

Inspection report for Signpost Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	384091
Inspection dates	19–20 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Godfrey Bancroft

Centre leader	Marion Mayhew
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	St Augustine's Centre Colombia Way Norfolk PE30 2LB
Telephone number	01553 611105
Fax number	01553 816909
Email address	marionmayhew@signpostcc.co.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Mr Bee's 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.



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, members of the advisory board and trustees, senior members of staff, partner providers, including the headteacher of a nearby school, parents, carers and children.

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

Information about the centre

The Signpost Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre. The children's centre was designated in February 2007, and full core offer was confirmed in March 2009. The lead partner for the children's centre is Mr Bee's Family Centre Charitable Trust, a development trust which was set up to provide a family centre in November 1995. The trust manages the children's centre on behalf of the local authority, Norfolk County Council.

The administrative base is in the St Augustine's Centre in the North Lynn area of King's Lynn. Many of the centre's activities take place at this centre which is leased by the trust from King's Lynn Borough Council. The children's centre also utilises other venues in the reach area; the main outreach buildings are Reffley Community Centre, Mr Bee's Nursery North Lynn and St Edmunds Primary School.

The centre's reach area covers the electoral wards of North Lynn and Gaywood North Bank. The area of the North Lynn area experiences extremely high levels of deprivation, with the majority of children living within the 10% most deprived areas

in the country. Much of the Gaywood North Bank area is in the 30% most deprived areas of the country.

The majority of the population are of White British background, but there is an increasing population from other European backgrounds, mainly from Eastern Europe and the Baltic states.

Unemployment and the percentage of families in receipt of benefits are much higher than found in most parts of the country. Levels of educational attainment are well below the national average and the area has a high percentage of adults with low-level or no qualifications. Children begin school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills, knowledge and abilities that are lower than 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

Signpost Children's Centre is effective in meeting the needs of and improving the outcomes for families. It operates at the very heart of the community, and parents and carers are delighted with the quality of the services it provides. One parent commented, 'This centre means everything to me, it's a life line.' The centre also has a good track record for sustained improvement. The centre is led and managed well. Its advisory board, centre leader and staff all make an effective contribution to promoting continued improvement. Self-evaluation is accurate and undertaken thoroughly. The advisory board and staff value the views of users, and initiatives designed to promote improvement are carefully tailored to their needs. This has resulted in steadily rising numbers, including families who are regarded as hard to reach, registering at the centre and accessing courses and services. These features provide compelling evidence of the centre's good capacity for sustained improvement.

The centre is good at identifying and responding to the needs of the most vulnerable and those, who, because of their circumstances, might sometimes be at risk. This includes providing the help that is needed for parents and children who have special educational needs and those who have come to live in the community from abroad.

Even so, in parts of the centre's reach area, there remains a minority of families who still do not access the services provided by the centre.

Centre staff are highly skilled in providing a warm welcome for those who attend and at ensuring that everyone feels valued. There is a highly effective confidential counselling service for those who need special help. This service is greatly appreciated by users. Parents who access the centre's activities say it helps them to establish lasting friendships and to feel increasingly confident in their ability to cope with the challenges they face. The celebration of the successes of those who attend courses helps to their raise self-esteem. In this respect, the adult learning courses provided by the centre are particularly successful. However, too few centre users take the vital next step of accessing courses that offer accreditation and qualifications that will prepare them for the world of work.

Staff and centre users benefit from the good accommodation provided at the St Augustine's Centre. This includes the good office accommodation. In turn, this helps to ensure that those who provide services, such as family workers and health visitors, are able to work closely together and to benefit from the good supervision and continued professional development that the centre provides for its staff.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Introduce additional strategies to ensure that as many families as possible from across the centre's reach area are registered and access the available services.
- Raise the proportion of parents who attend courses that lead to accreditations and qualifications that will help to prepare them for returning to the world of work.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre works effectively to promote the physical, mental and emotional health of children and their families. There are good opportunities for children to take exercise when they attend the nursery or crèche. This is because the provision for outdoor play is good. The centre's community cafe sets the tone for healthy eating with the excellent food it provides. All staff work effectively to monitor the health of parents and their children. This includes raising users' awareness of the dangers posed by illegal drugs, smoking and the excessive consumption of alcohol. The mental health of users is also enhanced significantly by services, such as counselling, and the confidence they gain by participating in courses.

Parents who attend the centre receive good advice and guidance about how they and their children can stay safe. Families who use the centre are very aware of the actions they should take if they feel threatened or at risk. This applies especially to those families, who the centre has identified as being potentially at risk. Families have justifiable faith that the centre will provide them with the protection they need. This good practice is applied to those children who are the subject of the Common Assessment Framework process, those on the child protection register and looked

after children.

Children and their parents enjoy the learning opportunities provided by the centre. For example, children make good progress during the time in the crèche and when parents bring them to sessions, such as the 'Under One's' group and 'Little Treasures'. Adults similarly benefit from courses like 'Solihull Parenting' and 'Learning for Life Skills.' Data held by the centre and the observations shared by the headteacher of a nearby school affirm that children make good progress and are increasingly well prepared for starting school, particularly in their personal and social development.

The influence of the centre and the support it provides for parents is helping children to adopt increasingly positive behaviour, and they play and learn well together. Arrangements for parents to contribute to decision making and influence the development of the centre are good. In discussion, parents said they feel their views are valued. Children and their parents make good progress in acquiring skills for the future. Parents particularly value opportunities to extend their ability to use information and communication technology. They also benefit greatly from courses about managing their personal finances effectively. However, having made a good start and gained confidence, too few parents go on to join courses through which they can gain accreditations and qualifications.

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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The range of services, including outreach services, activities and opportunities, is matched well to users' needs. Assessments are used appropriately to measure the progress made by parents and their children, to identify the next stages of learning and to plan subsequent courses of action that are matched precisely to needs. Over recent years, the centre has established a good track record for driving up participation rates and increasing involvement in the centre's activities. However,

there are still parts of the area and sections of the population served by the centre in which a significant minority of families remain stubbornly hard to reach. This includes, for example, teenage parents. Recently introduced strategies, such as additional home visits, are proving to be successful, but are at a relatively early stage.

The celebration of personal successes and achievements is a consistent feature of provision. Accurate assessments of the progress made by children and by adults reveals that they achieve well from their various starting points. This was also affirmed during discussions with parents, centre staff and partnership contributors, such as the local school.

The childcare provided by the centre is good and parents are particularly appreciative of the crèche and nursery. The centre provides high-quality information about avoiding anything that might be detrimental to physical or mental health. Evaluative data held by the centre affirm that this information and accompanying guidance are having a positive impact on the health of centre users. Arrangements to respond to the needs of those families who might be at risk are good. The head of centre is promoting a pilot project that is enabling partnership agencies to respond more quickly and effectively to those who are in the most need.

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

Arrangements for governance, provided by the trustees and the advisory committee, and accountability are clearly understood and all interested parties are able to contribute. Parents are involved well in these processes. There are frequent forums for them to express their views and evaluate the quality of provision. There is a strong parental presence on the advisory board which means that trustees from the lead partner, Mr Bee's Charitable Trust, are aware of parents' views and well placed to respond. Staff work closely together for the benefit of families and the day-to-day management, arrangements for their supervision and for continued professional development are all good.

The centre evaluates its own performance accurately. The centre leader is committed to a research-based approach that enables the centre to identify areas for improvement and formulating strategies to bring them about. This approach is also helping staff to identify effective ways of working. An increasingly robust range of

data about the reach area and the impact of the centre's work is used to underpin these processes. However, while areas for improvement in the current development plan are well matched to the needs of the centre and its families, the likely outcomes do not have precisely measurable targets that are linked closely enough to the key purposes of the centre.

The centre provides good value for money. Resources are used wisely and staff deployed effectively. Sustainability of the centre is given a high priority. The centre leader and trustees are adept at accessing sources of funding that enable them to enhance partnerships and provide additional activities. A result of this wise housekeeping is the good accommodation that is provided for families and centre staff.

Equality is promoted well and diversity celebrated. Centre staff ensure that no one is left out and everyone feels valued. They are particularly vigilant in applying these principles to those parents and children who have special educational needs and to those who have disabilities. The centre has data to show that gaps in achievement are narrowing for those who attend. The centre has worked very effectively to include those families who enter the community from abroad, particularly those from eastern Europe and the Baltic States. Courses, such as 'Mums around the World', are aimed at those who speak English as an additional language and are very well received. The Elephant Kiosk, which translates the centre's literature into the languages currently spoken by families, is a source of delight for all. Care is also taken to plan training activities to fit in with parents' other commitments. For instance, new courses planned for the nearby primary school will take place at the start and end of the school day when parents are dropping off or picking up their children.

Arrangements for safeguarding children and their parents are good; all policies and training are up to date and legal requirements are met fully. This includes arrangements to ensure that newly appointed staff are suitable to work with children and potentially vulnerable adults. The centre's work with key agencies to meet the needs of the potentially vulnerable is a strength, and arrangements to share essential information work effectively. Arrangements for child protection are good and understood well by all staff.

Work by the centre's leader has resulted in the workers of all the key partnerships being housed under one roof. This enables inter-agency and partnership-based activities to operate effectively, although some are at an early stage, such as the recently resurrected links with the nearby primary school. Partnerships with health, social and local voluntary services are good. Typical of these links is the one forged with the next-door Discovery Centre, providing activities for children and young people after school and during the holidays. There are many examples of the Discovery Centre and Signpost working together to help families, including those new to the area, to overcome significant barriers.

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	2
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

Discussions were held with the inspector of the Mr Bee's Nursery.

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 Signpost Children's Centre on 19 and 20 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

I would like to thank all those parents and their children who kindly gave their time to talk with the inspectors and share their thoughts about the Signpost Children's Centre. You told us, rightly, that you are very proud of the centre and greatly appreciate all that it does to help you and your children. One of you said that, 'I love coming to the centre and so does my child. It's a great place to meet people and make friends.' The centre's community cafe, with the excellent food it provides, is a great attraction. The crèche is also a great help and you know that your children are safe and well cared for while you attend activities. It is very clear that the needs of families are at the heart of the centre's work.

We are impressed by the welcome provided for everyone who visits the St Augustine's building. The fact that the doors swing open as you approach helps everyone to feel confident and makes everyone feel they are valued by the centre. Added to that, there is always a smiling face at reception to listen to what you have to say and to point you in the right direction. All the centre staff will find time to listen and respond as quickly as they can to any problems you may have. We are very impressed by the confidential counselling service the centre provides and are aware that many of you have benefitted from the advice and help it provides.

The centre provides a good range of activities for you and for your children. The courses you attend help you make friends. Many of you explained how this helps to relieve the loneliness and sense of isolation that some of you experience when you are at home with your children. Courses, such as pottery and flower arranging, often help to bring a feeling of success and raise confidence. However, inspectors are asking the centre to consider how it can involve more of you in courses that lead to qualifications and can help you to find your place in the world of work.

The Signpost Centre is also good at seeking out and providing support for those of you who sometimes face major challenges, for example the risk of domestic violence or the threat of becoming homeless. The number of parents registering at the centre is rising each year and the centre has a good range of strategies for contacting those parents who are hard to reach. Even so, inspectors are asking the centre to raise the number of parents from its reach area who attend activities and courses.

Most importantly the centre works effectively to ensure that, as far as possible, you and your children are safe.

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