

Inspection report for Swingbridge Children's Centre

Local authority	Lincolnshire
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY348009 Children 1 st @ Grantham

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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 49 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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the principle practitioner, centre practitioner, parents and carers, the local authority, commissioned service providers and partner agencies.

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

Information about the centre

Swingbridge Children's Centre is located in the Earlsfield area of Grantham. It is sited in the heart of a large housing estate in a modular building next to a primary school. The linked day care provider is located next to the centre. It is a phase one children's centre that provides services to meet the core purpose of children's centres. Some services are delivered from a nearby children's centre within the same district. The local authority is responsible for governance arrangements. It implemented a restructure of children's services shortly before this inspection. The children's centre practitioner took up her post in September 2011 and is responsible for service delivery across the reach area for this centre; she also has responsibility for six other children's centres in the district. The centre serves an area in the top 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. Services delivered by the staff team and partners include health services, family support, employment and training signposting, targeted support for vulnerable families and family learning.

The majority of the housing stock in the area served by the centre is local authority property with some private housing and private rental property. There are large pockets of social disadvantage. The vast majority of the population in the reach area is White British, with a small but growing Eastern European community. Within the

community served by the children's centre, levels of worklessness are high. Most children aged under five years are living in families dependent on workless benefits. Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision across the area with skills, knowledge and abilities that are 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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

'It's brilliant, I wish I'd known about it sooner', is a comment made by a centre user and a reflection of what many other parents feel about Swingbridge Children's Centre. Users are very comfortable in the centre. Children play happily in the community area and soft play space while their parents spend time talking to staff and friends. The community café, run by volunteers from a local church, opens one day a week offering hot, nutritious meals at a very reasonable cost. This is a thriving service and is greatly valued by centre users.

Recent changes to the structure of service delivery have resulted in a new management team. The team has thoroughly reviewed the centre's systems for planning and recording and is putting in place strategies to improve some of them. The majority of families with children under five years living in the area are registered with the centre. Currently it does not have a clear enough picture of which parts of the reach areas users live in, or where families who are not registered or do not use the centre are living. A key hindrance towards registering even more families is the lack of information from health partners at a strategic level about where families with young children live. Despite this the methods used to refer users to the centre and the number of families who are in receipt of family support services indicate that the centre is reaching families whose circumstances have made them vulnerable or hard to reach.

The number of registered families recorded as actually accessing the centre's services is still not at a high level. However, records do not accurately reflect the volume of users who access all services offered by the centre. For example, families accessing the counselling service and in receipt of family support services are not taken into account when counting and recording activities. Services offered by the

centre are clearly linked to the priorities set in the local authority's children and young people plan and the information held about issues for the area served by the centre. Services also relate to the target groups set out in the core purpose for children's centres. As a result, the centre is successful in delivering services that are having a positive impact on outcomes for families.

There is a positive emphasis on preventative and early intervention work. Local partnerships with health workers are a strong feature of this work in referring families to centre services. Once referred to the centre, users' needs are assessed very well and their support is allocated to the service that is best placed to meet their need. This results in individualised, time limited packages of support being offered to users. The large majority of centre services are delivered by commissioned partners. The high quality agreements and relationships with commissioned partners have created a seamless service for centre users. Monitoring systems for commissioned services are rigorous and are heavily focused on the impact on the outcomes for service users.

Users are valued by the centre as partners in shaping service delivery. Seven parents are members of the advisory board and receive information about the performance of the centre, which they are encouraged to discuss and challenge in meetings. User feedback is sought on a regular basis using a number of methods including verbal feedback, comments books, evaluation forms and satisfaction surveys. Information from feedback is used well to review what the centre is offering to users. Evaluation of the long term impact of services is not yet robust enough. An example of this is users who access the 'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities' parenting course. They make comments such as, 'We are learning things for life not just to get through the next week.' The course clearly has a powerful impact on users when they are attending the course, but there is no routine follow up contact to provide the centre with information about the long term impact their services are having on users' lives. Until recently the centre's action plan was wide ranging and lacked sufficient focus on local need. The weaknesses in action planning and use of evaluation have been recognised by the new management team in the four weeks they have been in post. Changes to action planning were swift and now take into account issues such as the static levels of obesity in children at the end of Reception Year in school. Actions, responsibilities and timescales are clearly defined in the action plan, however, there is a lack of sharp, measureable targets included where these are relevant. Evaluation of long term impact is beginning to be addressed, with strategies being developed to use with participants who have recently started courses. These prompt and incisive actions demonstrate a good capacity for the centre to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the level of information sharing by health partners at a strategic level to enable the centre to target registration activity to where young children are known to live.
- Improve outcomes and service delivery by:
 - developing and refining evaluation, tracking systems and how attendance and contact with the centre is recorded to monitor the long term impact of the centre's work
 - introducing more measureable targets to the centre action plan.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Users are developing a good understanding of how to keep their families safe and healthy. This is reflected in the steep reduction of presentations at accident and emergency departments in the area and the vast majority of families taking the opportunity to immunise their children against high risk childhood illnesses. Users comment that they are much more aware of the need to look for 'hidden' sugar and fat in food when they are shopping, indicating their secure grasp of what they have learned.

Children who attend the linked day-care provider for the centre make rapid progress in their development. They are very well prepared for school and their attitude to learning is strong. Within the schools that have received targeted services the achievement gap between children whose circumstances mean they may find it more difficult to learn and their peers is narrowing well. Across the area served by the centre there is a year on year increase in the number of children who are achieving within expectations for their age at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Users who have attended parenting courses experience very positive changes in the relationships within their families. Parents' understanding of children's needs and why they may behave in ways that parents find unacceptable develops quickly and they readily adopt strategies they have been given to improve family life. Users' emotional well-being is very well supported by the centre and they gain confidence in their abilities. A fortnightly 'Dads' Group' is a highly-valued session that has enhanced the relationships the male carers who attend have with their children. This group is now run independently of the centre by a constituted committee illustrating how the centre empowers users to move on.

A small but rapidly increasing number of users are joining the centre's buddying and volunteering schemes and those who do this are proud of the work they do. These schemes provide them with training and personal development opportunities that are stimulating and enthuse them to think about further education and training. The centre has evidence that users access education and training opportunities as a result of their contact with the centre, however, the centre is currently not able to quantify this.

Users who receive services through the family support team and commissioned partners who offer financial and legal advice are very well supported. Families are

given support to reduce debt and access the benefits they are entitled to, alongside help with housing issues, bringing greater stability to their lives. Families who are subject to the Common Assessment Framework or who have entered into a 'Team Around the Child' agreement with the centre are also very well supported. Families find the coordinated approach to having all the agencies involved with their family in one place highly effective in reducing the demands on the family.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target 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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre's self-evaluation is accurate and is focused on the target groups outlined in the children's centres core purpose. This results in a good range of family learning opportunities and services that vary from drop-in sessions to targeted, individual family support. All services are well planned and are linked to the centre's priorities or to the needs of the users receiving the support. As a result, outcomes in all areas are good.

Retention rates on courses are high and this is particularly noticeable on the 'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities' course that lasts for 13 weeks. Records show that the vast majority of those who start the course complete it. Certificates are awarded to participants to celebrate their success. The centre is moving forward well in its work to increase the number of users who access employment, education or training and improve their qualifications. The young parents' group is thriving. The 'Young Expectant Parents' course that is run in conjunction with the local college results in GCSE credits for those who complete it.

The centre is making a concerted effort to reach all of the target groups in the area with the limited information it has and is very successfully engaging with young parents, fathers and the small minority ethnic community. Assessment of individual and family need is strong. The process looks at all of the influences on a family's life and seeks to address them through well tailored packages of support. This can include, for example, one to one counselling for a parent suffering from depression,

funding for childcare places for their older child, home help with their younger children and support to be re-housed. The vast majority of the centre's outreach work is done in family homes. This is highly effective in delivering one to one support that frequently results in families accessing more services in the centre and reducing isolation.

The welcoming environment contains displays with a wealth of information for users. The majority of staff skilfully incorporate important messages for users into their contact with them in ways that are accessible and non-threatening. This approach nurtures the relationship between staff and users and develops users' confidence in the centre. Consequently, in times of crisis users are confident to approach staff at the centre for help and support. This is then supplemented by referring families to good quality specialist partners who offer services such as debt, housing or legal advice, for example, following the breakdown of a relationship.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management, including governance arrangements, are good at all levels with evident motivation to improve and develop the centre. Clear and well-defined monitoring and accountability systems are in place. The staff have faced many changes in recent months. Despite this the level of service delivery to families has remained consistent and almost all outcomes remain good. The centre is led by highly motivated practitioners who focus on the priorities for the area served by the centre, which offers good value for money. Action planning now derives from the analysis of local need. However, targets are not yet sharp enough in all aspects of the action plan to enable the centre to measure its progress. Systems to monitor and track commissioned services are robust, but the centre is not yet thorough enough when monitoring its own performance.

Safeguarding users is a key priority for the centre. The comprehensive range of policies and procedures are implemented well. Volunteers, for example, are subject to vetting procedures, have a thorough induction and training programme, and access the same level of safeguarding training as employees. A notable strength of the centre is the good relationships that are fostered between the partners who deliver services in the centre. The vast majority of these are delivered by commissioned partners and a seamless service has been developed for centre users as a result of the strength of the relationships. Although a wide range of partners deliver services

in the centre the procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns are clear and well understood. Users are also well informed about what to do if they have a concern about a child's welfare. Case study evidence indicates that families receive well-integrated support from the centre and its partners. This includes sensitive joint working with families who are experiencing change or challenge in their lives.

The centre celebrates and promotes diversity through resources which reflect different faiths, cultures, and backgrounds. It provides an effective level of service for the families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities that are known to them. Careful consideration has been given to how accessible services are for their target groups, for example, the 'Dads' Group' meets on a Saturday and some sessions are offered in the evening. In addition to this, transportation and childcare are provided to support users to access services, without which they would not be able to attend.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
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	2

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

The findings linked to outcomes for children and the progress they make in their learning and development from the inspection of the linked day-care provider EY348009 Children 1st @ Grantham conducted on 4 October 2011 have been used to contribute to judgements made at this inspection. Children in the linked day-care provision are making outstanding progress in their learning and development and

outcomes for children are good overall.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Swingbridge Children's Centre on 5–6 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you to those of you who came to speak to us at the inspection. We found our conversations with you very useful. We also took some time to read the comments you make when you have used services at the centre. We know that you really appreciate the work the centre does with you and your families. We found that when you use the services at the centre it makes a real difference to your lives. For example, we know that you use the strategies you have been given on courses to help you to understand your children's behaviour and how you can respond to it. The centre is good at asking you if the work they have done with you has helped you when they have finished the work or you have finished a course. However, it does not know whether this work is still helping you in the longer term, for example, six months later. In addition the centre has not been efficient enough in how it records who is using the centre. This is another way that it is not checking how well it is doing. We have asked the centre to improve how they find if the work they do with you is effective.

A large number of families who live in the area served by the centre are registered with the centre and this is positive. However, the centre does not have a clear idea where the families who are not registered live because information about this is not shared effectively by the partners who hold it. This means that some families who may benefit from the centre's services could be missing out. The centre is successful in assessing your needs and the needs of the local area. This means that its work is focused on the things that are going to bring about the most improvement in what is most important for you and your area, such as your health and your education.

We know that those of you who use the centre value the learning and development opportunities for you and your children. We found that your children are doing really well when they attend day-care settings and as a result they are well prepared for when they start school. All children are now doing better than they have previously, in particular those who find learning harder than their peers. The centre is very good at making sure the people who work there are suitable to work with your families. They also use the policies and procedures that are in place to keep you safe very well. We found that the centre works well with other agencies to support and guide you when you are finding things difficult to manage. They make sure everyone who may be involved in working with your family is kept informed about your progress.

Those of you who have experienced 'Team Around the Child' meetings told us you found this very helpful in reducing the demands on your time and your family.

Thank you again to those of you who gave their time to come and speak to us and we wish you and your centre our best wishes for the future.

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