

Inspection report for Westcliff Children's Centre

Local authority	North Lincolnshire
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY373015 The DoReMi 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.

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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 senior managers from the centre and the local authority, parents, a member of the advisory board, and a number of partner agencies including: health; early years staff; children's services; and domestic violence advocacy.

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

Information about the centre

Westcliff Children's Centre is phase one centre which developed from a Sure Start local programme, serving Westcliff and Riddings areas, towards the west of Scunthorpe. The centre offers early education, linked childcare including two-year-old funding, family support, speech and language therapy, health services, activities for parents and carers and links with Jobcentre Plus. The centre's reach area has 904 children aged under five years, most of who (85%) live within the 30% most deprived area. The large majority of the population is of White British heritage with a recent increase of East European communities (mainly Polish and Lithuanian) and also some Thai families. There is a mix of socio-economic backgrounds with high percentage living in social housing and dependent on workless benefits.

The centre has links with the nearby, privately-owned DoReMi Nursery which offers full childcare from 7.30 am - 6.00pm Monday to Friday. Most children enter early years' provision with a much narrower range of skills and abilities than those expected for their age, particularly in the area of communication, language and literacy. Governance is provided by the local authority.

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

Westcliff Children's Centre serves the needs of its community well. It is particularly effective at engaging with groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable or hard to reach and is having considerable success in improving their lives. While outcomes are good overall, the centre is extremely successful in improving the safety of families. Staff are particularly skilled in safeguarding children and families and increasing families' own knowledge and understanding of how to keep themselves safe. The centre is extremely highly regarded equally by those who access services and partner agencies, who work well with centre staff to ensure delivery of high-quality provision.

The centre's reach area has had a number of health issues affecting it, including a high teenage pregnancy rate, low breastfeeding rates and a limited understanding of nutrition. The centre has tackled these health issues with determination and tenacity and the strategies used have resulted in a marked reduction in the teenage pregnancy rate, although this still remains high in comparison to national levels. Better health and nutritional advice is having a positive impact, although the number of mothers breastfeeding their babies remains stubbornly low, particularly beyond eight weeks. Additionally, some data provided by health is out of date and not specific enough for the centre to evaluate the impact the centre is having on improving outcomes and plan precisely for future priorities.

Young children's speech and language skills are of particular concern and a range of strategies have been deployed to support children's learning in this area, such as targeted speech and language therapy, the 'Every Child a Talker' programme and funding for two-year-old. However, the impact of these and the success of transition arrangements are not yet being fully measured as clear results are not expected until 2012-2013.

Effective provision is a result of accurate assessment of need and services are continuously reviewed and revised following feedback from users. Adult users of the centre are forthcoming in their praise of the centre, but equally they are not afraid to tell centre staff when activities do not fully meet their needs. Activities are evaluated regularly and parents,

carers and children are encouraged to share their views informally to staff, through questionnaires and via the 'You Said, We Did' board. Additionally, there is a parents' forum and parental representation on the advisory board, although the advisory board has not met for a number of months due to the restructuring of services in Scunthorpe. However, there are plans in place to formally re-launch the board in January 2012 and consideration is being given to the skills needed by board members to ensure the board is effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are extremely robust with clear information-sharing protocols, sound vetting arrangements, highly knowledgeable staff and stringent child protection procedures. Staff are well-trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework and use this expertly to clearly identify individual need and support. Children's Services and other agencies working with those who are most vulnerable say the centre is extremely skilled in identifying concerns and taking appropriate action with the full knowledge, and often consent, of the families concerned. The independent domestic violence group report that the skills of the centre staff significantly enhance the work with victims of domestic violence. Consequently, children and families are highly protected and are supported extremely well. Managers are consistently mindful of the need to ensure best value and use its skilled workforce very effectively. Additionally, the centre's skill in working with target groups, together with its ability to ensure all outcomes are at least good ensure the centre offers excellent value for money.

The centre's leadership and management team evaluates the centre's effectiveness well and is consequently aware of the centre's strengths and weaknesses. They, together with strategic management and support of the local authority, set ambitious and appropriate priority targets. The impact that the centre has had over recent years, plus its commitment to further development explain why the centre has good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with health partners to ensure that data available reflect the centre's reach area more accurately in order to support the centre's analysis and setting of priority targets.
- Re-launch the advisory board and ensure that members have the skills and knowledge to offer appropriate challenge and support to the centre manager and local authority.
- Rigorously monitor and evaluate the impact of the strategies employed, including transition arrangements, to raise Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores, particularly in communication, language and literacy.

How good are outcomes for families?

The centre is valued by the community and families welcome the services provided. Sound advice is given on weaning and immunisations offered at the health visitor clinics which run alongside the 'Stay and Play' sessions. As a result, immunisation rates are increasing. Families receive a range of information related to healthy eating and childhood obesity has reduced over recent years, although parents' and carers' knowledge and understanding of what constitutes a nutritious diet remains an issue for some. Together with health partners, the centre has actively encouraged breastfeeding and a number of peer support volunteers have been trained to support new mothers with breastfeeding. Despite these efforts, breastfeeding rates remain an issue. Initiation is increasing but there is a significant drop off in the rate for sustaining breastfeeding beyond eight weeks.

Children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others, for example, putting toys away and helping to sweep up sand. Centre staff also help educate families in how to improve children's safety, consistently yet sensitively reminding parents of the need to be vigilant at all times. Staff are also extremely aware of the vulnerability of some parents and carers and give excellent advice on how to keep themselves safe, for example, highlighting the need to only use licensed taxi firms when returning from a night out. Additionally, children who are subject to a child protection plan are very effectively safeguarded through clear protocols and excellent safeguarding arrangements. The 'single point of contact' ensures that families only have to 'tell it once' and the rigorous assessment of need ensures that staff members with the best placed skills and knowledge are selected to work with families. Staff trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework discharge their responsibilities very well and clear, comprehensive records are maintained and stored confidentially. Additionally, centre staff are skilled in identifying domestic violence issues and are extremely effective in supporting victims, whilst ensuring the needs of children are given utmost consideration.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile point scores have shown an improvement year on year, particularly in personal, social and emotional development. However, data show that children's communication, language and literacy skills remain an issue. To tackle this the centre has, together with early years, health and educational partners, implemented the 'Every Child a Talker' programme and two-year-old funding is used for childcare and education for those most in need of intervention and support. How successful these initiatives are cannot yet be accurately assessed, although early indications are positive. Additionally, parents and carers report that the centre has helped them become better parents by showing them 'how to play with their children and make learning fun'.

Increasing numbers of adults are accessing education and training in order to improve their skills and employment opportunities. One parent reported that she had enjoyed the literacy and numeracy courses, despite not wanting to learn when she was in school. Partnerships with Jobcentre Plus are not as strong as they could be due to financial cutbacks. However, the centre displays the latest information on job vacancies, supports adults to attend interviews and helps them develop their skills through a rolling programme of training.

Adults regularly express their satisfaction about the centre. A recent satisfaction survey shows that the large majority are happy with the services on offer. Parents and carers who have low self-esteem and lack self-confidence are supported to express their opinions either informally or formally. The 'You Said, We Did' board enables families to challenge the centre to provide alternative services. However, the advisory board is not currently offering effective support and challenge to the centre. Parents and carers do, however, report that the centre has made a difference to their lives by raising their aspirations and giving them the confidence to engage with centre activities. 'Before I came here I wasn't interested in helping myself, but now I want to make a better life for me and my children' is typical of comments from centre users.

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	1
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

Assessment is used effectively to determine the needs of children and parents and carers within the community. Consequently, the centre knows the community well and strives to ensure that services successfully meet the needs of users. There are exemplary welfare support systems in place to help those most in need of support. For example, healthy and nutritious emergency food parcels ensure families receive appropriate support when they need it. However, these parcels are limited to a maximum of three per household to ensure families do not become dependent on hand outs. In addition, the centre's innovative free furniture and home goods store actively contributes to the welfare of families in the reach area. For example, centre managers report that a major problem for many families is the affordability of beds, particularly as children grow out of a cot. The furniture store, therefore, enables families to provide appropriate sleeping arrangements for their children. Additionally, excellent care, guidance and support and effective collaborative working with partner agencies secures swift support to families in times of crisis.

There are many examples of good quality outreach and support work, including the regular stay and play sessions, baby clinics, a rolling training programme, baby massage sessions

and a young parents' group. Parents are given a wide choice of learning opportunities which are well attended and completion rates are high. All sessions are continuously reviewed, taking account of families' views, and changes are implemented

Experienced staff work tirelessly to make contact with hard-to-engage families and they are described by parents and carers as 'very helpful' and 'brilliant'. One parent reported, 'my worker has been ace, kind and helpful'. Another reported that the centre had helped her 'cope with the challenges of being a mum'. The centre is very aware of the difficulties and challenges faced by families within its reach area, for example, those who feel isolated in the community, and those suffering domestic violence. Past divisions between Westcliff and Riddings estates are slowly easing due to the centre's success in encouraging the different communities to engage with one another. Those accessing the centre report that they feel valued and respected and young parents welcome their group sessions which cater for their particular needs very well.

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

Leadership and management are consistently good at all levels and are outstanding in relation to safeguarding and the effective use of resources. The senior leadership team, together with the local authority ensure the provision and services meet the needs of all target groups extremely effectively and, therefore, the centre offers excellent value for money. Senior leaders have a clear vision, set the tone, communicate high expectations and ensure that the centre is effective in improving the life chances of all users. Day-to-day management, accountability and strategic leadership arrangements are clear and effective, although the advisory board is not presently functioning. Each staff member is committed to the centre's work, understands how they contribute to its effectiveness and feels well supported by management.

A comprehensive staff training package ensures staff are highly skilled in working with target groups. Safeguarding training is comprehensive and significantly enhances staff's awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities. Their excellent knowledge of the safeguarding procedures means they respond swiftly and confidently to concerns. Robust procedures and protocols for sharing information, together with the 'single point of contact' ensure that needs are prioritised effectively.

The comprehensive data collection system enables management to measure the success of provision on outcomes and self-evaluation is ongoing and largely accurate. Consequently, there is a good understanding of the centre's strengths and where further improvements can be made. As a result, priorities for improvement are appropriate, challenging and realistic.

The inclusion of all children and families is prioritised well. Staff ensure that all children and parents, regardless of background, aptitudes or other differences have equal access to the provision available. The centre is accessible for people with disabilities and has been successful in increasing the engagement of families with children with disabilities. Consequently, the centre has had exceptional success in engaging with families whose circumstances make them harder to reach.

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 secures 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	1
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	1
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

Before the inspection, inspectors read the Ofsted inspection reports for local primary schools and inspection reports for two childcare providers to learn about partnership-working, attainment of local children and contextual information about the area in which the centre is situated.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Westcliff Children's Centre on 15 and 16 December 2011. We judged the centre as good overall with a number of outstanding features.

As part of the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation, and talked with a range of children and adults including parents and carers, staff, and partnership workers. We were pleased to speak to so many of you about the centre's work and to listen to your views. We really enjoyed talking to you around the centre and in the various activity sessions you were engaged in. You expressed your views very clearly and we appreciated your straight talking in telling us how things really are.

We are pleased to tell you that the centre provides good support to you and your families through the wide range of good quality activities and services it has on offer. The centre does some things extremely well, such as the way it helps you and your children stay safe, the way it supports you during times of crisis and the way it provides excellent activities for those who are most in need. We were delighted to hear how many of you have benefited from coming to the centre, making new friends and getting involved.

The centre works hard with local day-care provision and early years experts to improve your children's educational achievements. They are also good at helping you increase your knowledge about play and how children learn through the many stay and play activities and parenting sessions, which you told us are fun and worthwhile. However, we recognised that children need more help with their speech and language development and so have asked the centre to monitor how well children are developing their speech and language skills and to evaluate the strategies used to ensure children are well prepared for school.

We also know that many of you receive useful advice on health and nutrition in order to encourage your children to eat more healthily. There is a range of good support offered to new mums to breastfeed their babies to give them the best start in life, although breastfeeding rates still remain low in the area. The centre uses data to monitor how well they are doing and to plan for the future. However, some health data are not specific

enough to help them in this so we have asked the centre to work with health colleagues to ensure that the data accurately reflects your community area.

We were pleased to see that how the centre is making a real difference to improving your lives and to hear how much more confident you feel as a result of the excellent care and support offered to you. It was also good to hear that many of you have undertaken training to increase your confidence and develop your skills, which may help you secure employment in the future.

Centre staff are working very hard to make the centre as good as it can be. They are good at finding out what the centre's strengths are and what areas can be improved. To help them we have asked to re-launch the advisory board as soon as possible and ensure that all board members understand the work of the centre in order to act as a critical friend and challenge the centre to do even more. We would encourage you to help by becoming actively involved in the advisory board so that you can ensure the centre takes full account of the families who use its services.

Thank you once again for your welcome and your willingness to talk to us. We can see why the staff enjoy working with you every day and wish you every success in the future.

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