

Inspection report for West Street Children's Centre

Local authority	North Lincolnshire
Inspection number	376306
Inspection dates	27–28 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Pamela Blackman HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Sam Croxall
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY392296 Poppy Fields Nursery

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.

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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, parents and carers, partner agencies and local authority senior managers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The centre, situated within the town of Scunthorpe, was designated as a phase one Sure Start in May 2005 and was fully operational by October 2006 offering a full range of services. Poppy Fields Nursery provides day care with education on site and is subject to a separate inspection. Services provided by the centre include: family support; actions to improve the health and emotional well-being of children and their families; support to young mothers, and fathers; transition support for children and supporting parents into employment or training. Governance of the centre rests with the local authority and the parents' forum represents the centre on the Area Advisory Group.

The centre has a family room, kitchen and toilet areas, laundry, three offices, a health practitioner's room, midwifery office, and meeting rooms. The building has full disabled access. Poppy Fields Nursery provides access for children and families to secure outdoor space. Most children enter childcare and early education with a narrower range of experiences and skills than typically expected for their age. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is very low at under 2%; however, of the six children registered five are accessing services.

West Street Sure Start Children's Centre serves the town of Scunthorpe and Crosby ward with the majority of children living in the 10% most deprived ward in the country. The

percentage of children from a minority-ethnic background is above local and national averages. The majority of those residents from British minority-ethnic groups are of Asian heritage, the largest being from the Bangladeshi community. Almost half of north Lincolnshire's Muslim community lives in the reach area. Recent new communities include Polish, Iraqi and Kurdish families. An estimated 18 different languages are spoken in the locality. The proportion of children attending schools in the area who are entitled to free school meals is above the national average as is the proportion of children aged under-four who are living in households where no one is working and are dependent on benefits. Unemployment rates for the area are twice the local average and above national average.

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

West Street Children's Centre provides good services for young children and their families. It has built good partnerships with a wide range of settings and these are now well established and are effectively meeting the needs of families in the area, including the most vulnerable. It is good at promoting the learning, development and enjoyment of all its users particularly those from minority-ethnic backgrounds. It works very effectively in an inner urban area of high disadvantage and has established itself at the heart of the community, promoting respect and understanding, and improving community cohesion.

Families feel safe in the centre and high priority is placed on promoting safety, particularly in the home. Good risk assessments are carried out on all activities. The centre staff know the families and the area very well and the centre is accessed by a large majority of eligible families in the reach area. The staff carry out accurate assessments on families' needs, including those where children are subject to an inspection plan, and work well with social workers and others to support them.

Well-attended drop-in clinics, good support for mothers-to-be and new families and a wide range of healthy eating activities contribute well to the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Children' and adults' health and well-being has improved as a result. However, steps to

address some aspects of the communities' health, such as reducing obesity rates and sustaining breastfeeding after two months, have not yet had a significant impact. Families thoroughly enjoy the activities offered by the centre especially the good opportunities to play, learn and have fun together. Children make good progress with their speech and language and this is well supported by regular input from specialist speech and language staff.

The centre provides a good range of learning opportunities, advice and guidance to improve adults' future employment and economic well-being. These include developing links with Jobcentre Plus. However, systems to measure the success of these activities and ensure they are consistently effective are not fully established.

Staff work well together to deliver high quality activities and support to families. Parents and carers are increasingly involved in making decisions about the development of the centre through regular consultation and the parents' forums. However, the role of the local authority representatives and that of parents and carers in supporting the centre through the advisory board is less well established.

The centre provides good value for money and has a high commitment to sustainability. Safeguarding has a high priority and staff are well trained and experienced in recognising signs of abuse. All relevant checks on staff, other agencies and volunteers are recorded. Good and effective partnership working ensures information is effectively shared between agencies to make certain that services are well integrated to promote health, education and financial management. Good attention is paid to ensuring equality and diversity is promoted well and particularly good work is undertaken with the high numbers of users from minority-ethnic backgrounds who access the service. This is well supported by bilingual staff and volunteers.

The centre has good capacity for sustained improvement. The centre is well led and managed. Self-evaluation is robust and well established and is effectively scrutinised and challenged by the local authority. For some parents the support from the centre has changed their lives and those of their children dramatically.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve health outcomes by working with partners to increase the numbers of women breastfeeding beyond two months and to lower the rates of obesity in young children in the reach area.
- Further improve the economic well-being of families by improving the links with Jobcentre Plus and measuring the impact of training opportunities by tracking the outcomes for those users who are signposted to other agencies.
- Build on arrangements for the advisory board by ensuring appropriate representation of senior managers and other key partners and by providing training for members, particularly for parent representatives, so that they understand their remit and terms of reference.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Health outcomes for families are good. Regular high attendance rates at the daily drop-in children's clinic means that parents and carers are well supported when they have concern about their children's health. Health data confirms these have helped to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to accident and emergency. Good pre-natal support is provided through pre-birth classes - 'babies and bumps sessions'. As a result women are more confident and informed about their choices for labour and birth and increasing numbers stop smoking. However, despite the good efforts of staff to support breastfeeding, few mothers continue to breastfeed beyond two months. The promotion of healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating, good hygiene, and participation in sport or other activities, has improved the understanding and take up of healthier choices by children and their families, but the numbers of children who are at risk of obesity continues to rise. A well supported 'cheque book' scheme has enabled families who could not normally afford sessions at the leisure centre the opportunity to try different activities.

Children and families that come to the centre have a good understanding of their own and others' safety. Children behave well and are kept safe. Good outreach work with parents and carers increases their understanding of dangers in the home, including fire safety. This is supported by a safety equipment loan scheme. Staff make good use of the Common Assessment Framework and other procedures to support the most vulnerable children including those on a child protection plan. Thorough risk assessments are carried out for all activities and robust security procedures are in place, including a signing-in process, door lock alarms and visitor badges. Parents say they feel very safe at the centre.

Children make good progress in their learning and development from their individual starting points. Good transition arrangements mean they are well prepared to start school. Children develop good speech and language skills through participating in the Every Child a Talker programme and there are effective links and referrals to the in-house speech and language workers. Children who speak English as an additional language are supported well by bilingual staff and volunteers. The centre has close links with the local library and museum staff, meeting together to plan and promote a range of activities at both venues. These include the Rhyme Time challenge where children and families are encouraged over the weeks to learn a number of rhymes during the play sessions. Good numbers participate in these sessions.

Children develop positive relationships in response to staff's good examples. Parents and carers contribute well to decision-making in a variety of ways from suggestions about the sessions to more formal contributions through the advisory board, although their role is not fully established. Parents comment that their views are valued and taken seriously. Children's views are canvassed regularly regarding what they enjoy, with displays and comments visible around the centre. Children's behaviour is good and was exemplary in the sessions observed.

The centre offers a good range of additional training opportunities for adults to build confidence and help them find employment. This is helping improve economic stability and independence. Users are increasingly involved as volunteers at the centre. Good links are in place with a local employment agency who can offer part time work around childcare and a wide variety of training opportunities. In January 2011 ten parents were referred to Crosby Employment Bureau for short taster courses in cleaning, first aid and food hygiene. The centre has links with the Jobcentre Plus, but these are not yet well established, limiting their impact. Referrals are made on a regular basis to in-house welfare-rights workers based at Ashby children's centre and to Crosby Community Association. The centre is helping families in crisis get vouchers for enough food for three days through referrals to the Baptist food-bank scheme. However, the systems to measure the effectiveness of these activities are still developing.

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	2

How good is the provision?

2

Good outreach services ensure the needs of the most vulnerable families, including those subject to domestic violence and younger parents, are effectively assessed and responded to appropriately. Sensitive work is done with users from a variety of minority-ethnic groups to help them feel confident to attend sessions and undertake assessments if necessary. Parents and carers, who attend user groups, have their needs identified effectively and are signposted to other provision. The centre knows its users well and most users make good improvements in the understanding of their children's health, emotional and developmental needs and their own economic well-being.

Parents, carers and children are excited and proud of their achievements. Differences are recognised and the centre pays excellent attention to supporting families' different needs and enabling children to understand the needs of others. The centre effectively promotes purposeful learning and development and takes every opportunity to celebrate achievement and raise the aspirations and expectations of children, their families and other users. Attendance at sessions is good and well-monitored and registrations are high. The use of bilingual staff and volunteers ensures good opportunities to register families, particularly

from the Bengali and Polish communities, to encourage them to access further services once they become familiar with the centre. These have contributed towards the number of children registered from the British minority-ethnic communities increasing from 60 in 2009/10 to 350 currently.

Good impartial advice and guidance is available to families on a range of issues including: assisting them in accessing benefits; seeking work; help with housing issues; to stop smoking; and support them with alcohol and drug misuse and improve their sexual health. Support is well tailored to suit individual need and in times of crisis families report they were very well supported. One user who spoke to inspectors summed this up well, 'We are far better people and parents and we have created a loving home for our children. We have a better quality of life and our family is stronger and we are grateful for all the help we received.'

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

Managers are ambitious for the centre and effectively communicate high expectations to all staff and users. Good use of local data and accurate assessment of families' needs ensure gaps relating to education and health outcomes are narrowing for the most disadvantaged families. Managers set a clear direction to all staff that leads to highly integrated services. Regular and robust supervision sessions effectively support and challenge staff in their work. Staff feel valued and communication is good. Advisory board arrangements are not as robust as they could be and the centre has experienced some difficulties in the consistent attendance of local authority representatives and the role of parents and carers.

The annual conversation with the local authority supports the decision-making procedure through challenging the centre. Effective quality-assurance arrangements are in place to ensure the centre is accountable. Parents and carers are suitably involved in the process through discussions at the parents' forum. An independent evaluation exercise is done once a year, which effectively informs planning and future developments.

A suitable range of good resources are available at the centre including good play space, secure outdoor play area, garden and kitchen facilities. The centre makes good use of shared resources to secure best value for money. The centre has a high commitment to sustainability including a focus on recycling and encouraging users and families to consider sustainable resource usage, for example, a clothes swap and a vegetable garden. Staff are

very well deployed across the reach area to ensure their expertise is best used. All the facilities at the centre are well used by other agencies and community groups. Every proposed activity is accurately costed to ensure it meets budget requirements.

Equality and diversity are effectively promoted through adherence to good policies and procedures, ensuring the centre meets its legal and statutory requirements. The achievement gap in relation to early years' scores is narrowing, and the attainment of all children is improving. Parents make good use of crèche and childcare so they are able to attend training sessions and other activities. The centre undertakes good shared work to support families with children who have a known disability. West Street regularly celebrates diversity through recognition of cultural events and special celebrations, for example, it recently held a very well attended joint multicultural women-only event celebrating the diversity of food, dress and dance. A particular strength of the centre is its bilingual staff and regular volunteers who speak Bengali, Polish and other Eastern European languages. The centre successfully established a diversity coffee morning to help address community cohesion by bringing people from diverse backgrounds to play with their children, share and communicate.

Safeguarding arrangements are good and thoroughly understood by staff. All necessary checks have been undertaken and safeguarding is prioritised. Staff carry their action cards on them at all times to ensure procedures are accurately followed and all information sharing protocols and child protection procedures are clear. Parents are aware, through a display in the centre, of who the child protection officer is, and parents are kept fully informed of any referrals being made. The centre identifies concerns about possible abuse, records information relevant to safeguarding clearly and accurately, and shares it appropriately, both internally and with other agencies.

There are good partnerships to support the centre's work. Partners speak highly of the services offered. The centre enjoys good relationships with local schools in the reach area and with other early years' providers. The views of young children are routinely sought and adjustments made to the programme of activities as necessary.

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 West Street Children's Centre on 27 -28 Jul 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you to those of you who came to speak to inspectors. We read what you have written about how the centre was helpful and supported you and your children, especially as some of you were shy to start with as English is not your first language. We found that many of you use the centre often and enjoy the courses and activities you attend. The centre places a high priority on helping you and your children learn new skills and this is helping you to develop in confidence and your children to be well prepared for starting school.

You told us you really appreciate being able to walk into the antenatal clinic and you also like the fact that there is a nurse at the centre daily for when you have concerns about your children's health. While lots of you told us that the centre gives you good information about being healthy, we know the centre could work a bit harder with its partners to make sure that more mothers breastfeed their babies for longer. We are concerned that some young children are overweight and so we have asked the centre to make sure that it continues to work with partners to support you with this.

We know that many of you have been to classes at the centre and found the English lessons particularly helpful. A further successful course was the 'helping in schools' course and some of you told us that after your placements you were able to get jobs with your local schools. We are really pleased that many of you have gone on to other training programmes. However, we think the centre could do a little more to measure how these opportunities have made a difference to your lives.

We found that the centre is a very safe and welcoming place for you and your children. It works well with other agencies to protect children's welfare. The centre is good at encouraging people from different faiths and communities to participate. It is fully inclusive.

The centre offers a number of different services which are helpful to families. These include baby clinics, play activities and healthy-eating sessions and child care. We found there is lots of helpful information for you and many of you are making good use of the Crosby employment agency to help you find work. However, we think that there could be better links with the Jobcentre Plus and we have suggested this is further developed. We know that many of you come from different countries and you find it helpful that staff in the centre speak your language. We are pleased that the coffee mornings are proving so successful. Some of you have come back as volunteers and you are able to make the sessions very lively and interesting for the children by teaching them songs in Polish and other languages. We think this makes the centre a very lively and welcoming place.

The centre is good at making sure families get the right sort of support when they need it. Many of you told us that you feel valued when you come to the centre and you like the fact that nobody judges you. The centre is good at asking you about what you have enjoyed and what else you would like to do. We know the centre has gone through a lot of changes recently and we think it has done this well with few interruptions to your regular activities. We think more of you could be helped to work with the centre to decide what else needs to be done. We have asked the centre to work on this and support more of you to attend the advisory board. We have asked the centre to make sure that you are properly trained to do this. We have also asked the centre to make sure the representatives from the local authority and other partners participate in the advisory board so the right decisions can be made quickly.

Thank you once again to those of you who came to speak to us. We wish you all the best for the future.

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