

Inspection report for City and Eaton Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
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Reporting inspector	Jean-Marie Blakeley

Centre leader	Claire Skilleter
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Vauxhall Centre Johnson Place Norwich Norfolk NR2 2SA
Telephone number	01603 729808
Fax number	
Email address	claire.skilleter@norfolk.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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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

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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 additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff. Inspectors also met with parents and carers, members of the advisory group and representatives from Norfolk local authority as well as a number of partners including health, the voluntary sector and education. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

City and Eaton Children's Centre opened in 2008, as a phase two centre, covering Norwich city centre and was extended in 2009 to cover Eaton, a phase three centre.

The centre is managed directly by Norfolk County Council, with input from a strategic advisory group made up of professional partners, community members and users. The children's centre manager leads the provision.

The centre is based in the Vauxhall Centre, which is a community resource centre. The children's centre has a rental agreement for use of its rooms within the centre and it shares the main reception area. Other rooms within the building are used by the children's centre on a booking basis. The centre provides outreach services in community venues. The centre provides the full core offer. The centre sign posts families to local private day care providers.

The majority of local families are of White British heritage with an increasing and diverse minority ethnic population. Of the 1710 children under five living in the area, 25% are from minority ethnic groups. These consist of families from India, Western and Eastern Europe and Africa. The reach area is situated within a dispersal area for asylum seekers while they await the outcome of their asylum claim.

The centre is based in an area of high deprivation. Unemployment for the area is 3.5 % with 16% of children under 5- years living in workless households and 78% of families in receipt of working tax credits.

On entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage, children's skills, knowledge and abilities 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

City and Eaton Children's Centre serves its community well and its overall effectiveness is good. In particular, outstanding care, guidance and support and good safeguarding arrangements have a positive impact on the safety and well-being and personal development of families who may be vulnerable due to their circumstances. Outcomes for users are good. Activities in the centre promote learning well and as a result, enjoyment and achievement are good. For example, in two schools where the centre has specifically targeted its support, results from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile show an increase in the number of children achieving average levels for personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. However, overall results for the reach area are improving more slowly.

Skilled family support advisors provide outstanding one-to-one care, guidance and support to families in times of crisis. Staff are well-trained and have a good understanding of child protection procedures. They work closely with partners and ensure they share promptly any concerns with relevant agencies. As a result, families improve their ability to stay safe and the number of children on child protection plans has reduced. Policies and procedures for safeguarding including the recruitment and vetting of staff are good. Children are safe at the centre and the support they receive helps them and their children stay safe. Parents and carers made comments to the inspectors which support this judgement.

The lively centre is at the heart of the community. The majority of families in the local area engage with the centre's services. Parents, carers and children enjoy

coming to the centre which offers a good range of services to the community. Crèche, adult learning and stay and play sessions provided at the centre are of good quality and as a result, children's progress from their starting points is good. Adults' development of parenting skills is good because of the outstanding support they receive from family support workers. Adults engage well with the learning opportunities provided and a good number of them gain relevant qualifications to help improve their economic well-being. Case studies indicate that some adults return to work or training but the centre does not have complete records of all users' progress or destinations. The centre promotes healthy living well through its many activities which have a good impact on health outcomes. For example, the percentage of obese children in the Reception Year has reduced and at 7%, is below the average for Norfolk.

The centre provides a good range of opportunities for users to make a positive contribution. Volunteers and the parents' forum play an important part in the life of the centre.

The centre manager is ambitious and highly motivated to continue improving the provision, building on its strengths and reaching the families most in need. Evaluation is systematic and clearly identifies key areas for improvement. However, lack of administration capacity means that engagement levels and outcomes information are not fully recorded on the new local authority system. Lack of timely and complete data makes it difficult for the local authority, the strategic advisory group and the manager to consistently monitor outcomes and set precise targets.

The centre's promotion of equality and diversity is good. The inclusion of all children and families is central to the vision of the centre manager. The centre meets the duties that apply to it for equality and diversity. Outstanding support for children with disabilities helps their smooth transition into school. There is good evidence of its targeted work having a positive impact on narrowing achievement gaps. There is good engagement with children and adults with disabilities, lone parents and those from workless households. A 'Multi Cultural Stay and Play' session and English for speakers of other languages courses are successfully increasing engagement with families from minority ethnic groups. However, too few minority ethnic from the most deprived areas are benefiting from the good services and outstanding care, guidance and support the centre provides.

Good leadership and management, improving outcomes for users and quality of provision combined with the clear vision and drive of the centre manager demonstrate a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Make sure that the local authority provides the centre leaders and managers with complete data so they are able to measure the full impact of their work and set precise improvement targets.
- Extend the successful targeting of services to raise children's achievements across the whole of the reach area
- Increase engagement with families from minority ethnic groups who live in the areas experiencing the greatest level of deprivation.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes are good. Families benefit from excellent support and advice and the good promotion of safety by the family support workers. As a result, they have a good understanding of how to keep their families safe and improve their parenting skills. Early intervention for families with children identified at risk or in need is helping to keep children safe and supporting their development. One mother told inspectors: 'The centre is a lifeline for many mums, teaching useful skills and providing a safe place for isolated mums to mix and make friends.' Timely support is provided for children through effective use of the Common Assessment Framework and case studies demonstrate that as a result, they make good progress. However, the centre lacks information on the full impact of its work in its reach area on some staying safe outcomes such as the number of children admitted to hospital, including admissions for non-accidental injuries.

The centre is a welcoming and attractive building, enabling children to play and adults to develop their skills. The good quality adult learning provision and 'Stay and Play' sessions make a good contribution to children's and adult's enjoyment and achievement. Children's progress and development of skills is good. Transition into local day care and nursery is good. Adults enjoy courses to develop their parenting and other skills. One parent said: 'The centre is brilliant. I have done lots of courses such as Joy of Food, Learning on a Shoestring and Paediatric First Aid.' Other users commented 'The crèche has helped my child to play with other children. It has helped me as a parent and coming here has helped my child's speech.'

The centre provides a good range of opportunities for users to make a positive contribution. These include surveys, a suggestion box, a volunteer's programme, the parents' forum and membership of the strategic advisory group. Some users are very involved in the life of the centre, such as supporting activities or fundraising, which lead to improvement in their personal development. Children behave well and are developing useful skills for the future such as cooperation and independence. Families have respect for each other and community cohesion is promoted well through events such as the 'Multi Cultural Open Days' sessions.

The centre promotes healthy living through a broad range of services and sessions such as 'Joy of Food' and the popular 'Wiggle and Jiggle'. As a result families increase their understanding of how to stay healthy. The emotional health of families

is improved through the excellent care, guidance and support provided by family support workers.

The centre works in partnership with an adult education provider and a good number of adults have gained literacy or numeracy qualifications which helps to improve their economic well-being. Some users return to work or progress to education or training with support from the centre or Jobcentre Plus. The centre supports users to gain the skills needed to become registered child minders.

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

There is prompt and effective use of the Common Assessment Framework to provide support and services to families. Informal assessment and user feedback enables the centre to develop good learning opportunities for users. The flexible range of services provided by the centre meets the needs of users who access it. Participation is good. The centre is focused on providing services for families with the greatest need and is successful in working with its target groups such as workless families, teenage parents and children or parents with disabilities. The centre has established a Saturday 'Father's' group which is increasing the engagement of male parents and carers. The centre has increased the number of families from minority ethnic groups engaging with the centre although some are proving more difficult to engage.

An onsite crèche and activities to help children to learn and develop are good. Staff plan for children's individual learning and as a result their progress is good. The centre promotes children's and adults learning well and activities provided are of a good quality. As evidenced in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, there is a positive impact on those children accessing day care and learning and development sessions. One parent said: 'Coming to the centre has really helped my child mix with others and learn to share. My children love all the activities.' The good support given

to local child minders and private day care providers is helping to raise standards and outcomes for children.

Outreach work is highly effective. Case studies show that outstanding support from the centre is making a big difference to families, who may be vulnerable due to their circumstances. The outstanding support and guidance builds confidence and self-esteem and helps users improve their parenting skills. Parents and carers were keen to tell inspectors how their involvement with the centre has helped them make changes to their lives. One user said: 'The family support workers are amazing. I don't know what we would have done without them. I blamed myself for my child's learning difficulties. They have given us so much support. They even got a place for my child in day care and it has made such a difference.' 'They helped me with housing - we had not had any proper sleep for years because of the neighbours. The only time my child was able to play outside was when we came here' said another. These comments testify to the success of the centre's care, guidance and support.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Good management of the centre has a positive impact on outcomes for families. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear with strong support provided by the well-attended strategic advisory group. There are clear links between strategic planning and service provision leading to improvements. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities and are appropriately supervised. Good user, community and partner representation on the advisory board ensures a strong local voice in the life of the centre. The centre continually seeks and makes good use of feedback from users to develop and improve the range and quality of its provision.

The manager has a good understanding of the key issues facing the centre. There are clear links between the centre's on-going evaluation of its services and the priorities set out in its delivery plan leading to the improving outcomes. The centre manager carefully evaluates feedback from families on services and activities provided. However, although the availability of data is improving, lack of timely data input and reports impedes the centre's ability for consistent measurement of performance and precise target setting.

The use of resources is having a good impact on outcomes for users which means

that the centre gives good value for money. The centre building provides a welcoming environment and outreach work is extending the services provided. The work of the family support workers is targeted effectively on supporting families in times of need.

The centre meets its statutory duties for equality and diversity. Action to promote greater equality has resulted in engaging most key target groups with services provided by the centre. The centre is demonstrating that it is effective in helping to narrow the achievement gap between different groups of users. The number of families from ethnic minority groups attending the centre is increasing. The majority of children from minority ethnic backgrounds living in a 10% deprived area either benefit from the funded places available for three- and four-year-olds or access services at the centre, but the centre manager is determined to raise this figure even further.

Safeguarding is good and all statutory requirements are fully in place. The centre has effective systems in place for recording information related to the vetting and recruitment of staff. Staff and professional partners have a clear understanding of policies and procedures to ensure the protection of users. They understand their role in identifying and reporting concerns and do so promptly. As a result, users' ability to stay safe is good and improving. The centre collaborates effectively with other key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. Partnerships with other services contribute to good outcomes for users. Services are integrated and deliver cohesive provision for users. The strong partnerships with voluntary and community sectors, social care and health professionals contribute to the outstanding care, guidance and support for users. The good partnerships with private day-care providers and childminders enable good transition arrangements for children and are helping to improve children's outcomes.

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	2

integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	
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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the City and Eaton Children's Centre on 20–21 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you very much for talking with us and contributing to the inspection of your children's centre.

The centre offers outstanding care, guidance and support to all of you that use it. You said that family support workers give excellent support and always respond if any of you find your families in crisis. They offer you practical help and advice on parenting that you value. Those of you that have attended the parenting courses really appreciate how it has helped you. We found that staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures and that they are well trained. You said that you feel your children are safe at the centre and support from the centre helps you stay safe.

You enjoy the sessions such as 'Wiggle and Jiggle' and 'Baby Yoga' with your children. The centre is working closely with an adult education provider to give you good access to courses to help improve your own education and future employment opportunities and a good number of you gain qualifications to help improve your futures. Those of you that attend adult learning classes enjoy your learning and value the care and attention your children receive in the crèche. We found that children benefit from accessing services at the centre and make good progress from their starting points.

Your children behave well and you learn a lot about how to stay healthy. You especially enjoy the 'Joy of Cooking' and 'Learning on a Shoestring' courses. The centre listens to you and asks you what you think of the services and activities they offer. They change how and when they do some things because of what you say.

Some of you are involved in making decisions about your centre through becoming volunteers or being on the parents' forum or the strategic advisory group.

We found that the manager and staff are keen to promote equality and diversity. Young families are enjoying sessions to help them be parents and the centre works closely with those families that may be vulnerable due to their circumstances. There is good provision for children with disabilities or additional needs. The centre is trying to reach more male parents and carers and has established a Saturday 'Fathers' group'. We have asked the centre to find ways to engage with more families from ethnic minority groups so that their children benefit from the good services and excellent care, guidance and support provided.

The manager is ambitious and wants to improve the work of the centre. A range of methods are used to monitor the impact of their work. We have asked the local authority to ensure the centre has enough information so they know how well they are doing at improving outcomes and can set targets to improve further. Because the centre has been improving and it knows the main things it needs to do to improve further, we are confident that it will continue to do so.

A special thank you to those of you who took the time to come in and talk to us and for letting us join you in some of your sessions. 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.