

Inspection report for Gorleston and Hopton Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	None

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 representatives of the advisory board and local authority, the centre manager, senior staff, outreach workers, partner providers, members of the community and parents.

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

Information about the centre

Gorleston and Hopton Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre that was designated in January 2008. It is managed by the local authority. The centre's reach area covers the central and eastern area of Gorleston. This was extended in 2009 to include surrounding rural areas and the village of Hopton.

The centre is based in Gorleston library which has been adapted to provide a separate reception and administrative office and a consultation room for the centre. The centre also has access to additional facilities on the second floor such as a shared kitchen area, a large multi-purpose room, a family/meeting room and another small office for the centre coordinator. The centre can also have use of a small lecture theatre. The building has lift facilities to make it fully accessible.

The centre also uses other premises to deliver services including the Gorleston Baptist Church, Orbit Community Centre, St Peter's Church Hall, Hopton Village Hall and St Margaret's Church vestry.

The population of the area is mainly of White British heritage with an increasing number of Eastern European families. The reach area is mainly urban with some outlying villages. Housing consists primarily of privately owned and rented accommodation with some social housing. There are currently 909 children aged under five years living in the centre's reach area. Of these, 62% live in the 30% most deprived areas in Norfolk and 21% live in a workless household. The skills and

knowledge with which children enter the local Early Years Foundation Stage provision are below those expected for their age.

Norfolk County Council has recently announced a restructuring of its children's centre services. The centre is subject to a proposed merger with a neighbouring children's centre in July 2012.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The centre's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. Staff have worked hard from the start to establish a separate identity from the other centres in the area. This has resulted in the centre being highly valued by the community it serves. This is illustrated by the views of one service user that echoes the comments of many, 'I would be lost without the centre; it is like a second family.'

Being based in the library has provided some challenges. However, the good working relationships between the library staff and those working in the centre have resulted in a mutually beneficial partnership being formed.

In recent times, the centre's ability to increase services and activities has been hampered by the local authority's recruitment freeze, which resulted in temporary staffing arrangements being put in place. However, it now has a full complement of well-qualified and motivated staff who have, in the short time they have been in post, formed good working relationships with each other and, together, they are eager to bring about further improvement for the benefit of families in the reach area.

The centre's provision is satisfactory, inclusive and equally welcoming to all. Users experience good care, guidance and support. High-quality outreach work and effective one-to-one support, often in families' homes, are making a positive contribution to families' well-being. This is particularly the case for families who have

children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many parents wanted to speak to the inspectors because of the strength of their feelings about the support they had received from the centre. They spoke highly of how sensitively staff helped them to improve their lives through well-planned activities and individual support and guidance. Case study evidence indicates that families have received well-integrated and sensitive support in times of crisis. Although parents have access to a suitable range of services to support them back into employment, the centre does not provide sufficient opportunities for adults to attend accredited courses.

The charismatic centre coordinator is proactive in nurturing and promoting effective partnerships to improve outcomes for the community. Consequently, she is highly respected by other professionals and agencies working in the area. She is ambitious and highly motivated to continue improving the provision, building on its strengths and reaching the families most in need. Honest evaluation clearly identifies key areas for improvement. However, information about engagement levels and outcomes is not fully recorded on the local authority's new system. Lack of timely and complete data makes it difficult for the centre coordinator to consistently monitor outcomes and set precise targets. The local authority is aware of this and additional support has recently been put in place to support the centre coordinator, but it is too soon to measure the impact. In addition, some of the data provided by the health authority does not relate to the centre's specific reach area and is not current. While it proves useful to some extent, centre staff are not able to fully measure their success in all key performance areas.

Governance and accountability arrangements provide strong supervision and support to improve provision. The children's centre coordinator has a sound understanding of what the centre needs to do to improve further. Realistic plans have been developed which take good account of these areas and link to a clear vision for the future direction of the centre. As a result, the centre has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen partnerships with health services at a strategic level to improve the availability of data which are specific to the immediate reach area of the centre.
- Raise the proportion of parents who attend courses that lead to accreditation and qualifications that will help to prepare them for returning to the world of work.
- Complete the collation of all available data and use the whole range of available information to assess the impact of each service and the centre's overall effectiveness.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Parental surveys and discussions with users show that satisfaction levels are high

and that parents benefit adequately from the range of services on offer. Activities such as 'Kiddy Cook' have equipped parents with the skills and knowledge needed to provide healthy meals for their children. Providing vouchers for families to access the local swimming pool and organising activities on the beach in the school holidays is encouraging families to enjoy physical activities together. A few parents report that they have been able to stop smoking as a result of the guidance and support from the centre. The centre funds a specialist breastfeeding midwife to provide professional support to mothers at the breastfeeding café at the neighbouring centre. As a result, some mothers are breastfeeding for longer which benefits their children's health.

Users report feeling safe in the centre and are confident that any problems are tackled and resolved quickly. Consequently, parents trust staff and are confident in sharing their personal concerns and circumstances. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used well, in collaboration with parents, to develop a package of support that matches users' individual needs. The most vulnerable families are supported well by the centre through home visits and one-to-one help, as well as through good partnerships with other agencies.

Children enjoy the activities the centre offers and have fun playing with a range of toys and equipment. The recently appointed playworkers act as good role models who encourage parents to engage in meaningful play with their children. The development of the popular 'Bounce and Rhyme' is a good illustration of the strong partnership working between the library service and the centre. This encourages parents to enjoy singing and reading with their children. Parents are, therefore, increasingly able to contribute to their children's school readiness.

The centre works closely with the early years advisory team, and joint working with local primary schools in the area has resulted in a steady increase in early years profile scores and narrowing the gap for the lowest 20% of achievers.

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 satisfactory. Parents say they feel their views are valued. Parents make satisfactory progress in improving their personal and social skills through their participation in parenting, behaviour management and other programmes. These skills are also developed through the individual care, guidance and support those parents and carers receive from staff, particularly those from the most vulnerable groups. However, having made a good start and gained confidence, too few parents go on to join courses through which they can gain accreditation 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	3
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lifestyles	
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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	3
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?

3

The centre has a sound understanding of the needs of local families. It is good at listening to those who come to it for help. Consequently, parents feel they are well supported by the staff, who develop a good understanding of the needs of those who attend. Skilled staff establish very positive, trusting relationships with all families. Personal testimonies from parents indicate that well-coordinated multi-agency support is precisely targeted and plays an important role in preventing families from falling into greater difficulty. One parent summarised the feelings of many parents who spoke to inspectors, by describing staff as 'brilliant' and a 'godsend'. However, the assessment of the wider needs of the reach area is hampered by a lack of easily accessible data. Although the centre is well established and has formed strong partnerships with all agencies and organisations that work in the area, it is unable to demonstrate with certainty that it has identified and is meeting the most pressing needs within the community. Nevertheless, the centre uses its work with partners effectively to extend the range of provision that can be offered in a range of venues. Therefore, it provides a sufficient balance of universal and targeted services to meet the needs of the community.

The centre delivers a beneficial programme to help parents develop their babies' and children's learning. A parent who completed the programme commented on her evaluation of the course, 'I found this course invaluable. It has given me a better understanding of my child's behaviour and of myself as a parent.' Good links are established with agencies such as training providers and Jobcentre Plus. This helps increase some parents' employability and improves their confidence to return to work. A few parents are currently developing additional skills and responsibility in their role as volunteers at the centre. However, the centre does not routinely offer a programme for users to volunteer at the centre and few users currently attend courses that lead to a recognisable qualification. Crèche facilities are provided to enable parents to access courses and develop their own confidence and self-esteem.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre coordinator is fully committed to improving outcomes for families. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities and are supervised effectively. Staff have a good understanding of the key issues facing the centre. There are imaginative ideas and plans for future development. While users report strong levels of satisfaction regarding the services they receive, a lack of good-quality, up-to-date data and reports means that the centre cannot be fully assured of its success or that its target setting is precise. The local authority monitors the centre closely and is actively supporting the centre to embed the current system for data collection and analysis to ensure the impact the centre is having is accurately monitored.

Governance arrangements are effective and there are clear lines of accountability and challenge. The advisory board provides satisfactory support. Partners are well represented and welcome the opportunity to share information and network with each other. A parents' forum was well established, but many families have now moved on to school with their children, so the centre is actively recruiting new families to join the forum. The advisory board has recently appointed users of the centre as chair and vice chair with a view to encouraging more users to becoming involved in decision making.

Partnerships are a key strength of the centre. The centre coordinator seeks every opportunity to work in partnership with other professionals and organisations, thus significantly extending the range of expertise available to users. Good working relationships with key agencies mean that all partners work towards common aims and are clear about the contribution they make. The centre has initiated a number of very high profile community events which continue to bring agencies together and have been very well attended by the community.

Appropriate safeguarding arrangements are in place and there is a system to maintain and update them. Appropriate recruitment checks are completed and all staff regularly undertake child protection training. The centre is proactive and collaborates effectively with other key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. Agencies working in the centre understand the implications of the wider safeguarding agenda. The premises and environment are safe and security is satisfactory.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily throughout the centre. The centre

has developed strong partnerships with parents with a clear emphasis on promoting an inclusive and friendly environment. Parents value the centre's close links with specialists to help children, including those with special educational needs, develop and learn. For example, the Family Action service works closely with the centre to offer support to families. Fathers and male carers are included in all activities as well as specific groups for them. However, lately, numbers attending the fathers' group have been on the decline. The centre has responded to this by working with the local parent support advisor to explore ways they can work together to increase participation.

Staff are highly trained professionals and have access to regular training and development opportunities. Outreach services are continually targeting the most vulnerable and are reaching a satisfactory proportion of families. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

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	3
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	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
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	3

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Gorleston and Hopton Children's Centre on 7 and 8 December 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

All staff place the utmost importance on you and your families and always provide a listening ear for you. They are passionate about creating a welcoming environment where you feel at home and are able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you value the centre, which means you have no hesitation in using the services regularly.

The centre offers a sufficient range of services and activities for all families in the area, which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals. All centre staff are good at guiding you and referring you and your children to other activities and services they think you would also benefit from and enjoy. You told us over and over again that coming to the centre has increased your confidence and self-esteem. This is because centre staff and professionals from different agencies work closely with you and with each other to find out exactly what help and support you and your families need and make sure this is provided.

We would particularly like to thank those of you who made a special effort to come to the centre and talk to inspectors. Your comments indicate how passionately you feel about the work of the centre and the positive impact it has on your families. This is especially the case for those of you who have children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The inspection team was made aware that, in recent times, the centre's ability to increase services and activities has been hampered by the local authority's recruitment freeze, which resulted in temporary staffing arrangements being put in place. Consequently, the centre has not been as effective as it could have been. However, it now has a full complement of well-qualified and motivated staff who have, in the short time they have been in post, formed good working relationships with each other and, together, they are eager to bring about further improvement for the benefit of families in the area.

The centre is a happy and welcoming place for adults and their children and strives to meet the needs expressed by those who use it. Some of you told us you feel you and your families are safe at the centre and we agree. Safeguarding you and your children is given an appropriate priority. The centre coordinator and staff team provide a friendly atmosphere and you trust them to give you support and help when you need it.

The quality of learning and development opportunities for you and your children are satisfactory. You told us that you and your children enjoy the 'Stay and Play'

sessions. They give you somewhere to go to meet other parents and to get ideas on how to play with your children. Some of you have gained confidence through programmes offered by the centre. However, the centre does not give you enough opportunities to attend accredited courses. We have asked the centre to provide more opportunities for you to attend accredited courses to further improve skills that will help with employability.

We found that partnerships are a key strength of the centre. The centre coordinator seeks every opportunity to work in partnership with other professionals and organisations, thus significantly extending the range of expertise available to you. Good working relationships with key agencies mean that all partners work towards common aims and are clear about the contribution they make. The centre has initiated a number of very high profile community events which continue to bring agencies together and have been very well attended by you.

The centre is hoping that more of you will join the parents' forum and become more involved with making decisions about how the centre is run through being on the advisory board. The recent appointment of parents to the role of chair and vice chair offers the opportunity for you to have more of a say in what happens at the centre.

We have also asked the centre to improve its monitoring and evaluation systems and to ensure that it obtains up-to-date data from the health authority which reflects the community it serves to clearly show the impact of its work on outcomes for children and families. The centre, along with support from the local authority, has appropriate plans in place to address this issue.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honesty and openness helped us immensely during the inspection. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future.

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