

Inspection report for Roman Hill Children's Centre

Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	383550
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Centre leader	Sue Worley
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Roman Hill Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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 centre manager, representatives of centre users, parents and carers, and members of the advisory board. They met with representatives of the local authority and the East Coast Community Healthcare Community Interest Company (ECCH). They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Roman Hill Children's Centre is on the site of the Roman Hill Primary School. Accommodation formerly used by the school's nursery has been extended and remodelled to best suit the requirements of a children's centre. It is a phase two children's centre and was designated in 2008. The centre is used to run a variety of early years and family focused sessions. It serves an area judged to be within the 30% most disadvantaged nationally.

There are 739 children aged from birth to five in its reach area with a total of children aged from birth to five of 2264 in the North Lowestoft community.

The manager was permanently appointed in April 2012; she had previously been acting manager since October 2011. The centre works in a cluster with two other children's centres serving the North Lowestoft community. The centres are located less than two miles apart in a densely populated area. Services and staff are deployed to provide services at all three centres, and families access services at any of the three centres. Working relationships with other professional services has been established to deliver a programme of universal and targeted services to meet the local community's needs across the centres in the cluster.

Lowestoft is a coastal town with high levels of social disadvantage and deprivation. The reach area has high levels of unemployment and families living on benefits, teenage pregnancy and poverty. It covers densely populated and rural areas. The local population is mostly White British with smaller percentages from other minority

ethnic groups including those from Asian, Portuguese and Eastern European communities. The percentage of families who speak English as an additional language is increasing. Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are generally below those expected for their age.

The centre is run by ECCH on behalf of the local authority. Formally the Primary Care Trust, ECCH has recently launched as a social enterprise. A joint advisory board that serves the cluster area has been recently re-established.

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 overall effectiveness of the centre and outcomes for users are satisfactory. Governance arrangements are satisfactory. Over the last year the development of the centre stalled amidst staff and structural changes within the cluster of centres. In addition, the governing body moved from a health trust to a social enterprise and is now the ECCH. This has resulted in new management and governance arrangements which have rightly focused their attention on ensuring that the centre is well-ordered and running effectively on a day-to-day basis. They are now tackling, with some success, those issues that will help the centre improve further and achieve better outcomes for users.

After this period of change the centre is re-establishing its profile within the community. This has been successful in increasing the number of families accessing and benefiting from services, including those families whose circumstances makes them vulnerable. It has satisfactorily re-built previously good relationships with professional partners. The centre works consistently hard to improve this even further.

The newly formed management team have worked tirelessly to secure a range of improvements in the last six months. They have laid sound foundations for further development. The advisory board has been re-established, terms of reference are agreed and meetings take place regularly. However, they do not yet provide sufficient scrutiny and challenge to the centre. A new and active parents’ group is

beginning to impact and parents and carers attend the advisory board. Staff morale is good and they are working well towards achieving the centre's mission of, 'One team, one focus, helping every child to thrive and reach their full potential.' The improvements achieved are relatively recent so the centre's capacity for further improvements is satisfactory.

The work by the well-family support workers is a particular strength of the centre and is making a significant difference in improving the lives of families who use the service. Sound assessment procedures for all referrals for outreach work ensure that services are targeted effectively at those families most in need. Data show that the proportion of casework for those children on child protection plans and children in need is growing. This rightly reflects the high levels of need in the area.

Provision to help users move into education, employment and training is good. Personal learning plans capture well the individual aspirations of users who are effectively signposted to adult learning courses. A weekly drop-in session focuses on helping adults find employment. Data and case study evidence show that many who receive support move into voluntary work, full and part-time employment and further training.

Data are now routinely collected. However, they are not always reliable or analysed sufficiently to inform service planning or set challenging targets. The self-evaluation form provides a comprehensive description of the work of the centre but does not effectively evaluate the impact of its work. However, the centre's manager knows well the strengths and areas for development.

The centre recognises that it currently does not have a specific plan with regard to where activities are offered within the cluster group of centres. This has resulted in the majority of groups and services offered taking place at The Ark Children's Centre. The management team are looking to review services offered across the cluster of three centres in North Lowestoft to ensure that they meet the needs of the community more effectively.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen governance arrangements to provide robust support and challenge to the centre's leaders, underpinned by rigorous analysis of performance information and targets.
- Improve the accuracy and effectiveness of self-evaluation through regular and rigorous evaluation of information and data that show the full impact of the centre's work and helps leaders to plan consistently challenging targets for improvement.
- Review services offered across the cluster of three children's centres in North

Lowestoft to ensure that they meet the needs of the community most effectively.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Families access a suitable range of targeted and universal health services. The centre has successfully re-built its relationship with the health visiting team which has resulted in a revitalised approach to joint-working and integration of services. Baby massage is offered to all new births in the area. This supports the mother's bonding with her baby, resulting in improved emotional well-being. The 'Blues' group is successfully supporting mothers' emotional well-being. Initiatives such as the breastfeeding workshop offer a relaxed environment for expectant mothers to raise concerns and anxieties around breastfeeding with experienced midwives. However, breastfeeding rates remain low in the area. The 'Weaning Group' drop-in provides parents and carers with useful advice on healthy eating and snacks of fruit and vegetables are provided throughout the centre. Even though these initiatives raise parents' and carers' awareness of healthy eating, this is yet to be reflected in a significant reduction in levels of childhood obesity.

Outcomes for staying safe are good. Families feel safe at the centre and the staff give parents and carers good advice on safety in the home and outdoors. As a result, they take responsibility for their children's safety well. The centre, in collaboration with partner agencies, is effective in identifying and responding to the needs of vulnerable children and their families. Good use is made of the Common Assessment Framework for recording and coordinating targeted support programmes. Staff effectively build trust with families. The relaxed, friendly atmosphere ensures that users feel safe to ask staff when they need additional help.

Families show respect for one another within the centre. Children and parents and carers actively engage in a range of well-planned activities, which help children to develop the necessary skills to be ready for school. Parents and carers value the ideas they are given to continue their child's learning at home. For example, those attending the 'Songbirds' session proudly told inspectors how they enjoy singing the action rhymes they learn at the group, at home with their children. The percentage of children achieving the national average point scores across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scale remains below the local authority and national figures. The centre recognises that more needs to be done to build relationships with other pre-school provision and local nurseries in the area to strengthen transitions between providers and improve children's early learning. Consequently, they have recently secured the secondment of The Ark nursery manager to undertake this work.

The use of 'WOW' boards encourages feedback and comments from parents and carers. Their comments feed well into the development of provision. The centre staff successfully support many adult users in accessing courses to develop their skills to improve employability. The personal development worker works across all three centres and offers a package of effective individually tailored support and guidance.

The well-established and successful community parent programme develops users' confidence and supports them to move into further training, education or employment. There are many individual cases of parents being helped into accredited training and employment. Funding for childcare for families on low incomes is effectively promoted.

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	3
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	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	2

How good is the provision?

3

There is a sufficient range of services to meet the needs of users who access the centres across the cluster group. Assessment is used satisfactorily to ensure services meet families' needs. Local intelligence and the good knowledge that staff have of the community support service development well. Specialist support for those experiencing domestic violence is available at The Ark Centre and the young parents' group reflects local need well. Provision has been adapted to meet emerging needs such as providing a 'Blues' group for grandparents who are increasingly caring for young children in the area. While the centre collects a range of data relating to target groups, this is not used systematically to plan improvements and assess the effectiveness of specific provisions.

Services across the cluster centres are well attended and they are increasingly engaging the families with the greatest need. However, the majority of provision is offered from The Ark Centre. While this is the largest of the three centres and is equally accessible to most families in the area, the centre managers have not robustly explored what provision would be best provide at each centre.

Outreach provision extends opportunities into the community, such as providing activities at a near-by library. Working with families in their home is an established strategy which is appropriately and effectively used by many of the staff linked to the centre. Parents expressed appreciation for the support they receive and the positive changes that have resulted for their children and themselves. Typical of parents'

comments was, 'I don't know where I would be if it was not for staff here.' Case study evidence shows that at times of crisis families are supported extremely well. Family support workers are successful in working with the most vulnerable families, and parents and carers particularly value home visits and individually tailored support. Staff assess needs appropriately, provide sustained, on-going support and advocacy. They refer users effectively to other services.

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

Day-to-day line management arrangements are clear and understood by all staff within the centre and staff are provided with appropriate professional supervision. The new management team have prioritised well and have taken action in those areas most in need of improvement. They are ambitious for the centre and its users but the action plan for the centre does not include targets which are sufficiently measurable. Governance arrangements are satisfactory but not yet fully embedded. The advisory board, which serves all three centres in North Lowestoft, has been re-established with members from an appropriate range of professional partners and parents and carers. However, it is yet to provide sufficient challenge to the centre and to engage parents and carers fully in decision making. Leaders recognise that greater scrutiny of the performance of the centre is needed to ensure continued improvement.

Some service level agreements have been reviewed and good efficiency savings secured. Resources are being directed well to better support the increasing focus on the most vulnerable families, including the recruitment of a qualified social worker. Most groups and outreach services offered within the centre serve users from across the cluster area. As a result, families go to groups as it suits their needs. They achieve satisfactory outcomes and the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily within the centre. Activities are free and the centre provides a crèche to enable adults to access services. Increasingly, the centre is engaging a greater proportion of users from the most disadvantaged communities in the area. Individual support takes good account of the particular needs of users, including their language and literacy needs. Children with disabilities or with special educational needs are included in activity groups at the centre and some additional discrete provision is made for them.

Satisfactory safeguarding arrangements are in place to ensure the safety of users. All staff, including volunteers, undergo appropriate pre-employment checks, including Criminal Record Bureau checks. Partner agencies confirm the suitability of their staff to work in the centre. Routine risk assessments are undertaken for activities and suitable control measures put in place. All staff have undergone appropriate safeguarding training and know well what to do should they have concerns about the welfare of children, parents or carers.

Over recent months professional partnerships have been strengthened. As a result, the provision available has been extended. Health visitors promote the centre effectively to new parents and the sharing of information has increased the proportion of parents and carers with children under the age of one engaging with the centre. Partnerships with schools and early years settings are developing. Parents and carers contribute regularly to the evaluation of groups and sessions and changes are made as a result of their input. The parents' group is newly established and has already been able to enhance the work of the centre, for example in securing access to a soft play area in the adjacent leisure centre.

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	3
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

Outcomes from the inspection of the inspection of the Ark Children's Centre, which was judged satisfactory, were considered in making these inspection judgements.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Roman Hill Children's Centre on 2–3 May 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We very much enjoyed our visit to your children's centre and would like to thank all of you who gave your time to speak to us and tell us your experiences of using the centre. Your views have helped inform us of how well the centre is doing and we have mentioned some of your comments in the report.

The centre provides a welcoming environment where you enjoy time with your children, playing and learning together. It is a safe place for you and your children, and sound procedures are in place should staff have any concerns. Managers and staff are working hard to improve the centre further. They are re-establishing the centre as an important part of the local community and attracting more families to attend. A greater number of families who need additional help are being supported well by centre staff. Particularly good support is provided on education, employment and training opportunities. Overall, we were very impressed by the good-quality support provided for you by the dedicated staff team.

The centre has undergone much change over the last year. In that time new management arrangements have been put in place to oversee its development and management. These have succeeded in putting the centre on a stable footing. However, to ensure that further improvements are made, we have asked senior managers and the advisory board to better oversee the work of the centre. The centre collects a great deal of information about the difference that activities and services make to the community. However, this information is not always analysed well so that the progress of the centre can be judged accurately. In these areas, we have made recommendations for further improvements.

In addition, many of you choose to use other centres in the North Lowestoft area, such as the Ark Children's Centre. While this is the largest of the three centres in the cluster and you told inspectors that you find it accessible, we have asked the centre manager to review the provision offered across the cluster of three children's centre in the area to ensure that your needs are being best met.

It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. 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.

