

Inspection report for Bowthorpe, West Earlham and Costessey Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Norfolk |
| Inspection number | 367755 |
| Inspection dates | 26–27 July 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Susan Smith HMI |

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| Centre governance | Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust |
| Centre leader | Sian Larrington |
| Date of previous inspection | Not applicable |
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| Linked school if applicable | Not applicable |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Footsteps Day Nursery EY298740 |

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 registered early years/childcare provision was carried out the week before inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the centre's governing body, parents and carers, and the senior management and leadership teams. They also consulted agencies working in partnership with the centre, members of the staff and users of the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Bowthorpe, West Earlham and Costessey Children's Centre was designated in 2005 as a phase one children's centre. Its reach area was subsequently expanded as phases two and three of the Sure Start children's centre programmes were introduced. The centre is operated by Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust on behalf of the local authority. The centre operates from its main base in Bowthorpe and provides additional services from two outreach sites. The centre delivers the full core offer of services.

The child poverty index places the Bowthorpe Ward in the most deprived 15% of wards in the country and one of the four most deprived in Norwich. The reach area has high levels of lone parents, teenage pregnancies and children in families dependant on very low incomes or workless benefits. Although the area has traditionally comprised mainly White British families, this has been changing over recent years to include a diverse range of ethnic groups. The reach area also covers Rounderwell Park Traveller site.

An integrated team of health professionals, including health visitors, midwives, project workers, community nursery nurses, family support workers and speech and language therapists, works together to provide a full range of services and activities.

The centre's full day-care provision is delivered by Footsteps Nursery. The nursery was inspected the week before the children's centre. The inspection report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. The centre's premises are used to provide a range of activities for children and families and also to provide a venue for meetings, consultations and community activities. Children enter early years provision with skills and knowledge generally below those expected for their age.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Bowthorpe, West Earlham and Costessey Children's Centre is an outstanding children's centre that plays a pivotal and highly respected role in serving the needs of its community. Everyone involved in the centre holds a shared vision which leads to a passionate belief in the work that is going on.

The centre manager is very much at the heart of the centre's success. Drive and ambition at all levels are strong, and teamwork and morale among staff are extremely positive. There are clear lines of responsibility, and the senior management team meets regularly to discuss the centre's work and its plans for improvement. Future development is planned meticulously using evaluation and data available to the centre, so that services continue to improve. Consequently, the centre has outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

A key strength of the centre is the excellent relationships forged over time which foster a strong sense of common purpose among the vast majority of providers and professionals. Partnership working is exemplary. Links between local general practitioners and the centre are a model of best practice.

The ethos of the centre is seen in the way it helps parents to develop stronger relationships with their children. The centre engages successfully with its users,

including those from particularly vulnerable groups, and has an extremely positive impact on their lives. Centre staff are highly adaptable and offer flexible provision for families to meet their specific needs. This is based on excellent assessment of users' needs resulting in individually tailored services and support.

The centre provides outstanding care, guidance and support for users. Users confirm they feel extremely well supported, particularly when feeling vulnerable or in times of crisis. This was reflected in one user's comment, 'It's a godsend; I know that I would not be the person I am now without the support of the centre.' Safeguarding procedures are extremely robust. Systems, policies and procedures, services and partnerships ensure the well-being and safety of users, exemplify best practice and have led to impressive improvements to users' well-being.

All users of the centre value the welcoming, safe environment. Users comment that there is always a warm welcome when you come in, and they are always greeted with a smile and friendly response. Hence, users continue to visit the centre with many attending regularly over a number of years, often for more than one session each week. There is good progression between activities which have helped some users into employment. Staff have developed long-standing relationships within the local community and have a deep understanding of the needs of the families who live within it.

The centre demonstrates great success in lifting parents' confidence, developing their understanding and adoption of healthy lifestyles and safe practices, and extending parenting skills. However, the centre has not yet implemented training opportunities for users to become volunteers at the centre and some users require continued support to enable them to take up training to develop skills to improve employability. The centre is very aware of this and is exploring ways to offer a suitable scheme for volunteers. It is continuously targeting users to attend training and is looking at ways to extend training opportunities through partnerships with other agencies.

Equality of opportunity and celebration of diversity are outstanding. The centre has been proactive in going out into parts of the community where people are reluctant to come to the centre base. They have set up provision at the local Travellers' site. This has established positive relationships with these families and, as a result, some have accessed universal services at the centre and there is a 100% immunisation rate for Travellers' children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop further opportunities for adults to:
 - become involved in learning and developing skills to improve their employment opportunities
 - engage in voluntary work at the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Promoting healthy lifestyles and supporting emotional well-being are central to all services, resulting in outstanding outcomes in health and being safe. New mothers respond extremely well to high-quality advice about breastfeeding. As a result, the number of mothers choosing to breastfeed their babies is increasing steadily. Users talk enthusiastically about the support they have had to improve children's diets and the excellent baby massage classes that improve and support attachment and emotional well-being. Very effective partnership and integrated working at the child health clinics and during home visits promote and monitor very successfully the health, development and emotional well-being of parents, carers and children. Immunisation rates are very high and obesity rates are not increasing.

Users state they feel very safe and secure during activities at the centre, at outreach venues and during home visits. The centre is outstandingly good at identifying vulnerable children and their families and then responding quickly and effectively to their needs. Because of the excellent, trusting and caring relationships users have with staff, users frequently expressed that they would turn to the centre in times of crisis.

The centre gives the highest priority to safeguarding families and has exemplary procedures to safeguard children. In a significant number of cases, without the intervention and support of the centre, children and their parents would require the help of statutory services. In many of these cases, the work carried out by the centre has prevented children from being taken into care or having a child protection plan. The strong partnership with social services ensures that children with a child protection plan are extremely well supported, and services are coordinated very effectively. The Common Assessment Framework is used very well for the early identification of children's additional needs and to ensure coordinated service provision to meet them.

Parents and carers enjoy opportunities to engage in their children's play and gain a good understanding of how to support their learning through a rich and varied range of high-quality activities and drop-in sessions. These also contribute to children's good development in their early years. Parents and carers report that these sessions have also given them confidence and helped them to engage positively with their children. A strong focus is placed on developing children's language and communications skills. Speech and language therapists are based at the centre and have been proactive in working with childcare providers in the area to ensure the early identification of children showing signs of language delay. This enables any emerging issues to be addressed at the earliest opportunity and has resulted in an increase in referrals being made for speech and language therapy.

Support for parenting is of high quality and well coordinated. As a result, parents report that they have gained confidence in doing things such as messy craft activities with their children at home. The children's centre teacher works well with the early years' providers in the area and this has resulted in better transition procedures for children transferring from childcare to school.

The centre is an integral part of the community and all users treat each other with respect. Parents and carers value highly the opportunity to socialise at the centre and make new friends. This enables them to support each other outside of the centre and removes the feeling of isolation that a lot of users stated they felt before coming to the centre.

Parents and carers are asked their views during visits to the centre and home visits. A parents' forum is becoming increasingly well established and a representative from the forum is elected to the advisory board which enables users to contribute effectively to the governance of the centre. However, attendance at the parents' forum is not always high and the centre does not monitor if attendance gives a good representation from all groups within the community.

The leaders acknowledge that there is more to do to help users to develop their confidence so that they feel more ready to take up learning and qualifications which will enable them to pursue employment opportunities.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

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| The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them | 1 |
| 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?

1

Contact with centre users begins with universal health services and, as a result, the centre is reaching all its local families. Very effective systems are in place to ensure that the centre is swiftly informed of any new families with young children moving into the area and these families receive a visit from the health visitor. This ensures that these families are made aware of the centre at the earliest opportunity. By working in a sensitive and persistent way, the centre ensures that those who are hardest to reach, and need support the most, do in fact receive it. Case studies show the centre has been successful in engaging the hard-to-reach where statutory agencies have not. This is very evident through the work with Traveller families.

The centre has excellent knowledge and understanding of the community it serves.

The centre has a wealth of data, both from its own sources and the local authority. Feedback from users and the close cooperation and communication between professional staff working in the reach area ensure highly effective assessment of the needs of local families. Excellent use is made of assessment information within the centre which leads to timely, high-quality multi-agency support when it is needed. The computerised recording system enables staff to access the records easily and ensures the information they receive is consistent. The provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is particularly good. It is targeted effectively and this ensures that a high proportion of families who have specialist needs receive the support they require.

Activities are planned to offer a natural progression for children and increasingly for adults. For example, new parents can take their babies to 'Early Days' and baby massage classes and progress on to 'Baby Group', followed by 'Baby Explorers' followed by 'Stay and Play' sessions. Each of these experiences builds skilfully on what has gone before. Users recognise the richness of provision. For instance, one said, 'It's a really good place, I love it. It helps me relax and network with other mums. Plus it's a warm, safe and colourful place for my baby.'

Users of the centre often arrive with very low starting points in terms of skills and readiness to attend training and/or employment. Increasingly, centre staff are encouraging and helping parents and carers to access training and further education and, if appropriate, to seek employment opportunities. This helps many parents and carers to grow in confidence and begin to develop good skills for the future. Although the centre is constantly reviewing the frequency of courses, particularly those for numeracy and literacy, and tracking attendance, it recognises that more needs to be done to encourage greater participation and that users are supported further to ensure they attend a higher proportion of the sessions within a course.

The quality of care, guidance and support is excellent. Highly skilled, dedicated and enthusiastic staff ensure there is always a warm welcome and a listening ear readily available for users. They act as good role models and work sensitively and effectively with parents and children ensuring families can benefit fully from the provision. Parents interviewed confirmed high levels of satisfaction with the centre's provision and were very clear about the benefits. There is sympathy for users, but also pragmatism and suitably tuned challenge. Staff respond well, and often imaginatively, to the wide range of problems and issues that they meet. Consequently, the centre provides a haven to which families readily turn in times of crisis for practical and emotional support. The extremely high level of support empowers users to change their lives for the better, and many become sufficiently self-assured to focus on making life better for their children. The quality of outreach work is exemplary. Working with families in their homes is an established strategy which is used very effectively by staff who engage with families exceptionally well, because all contact is completely tailored to individual needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents | 1 |
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| and other users | |
| 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 | 1 |
| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community | 1 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The centre manager is highly respected by professionals and parents. This has resulted in the centre forging ground-breaking partnerships, such as the work with local general practitioners. Her wholehearted enthusiasm and systematic approach, combined with high aspirations, successfully inspire staff and result in a very strong staff team. Staff are enthusiastic and motivated, and show a commitment to improving outcomes for users and striving towards high-quality services. Staff are proud of the impact they have on the lives of the children and families who attend.

Roles and responsibilities are clearly understood. Procedures for performance management are thorough and used well to develop the skills and expertise of centre staff. Staff value the supervision and professional development opportunities they receive. Governance arrangements are excellent and clearly understood by all parties. The advisory group provides the centre with challenge and support.

Self-evaluation is accurate and, increasingly, is being supported by evidence of the impact the centre is having on the lives of its users. For example, the centre is gathering evidence of impact through case studies.

Evaluation of services is carried out at every level and staff routinely reflect on their practice to identify improvement. Parents' and carers' views are welcomed and acted upon. The centre is using innovative ways to evaluate its services. For example, it has recently completed a pilot project of a new evaluation method at the 'Stay and Play' sessions. Plans are in place to roll this model out to evaluate other activities and services the centre provides.

A wide range of data is being collected and is robustly analysed to support the development of the centre's effectiveness. All staff and partners are committed to evaluation and reflective practice and are increasingly providing evidence to hold them accountable and to demonstrate the impact of the services and activities on outcomes. All have a strong understanding of the targets for improvement and what needs to be done to achieve these.

The centre is successful in promoting equality and respect for diversity. This is evident in pioneering work undertaken with Traveller families. In addition, there is a commitment to providing an inclusive environment and removing barriers. For example, crèche places are provided for parents and carers to access courses such

as those to improve their numeracy and literacy skills. Provision and support for children and adults with special educational needs and/or disabilities are excellent.

Safeguarding procedures are extremely robust and vetting and recruitment practices are applied rigorously. Highly effective procedures are in place to monitor children's safety and well-being. Staff exemplify high-quality practice as they see safeguarding at the heart of the centre's work. Outstanding inter-agency partnership ensures excellent support is given to families in times of crisis. Protocols and practice for making referrals and sharing information between agencies are comprehensive. Intervention happens at the earliest stage and the multi-professional team works very effectively together to prevent families developing even greater needs.

The quality of resources is excellent and these are deployed very effectively to provide a fully integrated package for service users. Families benefit from a well-integrated, highly responsive service provided by the staff team which contains an excellent mix of expertise that is highly pertinent to the work of the centre. Very effective use is made of the accommodation at the centre and staff are deployed extremely well ensuring that the centre provides outstanding value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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| The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood | 1 |
| The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community | 1 |
| The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community | 1 |
| The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| 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 inspection of Footsteps Day Nursery was carried out on 22 July 2011. The nursery was judged to be good. Findings from this inspection have contributed to the children's centre report and judgements on outcomes for users and the effectiveness of provision.

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 Bowthorpe, West Earlham and Costessey Children's Centre on 26 to 27 July 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

This centre is at the heart of the community and is relied upon for the well-being of large numbers of people. The very strong leadership of the centre manager and her dedicated team have provided you and your children with a wide range of excellent services that are carefully tailored to meet your particular needs. This is because centre staff and professionals from different agencies work extremely closely with you and with each other to find out exactly what help and support you and your families need and make sure this is provided.

Some of you went out of your way to tell us how much you enjoy the activities provided through the centre. Those of you who spoke to us said that your children's centre is a friendly and welcoming place and many added that you do not know what you would have done without the support provided by the centre.

You told us that you think that the centre is a safe place for parents and their children. Inspectors agreed with this view and think that staff work very well to ensure the health and safety of all who use the centre. The centre is also very good at helping children in need to be safe through very effective partnership and multi-agency working. They are helping you to keep you and your children healthy by encouraging new mothers to breastfeed and by promoting healthy eating.

The care, guidance and support that you and your children receive are excellent. This is because the staff are very successful at helping you to decide how to improve your lives and then making sure that you access the right services to do this. Those of you we spoke to said how much you appreciated that there is always someone to help when you need advice. Many of you who have felt isolated and alone with your problems say you have made friends as a result of the centre's work.

The centre also provides excellent resources, including high-quality staff, to help your children enjoy their learning through play and so develop their full potential. They also help you to support your children's learning and development at home by providing services which help you bond with your children, such as baby massage. They encourage you to engage in play with your children from a very early age at sessions such as 'Explorers' and 'Stay and Play'. You told us the centre has helped you develop closer and more effective relationships with your children. This was very evident when we visited you.

The centre manager and all the centre staff understand your needs, and those of your children, extremely well, and they carefully check that they continue to do an excellent job. They show that they are determined to improve the lives of users even more. We have asked the centre to continue to help you to develop your confidence so that you feel more ready to take up learning and qualifications which will enable you to pursue employment opportunities. In addition, we have asked the centre to consider opportunities for you to become more involved in the centre through a volunteer programme.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honest and open discussions with us 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.