

# Inspection report for The Witham Family Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Lincolnshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	383694
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	The Priory Witham Academy URN 135563
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	The Priory Nursery EY426713

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the senior leadership team including the Chair of the Governing Body of Priory Witham Academy, a representative from Lincolnshire County Council, partner agencies, frontline staff and parents.

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

## Information about the centre

The Witham Family Centre is a phase one centre. It is an integral part of The Priory Witham Academy which has been commissioned by Lincolnshire County Council to deliver its children's centre services in the Moorland ward. The Priory Witham Academy provides care and education services for children and young people aged 0–19 years. The family centre developed from a Sure Start local programme and was designated in May 2005 and was delivering fully operational services by August 2006. In September 2011 it moved from its original site to new premises within The Priory Witham Academy. Most services are delivered from a purpose-built centre which is located within the academy's early years unit. This changed location and its link to the academy supports the delivery of a seamless service from birth to 19 years. The management of the centre is the responsibility of the headteacher of The Priory Witham Academy who reports directly to its governing body. There is also a family centre advisory board consisting of a range of professional partners, staff and parents.

The family centre serves a community where there are pockets of extreme deprivation, with areas being in the highest 1% of the most deprived areas nationally. Unemployment is high and opportunities for employment are low. A large majority of housing is provided by the local authority. Most families are of White British heritage with a growing number of Eastern European families moving into the area. Most children enter the centre's childcare and play provision with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that usually 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

Unflinching dedication and the commitment of all The Witham Family Centre staff have ensured that outcomes for the large majority of families living within this locality have improved greatly. This is often in the face of the most challenging of circumstances. Multi-agency partnerships are outstanding and provide the foundation stone from which to deliver individualised, integrated support, which is responsive to the needs of the local community. A recent change of venue has resulted in attendance figures over the summer period reducing for the first time. However, the number of people accessing the centre's services is rising again. The participation and engagement of a few of the centre's most hard-to-reach families continue to be a challenge.

The robust implementation of safety and safeguarding procedures and the holistic approach taken by the family centre and The Priory Witham Academy staff are having an outstanding impact on the safety of children. Parents state they have a much improved understanding of how to keep their children safe within the home and in the community through the advice they receive on home safety visits from centre staff and the Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service. They also comment upon the role that the community police officer also plays in ensuring their safety and that of their children.

Very effective relationships with health visitors who run baby clinics twice a week, with 13 to 15 families attending on average, are improving health outcomes for families. In addition, the midwife considers the working relationship between her and the centre to be 'absolutely fantastic and having a major impact on families'. They are all working together to improve breastfeeding rates and there is evidence that this is happening. Nevertheless, continuation rates at six weeks are still lower than the Lincolnshire average. The centre receives a wealth of information in the form of data. However, it does not receive it early enough for staff to make contact with teenage mothers and other new parents as soon as their babies are born. This delay has an impact on the speed at which breastfeeding peer supporters and family support workers can offer support to new mothers who may be experiencing difficulties around breastfeeding and, therefore, give up.

Children and parents have access to high-quality play and learning opportunities. Effective monitoring, planning and the delivery of a wide range of services ensure that children make outstanding progress in relation to communication, language and literacy, and personal and social development. The aspirations of staff are high. They are enthusiastic and talk with a 'can do' attitude. Equipment and the play and learning environment both indoors and outdoors are excellent and provide appropriate challenge. Children explore and experiment with confidence. Adults, although mainly women, take part in a wide range of individualised learning opportunities which are designed to support their development. Participation and continuation rates are very good and few people drop out. 'Skills learnt assist in every part of life.' 'I enjoy English more, it is not a curse.' 'I love going on courses, it makes me feel good.' These are the comments of parents whom inspectors met during adult-learning sessions. As a result of the training and development opportunities, a few adults move into employment. However, too few centre users are given the opportunity to take part in volunteering or buddying opportunities and, as a result, are not developing the necessary skills to prepare them for the world of work.

Senior leaders are enthusiastic and are wholly committed to making a difference to the families within the Moorland Ward. They are highly visible to staff and families who talk about them with respect. The centre manager is well known and well liked. Parents say they trust her completely. Parents consider their views are listened to and are used to develop services. They state that they were regularly consulted when the move from their previous location to The Witham Priory Academy was considered. Challenge and support are provided by the local authority and the advisory board of which some parents are members. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate and the centre is aware of its areas for development. As a result of the commitment of managers and staff and the high quality of its work and resources, The Witham Family Centre's overall effectiveness and the capacity to improve are both good.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve strategies for information sharing at a strategic level so that the centre obtains timely, up-to-date information in relation to teenage pregnancies and new births generally so that early intervention and effective support can be given, particularly in relation to breastfeeding.
- Improve engagement and the participation of the remaining few families within its most hard-to-reach groups.
- Improve the opportunities for centre users to become involved in buddying or volunteering.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2
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The emotional health and well-being of families, particularly when one or both parents are suffering poor mental health, are given very good attention by staff. The ongoing support, timely referrals and effective signposting are enabling and empowering parents to seek help and bring about genuine and sustained improvements. 'They hold your hand, then let go when you are ready to move on but hold it again if needed.' 'I would not be here today if I had not had the help from the centre.' These comments from parents show how vital the centre has been to them. The twice-weekly cooking activities are well attended and the provision of fresh fruit for all snacks is educating the whole family on the benefits of a well-balanced diet. Parents are thinking about the sugar and fat content in foods. Consequently, obesity rates are low. Despite the implementation of a range of strategies, which are having some impact, breastfeeding continuation rates continue to be a challenge for the centre. However, mothers who have sustained breastfeeding through difficult circumstances comment on the benefits to them and their children.

Safeguarding is given exceptionally high priority. The centre meets and exceeds legal requirements. Support and monitoring by the centre manager and a number of safeguarding officers ensure that children and their families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable than others receive the appropriate early intervention. Users of the centre say that they feel completely safe and tell how they are helped to keep their children safe. Without exception, they comment upon how much they can trust the centre staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties. Family support workers help families to understand how fitting safety equipment plays an important part in keeping their children safe. As a result, hospital admissions to accident and emergency departments have reduced considerably. The centre is a busy and happy place to be. Children play well together and adults are respectful and polite to each other.

Children make excellent progress in their learning when they attend the centre's crèche and The Priory nursery and Early Years Foundation Stage unit. Children enjoy themselves and very quickly grow in confidence. Extremely effective monitoring systems demonstrate that children whose starting points were generally lower than those normally expected for their age are reaching and exceeding county and national expectations in communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development. Early identification of children who are at risk of delay, particularly in the use of language, and the support given by the centre staff, including the speech and language worker, are important factors in bringing about these improvements. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of the targeted support and appropriate interventions. Consequently, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest is narrowing significantly.

Adults are developing confidence and the skills required to embark on further education as a result of the high-quality learning opportunities. Inspectors observed adults involved in learning and development and their enthusiasm and desire to

succeed was clearly evident. 'I can help my children to learn now,' was one parent's comment. Another who has gone on to university felt compelled to write to the lead inspector to reinforce how much she has been supported by the family centre, stating, 'There is no greater feeling than my children saying, "Mummy are you at university today?"'

Parents make their views known through formal routes such as the user satisfaction survey, the evaluations of activities, contact with centre staff and, more informally, through day-to-day verbal feedback. They consider they are listened to and their views are used to plan activities. One example was the delivery of a 'Polish for English Speakers' course which was requested by mothers so they could communicate with the growing number of their Eastern European neighbours.

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>1</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>1</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>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

'If centre staff hadn't come to my house, I wouldn't have come here and I wouldn't have gone to college.' 'They helped me to build a relationship with my child,' were the comments of two parents but reflect the views of many. The range of services including outreach, activities and opportunities, is matched well to users' 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 served by the centre in which a minority of families remain stubbornly hard to reach. This includes, for example, teenage parents.

The celebration of personal successes and achievements is a consistent feature of provision. Accurate assessments of the progress made by children and by adults reveal that they achieve extremely well from their various starting points. Take-up of the parenting course, which enables parents to identify strategies to promote positive behaviour and raise confidence and self-esteem, is good. Healthy cooking groups are oversubscribed and the dance exercise class appears to be a real favourite with

mothers who are seeking to stay fit and healthy. They comment upon how it improves their emotional well-being as well as their physical health. The retention rates for all courses and activities are excellent. The Witham Family Centre speech and language worker guides family support and nursery staff in the delivery of activities which are improving the engagement of parents in their young children's play and learning. Parents of older children take part in courses which improve understanding of sexual health matters.

The centre works exceptionally well in partnership with a range of agencies to ensure assessments, such as those carried out under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) are robust, well informed and lead to early intervention. The staff team skilfully identifies the needs of families and provides services or signposts to appropriate agencies. Early intervention and personalised service delivery are preventing a large number of families reaching crisis point. 'Larder vouchers' prevent families being left without food if such a crisis arises. Families state that the centre has enabled them to make friends, and develop their confidence and self-esteem. Good quality care, guidance and support are helping them to improve outcomes for their families.

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>1</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?**

**2**

Leadership and management are mostly good and are outstanding in some aspects. The senior leadership team is strongly committed to improving the lives of children and families in the area, and has a clear vision and a determination to succeed. Aspirations for all families, including those whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable, are high. A knowledgeable staff team, which is very well respected by the families, makes a valuable contribution to the effectiveness of the centre. As a result of the vision, commitment and practice, outcomes are good and rapidly improving, and The Witham Family Centre offers good value for money. Governance arrangements between Lincolnshire County Council and The Priory Federation Academies Trust are understood by all. The centre manager is held accountable through regular meetings with the governing body of The Witham Priory Academy and the local authority. Self-evaluation is accurate, and the operational improvement plan effectively identifies targets and priorities for improvement.

Inclusion and the accessibility of services provided by the centre are good. The centre celebrates diversity through a wide range of resources which reflect different



faiths, cultures and backgrounds. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are provided with good-quality resources and support. Parents are supported in the centre and on outreach work. Family support workers are adept at helping families to find strategies to deal with areas of their children's behaviour that they find most challenging.

The arrangements for safeguarding are outstanding. Robust practice in relation to ensuring the suitability of staff to work with children and vulnerable adults protects children and families extremely well. There is a shared responsibility for safeguarding between The Witham Family Centre and The Witham Priory Academy. As a consequence, there is a relatively large team of safeguarding officers who take into account the needs of the whole family and adopt an internal 'team around the child' approach to their work. In addition, excellent partnership working promotes the swift exchange of information for the most vulnerable children leading to better protection. Risk assessments are detailed and are conducted for all activities within and beyond the centre. There are effective procedures for lone working and home visiting, and all visitors to the centre are monitored by administrators.

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>1</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>1</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 considered the judgment made for the Early Years Foundation Stage

which was outstanding when The Priory Witham Academy was inspected on 17 and 18 November 2010.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected Witham Family Centre on 3 and 4 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. Some aspects of the centre's work are outstanding.

As part of the inspection, we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation and talked with a range of children, users of the centre, staff, community representatives and partnership workers. We would like to thank all the people who spoke to us when we visited the centre and met you in your homes. Many of you told us what you thought about the centre and its activities. Your views were very helpful. It is clear that you are highly delighted with what the centre has to offer and many of you view it as a 'lifeline'. 'I was unable to leave the house but now I am going to college as a result of the support from the centre.' 'I love going on the centre courses, they have made me confident,' are typical of the comments you made. So that more families can benefit from the types of service you are receiving, we have asked the centre to make contact with and provide for families who do not currently attend.

The centre works outstandingly well with its partners. There are excellent links with the health professionals and these are making it much easier for you to attend baby clinics and to gain useful information about how to keep your children healthy. In order to improve the health of your children even further and to improve breastfeeding rates in the area we have asked that information be made available to the centre earlier in relation to teen pregnancies and new births generally.

Led by a manager who knows the community extremely well, all staff members work very effectively to safeguard children and families. They provide a 'team around the child' approach which supports the improvements you are trying to make to your lives. We know from the information supplied by the centre that, for a large majority, the safety of your children at home and in the community is outstanding. Hospital admissions to accident and emergency departments have reduced considerably and intervention work is ensuring that fewer children than previously are subject to child protection plans.

Your children who attend the high-quality childcare and early education provision are making outstanding progress relative to their starting points. They are developing confidence and the skills that enable them to learn quickly when they start school. The centre has very high aspirations not only for your children but for you as well.

Inspectors were very impressed by the first-class learning and development opportunities for adults provided in partnership with The Priory Witham Academy, family learning or Lincoln College. Your enthusiasm was overwhelming. We could tell from information and our discussions that almost all of you had progressed from those first confidence-building courses into other training and a few of you had progressed to graduate-level training and employment. In order to support you even further by providing work-related experiences, we have asked the centre to provide volunteer and buddying opportunities.

Thank you once again for coming to talk to us. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre and we wish you and your families our best wishes for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).