

Inspection report for New Earswick Children's Centre

Local authority	York City Council
Inspection number	367842
Inspection dates	5-6 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Elaine Clinton HMI

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Juliet Burton
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if 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 one Early Years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with parents, carers and other users of the centre, the locality children's centre manager, the locality integrated services team leader, front line workers, local authority officers and partner agency representatives. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

New Earswick Children's Centre is a phase two centre that was established in 2007 and designated in 2008. It is located on the site of New Earswick Primary School, and has a satellite centre in the nearby village of Strensall. Over 1400 families are in the centre's reach area which includes the villages of Strensall and Huntington. This community is characterised by a mix of relative affluence and pockets of deprivation and rural isolation. Although the number of children living in workless families is just below that of the York and national average, there are a few significant clusters where there are families dependent on workless benefits. Housing in the area is a mix of social, privately-rented and owner-occupied properties. The population is largely White British with only small numbers of families from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Most children enter school with broadly the same range of skills and abilities as that expected for their age.

The centre is accountable to the local authority and is governed by an advisory board. The locality integrated services team leader, who has a half-time post, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the centre. The locality children's centre manager, who has responsibility for five children's centres across York, leads the services provided by the centre and co-ordinates those provided by its partners. New Earswick Children's Centre works closely with the other nine children's centres in the local authority. A multi-agency team that includes qualified teachers, midwives, health visitors and Jobcentre Plus provide services for the 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

High-quality leadership and a determination to offer the best services possible are key characteristics of this rapidly-improving centre. The overall good level of service provided by the centre is the result of the drive and ambition of the locality manager, the integrated team leader and the staff team who are supported by rigorous and detailed assessment and a good understanding of the needs of the reach area. Staff are extremely professional and demonstrate a real commitment to improving provision for families in the reach area, in particular those from target groups. The centre benefits well from the expertise of a very small team, who make excellent use of their strengths to ensure that the centre provides good value for money through sustainable working, careful monitoring of room useage, and very effective partnership working.

New Earswick Children's Centre provides a very friendly, accessible and extremely safe environment for all its users. Throughout the inspection users spoke of how the centre has helped them to improve their lives. Typical views expressed by users are, 'they have opened my eyes', and 'the centre support has helped me to see that I am a good parent'. All families are welcomed to the centre. During the inspection inspectors saw many excellent examples of the way staff quickly integrated families into groups they were attending for the first time. The centre is rightly proud of the high regard with which it is held within the community. This busy, welcoming centre is used well by an increasing proportion of users in the reach area; in particular it is being used well by families from target groups and from the most deprived communities, which is evidenced by the 24% increase in registrations since January 2011. It has excellent strategies to make contact with even harder to reach families. Particularly good assessment of needs and care guidance and support empower parents to overcome many difficulties in their lives. Very well planned transition support is beginning to help prepare children settle into school quickly. Excellent opportunities have been developed to enable users to have access to a wide range of voluntary roles, helping them to use their interests to improve learning and

development and increase their employment opportunities.

During the time the integrated team leader has been in post she has focussed on the evaluation and development of services in a structured way to further develop provision. In doing this she has included staff particularly well, ensuring that morale and enthusiasm are high. Central to this development is engagement with a range of partners and users to ensure that needs are being met, combined with a clear understanding of the importance of data to develop provision, set clear targets and measure the impact of services. Senior leaders and the local authority therefore fully recognise the need to work even more closely with health partners to ensure that that are provided with accurate health-related information about all families in the reach area. These factors, along with careful self-evaluation procedures that take into account national indicators, demonstrate good capacity to improve.

The centre makes good use of strong partnerships to provide a wide range of integrated services. Communications between these partners are good and are used very well to assess the effectiveness of the centre and identifying ways to improve. Partnership with the primary school is good. The integrated team leader has worked tirelessly to ensure that relationships between the key partners involved in the delivery of early learning are robust and are used to inform the direction of the centre. In particular she has focussed on working together to improve outcomes for families. Consequently the children's centre makes good use of the school's resources, in particular facilities such as the library and computers.

The two locality managers work collaboratively across the eight children's centres in York to share expertise and good practice. The locality manager and the integrated team leader have a firm understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development, based on on-going observations and reviews of staffs' work, and a very good understanding of the impact of the centre's work, hence the accuracy of their self-evaluation. Plans for improvement are detailed and although they contain realistic targets, many lack sufficient challenge to move the centre towards excellence. Whilst the advisory board has been in place since the centre opened, there have been changes to the structure of the board across the local authority and its role has not been fully developed. Due to these changes there have been variations in representation by different partners on the board and users are not well-represented. The centre is fully aware of this and has ensured that the views of parents are sought and used in a variety of ways to ensure that the centre meets their needs well. In addition it has ensured that, whatever format the board has taken, members and wider partners are informed of the work of the centre through regular reports and meetings.

In the last two years the local authority has established arrangements to review the effectiveness of the work of the children's centre annually. Its current procedures to evaluate the centre's effectiveness do not pay sufficient regard to the impact of the specific work of the centre as the report covers the work of all eight centres in York.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work closely with health partners to improve data collection and sharing procedures to ensure that they inform further development of the centre's work.
- Working with the local authority the centre should embed the proposed changes to governance of the centre to ensure a stable advisory board where parents are fully involved in monitoring the work of the centre.
- Further develop and implement quality assurance arrangements through establishing the use of a centre-specific annual conversation and the setting and monitoring of more challenging targets within the service delivery plan.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre plays a highly-effective role in the provision of health-related courses and activities. Case studies and discussions with users and professionals consistently demonstrate the good impact of their work. Staff work very closely with health partners to ensure that the provision is of a high quality and meets the needs of the reach area, although they recognise the need for more detailed health data to measure more effectively the impact of their work. Many activities are based on health issues, for example the weekly health drop-in, 'Little Chestnuts', 'Little Elms' and regular ante-natal groups. Case study evidence demonstrates that increasing numbers of parents, in particular lone parents, dads, and isolated families, are reporting that they are more confident in key aspects such as weaning and producing healthy food for their children. Healthy eating is reinforced by the centre's support of a flourishing vegetable garden that is being developed and cared for by parents and children. Initiatives to encourage children to feed themselves have been shared well with health visitors, and the centre has developed and delivered training alongside health professionals. The centre is beginning to make good use of the Leuvern assessment of involvement and well-being in group and individual sessions to identify specific health-related learning needs. Take-up of support for mothers through the peer breastfeeding group is good and improving and centre evidence indicates that increasing numbers of mothers are breastfeeding. Support activities such as portage provision and speech and language therapy, are having an impact on improving outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and making a difference to their lives and their parents. Parents report the significant difference that attending groups such as 'Small Talk' have had on their child's language and general development, 'from saying nothing she now talks non-stop....I realise that I have to talk too and now have the confidence to do this'.

Parents and carers say they feel safe and state that the centre is a 'very safe and welcoming place to be'. They report that staff really understand them and their needs and are totally non-judgemental. Parents describe how their homes are safer as a result of the advice given by the centre and by the good examples

demonstrated by centre staff. One parent said that she now never has a hot drink anywhere near her child, whereas before using the centre there were always hot drinks 'lying around'.

The importance of high-quality play and early learning is promoted well during activities such as 'Little Elms' and 'Little Chestnuts', and through the excellent planning of activities. Parents state that the range of courses that is available to them to support and develop their parenting skills have made them much more aware of the need to play with their children and to talk to them whilst they are playing. Transitional arrangements are particularly well-planned, with well-targeted activities focussing on those children identified as at most risk of finding transition difficult. Evidence is building that, where children and families have benefited from contact with the centre, children have a better start to school life. Outcomes from the Early Years Foundation Stage show that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good progress given their starting points.

Behaviour is of a very high standard. Staff are excellent role models for both parents and children. On the very few occasions when behaviour is less good, firm but sensitive action and support is provided. Users have good opportunities to feed back on the activities they attend through an innovative range of evaluation tools to further develop the provision and are increasingly gaining confidence in sharing ideas about activities that can be offered and improvements that can be made. They readily share these ideas individually, through focus groups or through written evaluations. As one parent said, 'They really take notice of what we have to say, they redesigned the play area with children so that it is more fun'.

A significant strength of the centre is the excellent use of volunteers. Increasing numbers of users are benefitting from the many opportunities to become involved in volunteer work both at the centre and in the wider community. Close links with family learning are ensuring that volunteers and other users have access to a range of learning opportunities that meet their needs and aspirations. The centre recognises that there remains scope to increase adult involvement in education and to track and monitor their progress better. Strong links with Jobcentre Plus, good access to information and communication technology (ICT) and a jobs' notice board ensure users are regularly informed of local job vacancies, as well as being supported to apply for jobs. Childminders talk positively of the impact that working with the centre is having on their work, enabling them to provide even better quality play and learning for the children they are looking after. The impact of this aspect of the centre's work can be illustrated by the increasing number of childminders in the area whose provision is judged to be good or better.

These are the grades for 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
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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 needs of vulnerable families referred to the centre are very effectively assessed and support is well-organised across agencies. Clear procedures for sharing information, including excellent understanding and use of the Common Assessment Framework process, and a good understanding of families within the reach area result in carefully-planned, flexible support being readily available. As a result of this more vulnerable families are being supported to look after their child during times of crisis. Data on outcomes and provision from the local authority show that the support is having an impact. Centre staff are providing excellent support to local nursery and playgroup staff to use the Common Assessment Framework process. The centre carefully assesses and reviews the needs of all users and consults with groups as to where to target further provision.

The centre offers an excellent range of well co-ordinated activities across the reach area. Outreach provision, in particular the Toy Bus, is thoughtfully-located and is particularly effective in engaging increasing numbers of users because it provides a range of activities in local communities. Managers are very careful to ensure that families access the full benefit of the centre's services through promotional events and well-attended family days, which are used to inform parents of all the activities available. Many parents commented that the centre has 'wonderful range of activities,' and 'provides an oasis of peace and on the really bad days'. The most vulnerable families are well-supported by staff to come to the centre.

Centre evaluations and discussions with users show that they thoroughly enjoy the courses and learning opportunities available to them. In all sessions, staff continually ensure that activities are interesting and relevant to users' lives. For example, children and parents engage in messy play while staff provide useful ideas on how this activity can be carried out at home in a confined space. Activities are firmly based on an assessment of need and a good understanding of the reach area. Consequently learning is planned to take place across the reach area at different times and on different days. Concerted actions by the centre and its partners are resulting in a steady increase of users from target groups.

The high quality of care, guidance and support is best captured in the words of one parent who said, 'Coming here has been a turning point, from the moment I walked in the door I was welcomed, valued and supported to get the help I needed.' Centre staff are very knowledgeable about the range of services available. The centre's information champion provides parents with an excellent first point of contact, skilfully signposting users to relevant agencies, liaising with Jobcentre Plus and supporting them to access specific services where appropriate. Good use is made of the local authority's language line to ensure that speakers of other languages have clear and accurate information. Strong partnerships with a number of support organisations ensure that there is a large amount of information, advice and support for families through the regular 'drop-in' sessions held across the reach area and on the Toy Bus.

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

Since her appointment, the integrated team leader, supported by the locality manager has had a significant impact on the range and quality of provision at the centre. Staff, users and partners talk about the integrated team leader's 'determination to ensure the very best services'. These two senior leaders have particularly high expectations of the centre staff, which is evidenced through their detailed annual performance reviews and monthly supervision meetings. The openness and friendliness with which staff work together is extended to the families who use the centre and reflects a real commitment to promoting equality and diversity. Effective performance management arrangements are in place to hold staff accountable for their work. Targets are set by the leaders and the local authority to drive improvement and these are suitably based on an accurate evaluation of the centre's main priorities for improvement. However, many of the targets lack the challenge needed to move the centre towards excellence.

Governance of the centre through the advisory board is at an early stage following changes to the structure and reach. Despite this, partners are well-informed of the progress and development of the centre and are used collectively and individually to challenge the centre's work. Projects are carefully evaluated seeking the views of users formally and informally. As one parent said 'they are always asking us for

feedback....they always want the activities to be better'. Staff rigorously evaluate the sessions they have delivered to ensure they always improve and are of the highest benefit to users. Senior leaders are determined to ensure that the centre is sustainable and the resources used by the whole community it serves. Resources are managed very efficiently and creatively with a high level of usage. The centre provides good value for money.

The centre is very successful in developing inclusive provision, which meets the needs of all of its users. The contribution of users is particularly valued. Positive images and carefully-developed programmes demonstrate the centre's commitment to reaching out to the most vulnerable and isolated groups. The proportion of black and minority ethnic users is small, reflecting the make-up of the local population. Those families who do use the centre are given high levels of support to integrate, including sensitive help with English if needed. The provision for users identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is sensitive and well-planned. The centre carefully scrutinises Early Years Foundation Stage data to identify and address variations in performance of different groups of children. As a result of this it is working closely with small groups of children to support them through their transition to school.

Safeguarding arrangements reflect excellent practice, with a central list of information that can be accessed and used easily. Child protection arrangements are well-known and staff are extremely confident to use them. Outreach work with the most vulnerable in the community is sensitive and effective. Policies and procedures to ensure the protection of children and other centre users are well-embedded so that people say they feel very safe. Intervention strategies are very effective, ensuring prompt and high quality multi-agency support.

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	2

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

None

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 New Earswick Children's Centre on 5-6 July 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all of you who made us feel so welcome and spent time talking with us during meetings and activities. We listened very carefully to what you told us and included many of your comments when we made judgements about your centre. Your comments were very helpful.

Those of you we spoke to say that the centre is a very warm and welcoming place to be where you and your children can make new friends and take part in activities. Many of you told us how much you enjoyed attending sessions such as 'Little Lambs' and the 'Dads' Group'. All users we spoke to say that the staff listen to what you have to say, particularly when you would like to try a new activity. We particularly enjoyed attending the 'Little Elms' and we were really impressed with your enthusiasm and the range of activities that were on offer. You say that they go out of their way to put on activities that you want and also to improve those that you feel are not so good. You were very positive about the opportunity to give your feedback and many of you are excited at the thought of being part of the parent focus groups. Throughout the inspection we were constantly told by children and parents of the difference that the centre was making to them. One of the very good activities that we heard about was volunteering and the help it gives to improving

confidence and improving job prospects. You were also very enthusiastic about the Toy Bus and the opportunities it provides you with to try out new toys.

We were very impressed by the way that the centre ensures that you are safe both at the centre and at home, through the information it provides you with on home safety and the way it helps you to keep you safe. We also think that the way that the centre monitors the uses of its staff and rooms is very good, making sure that really good use is made of the money it receives. The centre provides many good opportunities for new parents to receive helpful information and advice about how to manage children's behaviour, weaning and healthy eating. The centre supports those of you who want to move into employment through its links with Jobcentre Plus, as well as providing many of you with opportunities to work as a volunteer at the centre.

The team that leads the centre is very motivated and knows exactly what its members want to do to ensure the centre continues to improve. They are very keen for you to be even more involved in this and are looking at the best ways to achieve this. The centre collects information on how many of you are using the centre. We have asked them to work with health partners to collect information that shows how effective some of the sessions and activities are in helping families make progress. We have also asked centre managers to set more challenging targets to help the centre further improve the quality of its services. Representatives from the local authority meet with senior leaders to monitor the work of the centre. Once a year they formally evaluate the work of the centre. We have asked the local authority to make sure that this process reports on the work of your specific centre rather than on all the centres in York.

Thank you once again for your welcome and your willingness to talk to us. We wish you and your children every success in the future.

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