

# Inspection report for The Tree House Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	384169
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 September 2011
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	The Tree House Nursery EY 411414

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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 the centre manager, representatives from health services, partnership agencies and the local authority, the staff team, nursery staff, parents and carers.

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

## Information about the centre

The Tree House Children's Centre developed from a Sure Start local programme and was the first designated children's centre in Suffolk in April 2004. The current manager was recently appointed to the post in a permanent capacity after several months of carrying out the role in an acting capacity. She also manages one other children's centre serving the North East Ipswich Locality.

The reach area has high levels of unemployment, teenage pregnancies and low educational expectations in schools. Cases of child poverty and the proportions of families on benefits and/or living in unsuitable housing are high. Most children enter early years provision with a much narrower range of skills and knowledge than is typically expected for their age. The local population is mostly White British with a growing percentage from other minority ethnic groups including those from Asian, Portuguese and Eastern European backgrounds. The percentage of families where English is not the first language is increasing.

The centre is located in one building which is a converted public house with a half-acre urban garden. It provides the full core offer including family support, child and family health services and has good links with Jobcentre Plus. The centre's full day-care provision is delivered by the Tree House Nursery which is incorporated into the main building. The Tree House Nursery has separate inspection arrangements to the children's centre and was last inspected in November 2010.

An advisory board acts as a link between the centre’s users and the local authority, which is responsible for governance.

## 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 families**

<b>2</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>2</b>
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## Main findings

Tree House Children's Centre is a well-established and effective children’s centre that users say is ‘invaluable’. It is welcoming to the community, knows its users well and has a very good understanding of the local area and many of the issues which users face. It offers an environment which is friendly, safe and accessible.

Good leadership by the recently appointed manager has secured significant improvements in a relatively short period of time. These include placing a greater emphasis on outreach provision, strengthening arrangements for safeguarding users, improving staff supervision, and re-establishing an advisory board. She demonstrates a passion and relentless determination to improve the life chances of families in the local community.

The centre has developed good partnerships with a range of other agencies which ensure effective working practices, such as the sharing of information and signposting to each other’s services. Procedures for safeguarding are comprehensive and robust. The centre is rightly recognised by users as a place of safety. Relationships with parents and carers are good, and the centre rightly prides itself on the warm welcome it extends to all. Users speak very positively about what the centre provides and say that all staff, without exception, are welcoming and very helpful.

Strong multi-agency working provides clear and carefully targeted support and guidance for families, with the result that their well-being is improved. Assessments of need are thorough, and concerns are followed through with diligence by a range of professionals. Regular meetings about vulnerable children ensure that support is targeted effectively to ensure that levels of care within their families improve. Staff are very caring and work hard to provide a secure and nurturing environment within the centre. Support is carefully tailored to meet the needs of users, especially those

who are in challenging circumstances or in a period of crisis. The centre is inclusive and fully celebrates diversity.

A high priority has been given and continues to be given to improving children's achievements, especially in communication, language and literacy and mathematics. Despite the high quality of activities and childcare provision, the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores have shown no improvement over the last two years and the performance remains well below that of Suffolk as a whole. The centre recognises that more needs to be done to improve children's achievements. Plans are in place to liaise with schools and other childcare providers in the area to work together to address this issue.

The centre encourages adults to take part in a range of activities and values their feedback, making changes and introducing new ideas in response to their views. For example, an allotment project was recently introduced in response to users' feedback.

Governance is good, and clear lines of accountability have been established. Staff display a strong sense of teamwork. They are highly self-motivated, resourceful and enthusiastic about providing the best possible levels of service and care for users. The whole staff and leadership team are self-critical and constantly search for ways to do things better. Weekly team meetings focus on performance to ensure families with the greatest needs receive high-quality support.

The centre's self-evaluation is accurate and covers all the necessary areas. The centre successfully identifies areas of strength and weakness. The centre has identified that the mechanisms for collecting, collating and analysing impact data are not sufficiently embedded in its day-to-day practice to fully demonstrate the impact the centre is having in improving outcomes for families. However, case-study evidence is robust and shows considerable impact for the most vulnerable families in the community.

Action planning is sufficient to ensure that the centre continues to improve. However, it does not always contain sharp measurable targets. This hinders the advisory board's ability to fully evaluate the impact of the centre's work and provide challenge.

The centre's recent progress and the energy with which weaknesses are currently being tackled are indicative of its good capacity to sustain improvements.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Continue to work with the local authority, local schools, local childcare providers and childminders to develop strategies to improve children's achievements, especially with regard to communication, language and literacy and mathematics.
- Ensure the action plan contains sharp measureable targets to enable the advisory board to provide challenge.
- Sharpen the approach to collecting, collating and analysing impact data, so that the centre is able to prove that it is making a difference for all its users.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2
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The centre offers a broad range of programmes to families to help improve their physical and emotional health. Analysis of data indicates that the number of children under five who are obese is falling and that the centre is starting to have an impact on increasing the number of new mothers starting breastfeeding and continuing breastfeeding after six weeks. Users' understanding of how to promote their own good health is developing through the implementation of a 10-week healthy lifestyle programme. This covers relevant topics such as healthy eating, exercise and dental health. Mothers who have had post-natal depression or adults who have had other health-related problems comment with gratitude on the positive impact which health professionals working at the centre have had on their lives.

As a result of the centre's input, children and families make good progress in developing their understanding of safety in and around the home. Attending first-aid courses means that parents and carers learn skills, such as resuscitation techniques, to keep their children safe. Parents and carers report that they are confident that their children are safe while attending the centre because of the security systems in place and staff's attentiveness. Good support is given to families who are subject to child protection plans in order to safeguard vulnerable children.

Users express verbally and through the written evaluations that they very much enjoy the activities offered. 'Stay and Play' sessions are extremely well attended and encourage parents to engage in meaningful play with their children as well as providing them with interesting ideas to try with their children at home. Parents feel empowered to learn and develop their own skills and knowledge through the good range of good quality courses available. Many parents have undertaken courses to help them with parenting. Other courses help to support parents in their own well-being, such as those about building confidence and for developing greater assertiveness. Parents are empowered to believe in themselves as parents and develop positive attachments with their children.

Despite data that indicate children's achievements at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is not improving, assessments of children who attend the nursery currently indicate that children are making good progress in all areas of learning and developing a good range of skills to prepare them for primary school education.

The centre identifies children who are in need and helps their families to access

funding for two-year-olds. These children benefit from places within the early years provision. The centre recognises that this is a crucial step in not only educating parents in the benefits of learning through play, but also providing these children with an extra year of education. As a result, these children are less likely to begin school with deficits in their learning ability and social behaviour. Children are supported to settle well into school through a cohesive programme of transition.

The centre provides wide-ranging support for parents and carers which is helping those who access the centre to learn and develop new skills and to improve their prospects for future employment. Some parents comment on how advice from the centre has made a difference within the home, and others on how they have developed self-confidence as a result of courses and one-to-one support. Case studies show how well individual families have progressed in their personal and social development, improved their parenting skills and strengthened their economic stability. The centre has been very successful in ensuring that families are able to access the benefits to which they are entitled to improve their economic well-being. Staff are passionate about their work and have a real desire to make a difference within the local community. Achievement is highly valued and celebrated, which is helping to raise users' aspirations.

Behaviour in and around the centre is good. Relationships within the centre are respectful and adults feel the centre makes a very important contribution to the community. Consequently, users are confident to give their opinions to staff on the activities they attend and issues within the centre. Although the advisory board is newly established, one parent has recently volunteered to take up the role of chair and several other parents have expressed an interest in attending. This allows a formal mechanism for parents' and carers' involvement in strategic decision making and service planning to be developed.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

2
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The centre delivers a good range of services and activities and ensures there is a good balance of universal and targeted services to meet the needs of the community. Good-quality partnership working ensures support for children and families is responsive and effective. Centre users benefit especially well from the breadth of partner organisations with which the centre works. This gives staff the capacity to support a considerable range of needs, such as coping with debt and mental health concerns. Staff are effective in signposting parents to other organisations, and through this, parents are able to access support and advice, for example on giving up smoking and dealing with drug addiction. The commissioning of counselling services has had a significant impact on the mental health of a number of users of the centre.

The quality of the early years provision is good for young children, parents and carers and other users, enabling children to learn and develop across all areas of learning through quality activities and resources that interest and engage them. Initiatives such as providing play session in the families homes, ensuring planning of all activities are linked to the Early years Foundation Stage and the introduction of a 'Little Explores' group which focus on the promotion of early communication and social skills have been introduced to raise children's achievements. However, it is too soon to measure the impact they are having.

The centre has good evidence of how it has enabled users to take on roles and responsibilities and develop their skills for the future; for example, the parent volunteer programme enables parents and carers to take on responsibility and complete courses leading to accredited qualifications. Many users are supported to improve their educational and personal development and to progress to further employment, education and training. Staff skilfully support parents to attend the 'Me, Myself and I' course. This course is very successful in raises self-esteem and the aspirations of those who attend. As a result, many go onto attended other courses.

Staff are effective at assessing the needs of individual children and families who use its services. For example, family support staff spend time getting to know families on a one-to-one basis in their homes before identifying what services may be useful to them. In addition, joint home visits are often made with staff from the referring agency ensuring that outreach provision is carefully focused on the needs of parents and carers. Staff make effective use of the Common Assessment Framework to ensure the individual needs of vulnerable families are identified and planned for.

Care, guidance and support arrangements are effective. Good, tailored support develops families' well-being. The open-door policy provides a listening ear to support children and families all year round. Users feel very well supported, particularly when in times of crisis. This is encapsulated by one user who stated, 'It saved my live,' and 'It stopped me doing things that I did not want to do.' All parents who spoke to inspectors were positive about the centre and articulated clearly the impact different services have had on their families' lives.



These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

<b>2</b>
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The staff work well together, and morale is high as a result. They are focused on local need and improving outcomes for centre users. The manager previously worked within the centre's family support team, so parents and carers have come to know and trust her well. She has high aspirations for the development of the centre and a determination to see projects through.

Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Procedures for performance management are thorough and used well to develop the skills and expertise of centre staff. Staff supervision has become more robust and is valued by staff, as are the professional development opportunities they receive. The local authority provides a clear framework for the centre and effective oversight. Governance and accountability are clear. The advisory board is establishing itself well but it is too early to assess its impact on providing effective challenge and support to the centre.

Partnerships are pivotal to the centre's good work. All partners spoken to were unanimous in their appreciation of the services and support they could access at the centre. One partner said, 'It's a real positive working relationship we have with this centre.' This was supported by another partner who simply said, 'This centre is brilliant in helping us support families.' The work with the health and social work teams is extremely effective. Together, they provide a thorough 'team around the child' approach to ensure that the most vulnerable children and families are protected and cared for.

Rigorous checks ensure that all who work or volunteer in the centre are suitable to work with children and vulnerable adults. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are good. Staff are well trained with regard to safeguarding, and all place a very high priority on ensuring confidentiality. The accommodation, inside and out, is well maintained, and staff conduct regular checks to assess safety.

The centre is collecting a wide range of data. It is able to measure the popularity of some services and can show that the most deprived families in the reach area have been served by the centre in some capacity. The process for evaluation involves others who work and are engaged in the centre. There is some evidence to show the

good impact of the centre's work on outcomes, and the centre recognises that the collection of evidence is an area to expand further.

Financial planning is rigorous and funds are used carefully to achieve the best and most appropriate services. The centre maximises the budget's potential. Volunteer parents receive a high level of training which develops their self-belief and skills and enables them to run groups and activities successfully within the centre. Staff and resources are deployed well across the two centres in the cluster to ensure the centre provides good value for money.

The engagement of users is good. There is a range of opportunities for centre users to share their views, contribute ideas and help shape future provision. As a result, users take full ownership of the centre and are very proud of all its services. Consequently, the centre is highly regarded by the local community.

The centre is fully committed to supporting equality and diversity across its area and wider community. It has an inclusive approach towards all services in order to eliminate any discrimination. Children with disabilities are supported well and services are adapted to suit individual need. The 'Home from Home' drop-in has been successful in attracting Bangladeshi families and other minority ethnic families into the centre.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>2</b>

## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made**

## during this inspection

Inspectors took account of the report for The Tree House Nursery which was inspected in November 2011. The setting was found to be good.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the The Tree House Children's Centre on 14 and 15 September 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

To help us make our judgements, we observed activities, looked at documentation and spoke with a large number of service providers, professionals and parents and carers. Thank you very much indeed to all of you who helped us to understand the quality of services provided by staff.

All 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 value the centre, which means you have no hesitation in using the services regularly.

The centre offers a good 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 benefit from and enjoy. You told us over and over again that coming to the centre had increased your confidence and self-esteem. 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 make sure this is provided. A strength of the centre is the care, guidance and support the centre provides for you, often in your own home.

You told us that you think that the centre is a safe place for parents and their children. Inspectors agree with this view and think that staff work very well to ensure the health and safety of all who use the centre.

At the moment, the centre leaders are in the early stages of collecting information about the centre's success and using this to help develop further services. We have asked them to sharpen the approach to collecting, collating and analysing impact data, so that the centre is able to prove that it is making a difference for all its users. However, they have a good understanding of your needs and a great determination to keep on improving.

It was evident to inspectors how much enjoyment you and your children get from engaging in good-quality play activities with your children at the centre. However, data from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile indicate that the achievement of children, particularly with regard to communication, language and literacy, and mathematics has not improved over the last two years. Therefore, we have asked the centre to work together with the local authority, other childcare providers and schools in the area to raise children's achievements, particularly in communication, language and literacy, and mathematics.

The centre manager has put together an ambitious action plan to improve the services offered to you. We have asked the centre to ensure that there are measurable targets to enable the advisory board to provide challenge. Although the advisory board has not been in operation long, some parents have expressed an interest in attending and the meetings are chaired by a parent. This allows you to play an active part in the decision making at your centre.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).