families who are identified as being in need of support are referred to the children's centre where they access an appropriate range of services. The assessment process is effective in ensuring families receive tailored packages of care applicable to every member of the family. In times of crisis, families feel well supported by the centre. They know that they can confidently turn to staff, who go out of their way to help. The staff support some very vulnerable families extremely well. 'The staff are compassionate and caring,' and 'I would not be who I am today without their help and guidance,' were just a few of the comments users made to inspectors about the work of the family support workers. All services offered in the centre keep users safe.

Centre staff and outreach workers develop good relationships with users. Working with families in their home is an established strategy which is used appropriately and effectively by many of the staff linked to the centre. Case studies demonstrate the positive effect of outreach services on improving the outcomes for the families who access them. However, the centre does not currently have a fully comprehensive view of the profile of need within its reach area with regard to the more rural areas. The centre is aware of this and is considering a programme of outreach work during the summer holidays to explore the needs of families in these areas.

Centre staff place much emphasis on celebrating the achievements of users. They support users well in their educational and personal development through the provision of appropriate courses. Users speak highly of these opportunities. One user, reflecting the views of many, said, 'The centre gave me confidence to explore other courses and believe I can do it.' Links with Jobcentre Plus ensure that effective support with work-related issues and benefits advice is readily available.

The 'FUN' parent group provides a range of activities such as trips to local attractions at greatly reduced cost. This not only enhances the provision provided by the centre but is greatly appreciated and valued by the centre users. It allows families to have a day out together they would otherwise not be able to afford. However, the number of parents who are active in this group has declined and the group relies heavily on a few highly dedicated parents.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
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	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the	2

centre and the wider community	
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How effective are the leadership and management?

3

There have been and continue to be many internal changes within the local authority and the primary care trust which have an impact upon the governance of the centre. The local authority has systems in place such as monitoring the monthly centre reports and through the annual conversation to support the centre manager. The local authority and primary care trust also meet regularly to monitor the performance of the centre. The primary care trust acknowledges that sufficient challenge has not always been given to the centre to ensure that a robust system has been put in place to monitor the performance of the centre, however, plans to remedy this are now being given priority attention.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The centre has a staff team who are enthusiastic, committed and passionate about their work. They are keen to develop the services further. However, the lack of an accurate self-evaluation of the impact of the centre's work and specific, measurable targets in the development plan is having some impact on the centre's ability to become more effective. Evaluation is carried out following each activity and reflects the views of users and the centre is beginning to develop systems to track and monitor its performance to evaluate effectively the long-term impact of provision and inform practice. Resources are managed in a coordinated way across the different centres to provide services for those who need them, consequently the centre provides satisfactory value for money. Day-to-day line management arrangements are clear and understood by all staff within the centre and staff are provided with appropriate professional supervision.

The advisory board, which serves all three centres in the North Lowestoft area, has members from an appropriate range of professions and is chaired by a parent. The board has some committed individuals on it who require further support and guidance from centre staff to be able to embrace their role.

The centre meets its duties relating to equality and diversity. Children with disabilities are included in activity groups at the centre and some discrete provision is also made for them.

Staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding practices, and training is renewed regularly. The centre provides a safe and secure environment for its users. Strong relationships with parents and cooperation between some agencies ensure information is shared. This is making a positive contribution to supporting families experiencing difficulties and children who may be at risk, including those with child protection plans. Recruitment procedures for staff and volunteers are in place to ensure that all are appropriately checked and cleared to work with children.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional	
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supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
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	3
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	3
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

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 Village Rise Children's Centre on 9–10 June 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The centre offers a satisfactory 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.

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 staff, which means you have no hesitation in using the services regularly. Many of you choose to use other centres in the north Lowestoft area, such as the Ark Children's Centre, as these are easier for you to access and have been operating for longer.

You told us over and over again that coming to children's centres has 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 families need, and they make sure that this is provided.

You told us that you think that the centre is a safe place for parents and children. The centre is also 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 'Little Lambs' and 'Mucky Ducks'. The speech therapists are helping you to support your children's communication skills at home.

Several of you have become community parents at the centre and value the opportunity to develop parenting skills and training.

We have asked the centre to look at how it evaluates its performance to ensure that it is accurate and shows the full impact of the centre's work. We have also asked the centre to develop the centre's improvement plan so that it contains sharp, measurable targets to enable leaders and managers to evaluate the success of their work and to enable the advisory body to challenge the centre's managers and hold them to account. We have asked for this to be specific to Village Rise Children's Centre. In order to monitor the performance of the centre we have asked that the governance arrangements at the centre are strengthened to provide support and challenge to the centre's leader so that Village Rise can continue to improve.

To ensure that the needs of all the families in the area are given full consideration when planning services at the centre, we have asked the centre to increase their outreach work, particular into the rural parts of the area.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk to 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.