

Inspection report for Growing Places Children's Centre

Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	383944
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2012
Reporting inspector	Susan Smith HMI

Centre leader	Lorna MacLaughlan
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	The Brook Sutton Ely CB6 2QQ
Telephone number	01353 777847
Fax number	01353 777847
Email address	lorna.maclaughlan@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Sutton C of E VC Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Paintbox Pre-School EY386347

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.

Report published: May 2012



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and deputy manager, representatives of the local authority, partners, parents, frontline staff and representatives from the advisory board.

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

Information about the centre

Growing Places Children's Centre is a purpose-built centre on the site of Sutton Church of England Primary School. It a phase two centre which was designated in 2008 and opened in 2009. It fulfils its core purpose by providing support for families, services related to family health and links to employment services through Jobcentre Plus.

The current centre manager has been in post since August 2011 in a seconded role which lasts until the end of July 2012. She also manages two other centres serving the Ely, Littlepool and Witchford localities. The local authority has arrangements in place to appoint a permanent manager. The governance of the centre is through the local authority and an advisory board which advises all three centres in the cluster. The board consists of representatives from the local authority, partner organisations, key stakeholders that work with the children's centre, and parents.

The centre's reach area is mainly rural and includes nine villages: Sutton, Mepal, Witcham, Wilburton, Haddenham, Aldreth, Stretham, Little Thetford and Witchford. Sutton is the largest and most deprived. Almost all of the local families are of White British heritage, and there are very few from minority ethnic groups. The area has a mix of housing types, with approximately 11% of the families living in social housing. Unemployment rates and the proportion of families on benefits are comparable to

those elsewhere in the region and lower than the national average. There are pockets of deprivation within the reach area, with 15% of households not having access to a car.

There are currently 870 children aged under five years living in the centre's reach area. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision across the reach area are at the levels expected for their age.

The children's centre team works with other professionals including health visitors, midwives and speech and language therapists to deliver services to users of the centre. The larger portion of the building is rented by Paintbox which is an independently run pre-school. The pre-school was previously inspected in October 2010.

The centre comprises a main play room and adjoining training room, a staff office and a small consultation room. A kitchen and outdoor space are shared with the pre-school. The centre uses other premises throughout the reach area to provide some services within the community.

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 is satisfactory. The current manager has ensured the centre's smooth operation on a day-to-day basis. In the short time she has been in post, she has forged a strong staff team that works together well, with a common purpose. The centre is developing systems for further analysis of data and evaluating the long-term impact of the provision. Staff regularly complete evaluations of activities and services. Supervision is regular and provides staff with opportunities to discuss concerns and identify professional development. Partnerships are satisfactory overall. Some relationships, such as those with schools and early years settings, have not been sufficiently developed.

Parents and their children feel safe at the centre and are settled and secure enough to play a full part in the variety of group activities. They develop a good

understanding of dangers and how to keep themselves and each other safe. Courses such as 'Baby Resuscitation' give parents the opportunity to develop skills to deal with emergency medical situations with young children. They are well attended and prove particularly popular with fathers and grandparents.

Adults improve their parenting skills and some have gained academic achievement and progressed into employment. Staff effectively, signpost parents to job opportunities and adult learning courses, including those offered at another centre within the cluster. It has recently started to offer their own 'Basic Skills' course in partnership with a local college, which has proved popular with users. The centre makes little use of volunteers to enhance its provision.

Children are well supervised and consistently good procedures safeguard their welfare. Staff and users show consideration to each other, and there is an atmosphere of mutual respect. Those families identified as requiring support and referred to the centre have their needs effectively assessed. Once users are engaged, staff often identify other needs and either supply the necessary support themselves or refer the user to the appropriate agency. Users truly value the interaction they have with all staff. They particularly value the support from the family support workers, as one user stated, 'They are non-judgemental, so I feel able to discuss any problems or concerns freely with them.'

The centre is an inclusive setting and promotes equality sufficiently. Provision is expanding to meet the needs of the community and this is having a positive impact for many users, but the centre is not yet fully identifying and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and those who are hard to reach. Outreach provision is satisfactory and the centre is currently focusing on identifying and developing strategies to meet the needs of families, particularly those in the more rural areas of the community who are not currently accessing services.

A number of significant improvements have been made in a short space of time and the centre's capacity for future improvement is, therefore, satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Continue to make better use of data by analysing them rigorously to ensure that services are targeted at the areas of greatest need and to measure the impact on outcomes for children and their families.
- Review the centre's provision and ensure it is well matched to the needs of all groups, particularly the most vulnerable and those living in the more rural areas of the community.
- Strengthen partnerships with schools and pre-schools in the reach area.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes for users are satisfactory. The centre has limited statistical evidence to demonstrate precisely the long-term impact of the services offered. The extent to which the centre ensures that children are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles is satisfactory. Clear advice is given to families covering an appropriate range of health-related matters. Universal health services, such as postnatal and child health clinics, operate out of the centre and contribute to the early identification of health and safety concerns. Children develop positive attitudes towards food by eating healthy snacks at activities offered by the centre. However, the centre recognises that it has not done enough to reduce the levels of childhood obesity, which are above average.

Outcomes for staying safe are good. Staff effectively build trust with families. The relaxed, friendly atmosphere ensures that users feel safe to ask staff when they need additional help. 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.

Children and their parents enjoy attending the centre and benefit from high-quality, purposeful activities. They grow in confidence quickly as a result of attending centre-based activities. The fun activities offered at sessions enable parents to become more involved in their children's learning and to recognise the value of play in supporting development. Many parents commented on how they welcome meeting new friends and how visiting the centre's activities have reduced their sense of social isolation and encouraged their children's interaction and social skills.

Completion of parenting and other courses gives parents the confidence to cope with child rearing. Parents comment that it encourages them to continue activities at home to enhance their children's development. As one parent's evaluation stated, 'I have started reading more books to my son, counting, showing him colours and singing songs.' As a result, children make good progress from their starting points and develop skills to help them in the future. The percentage achieving 78 points at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has remained consistently above the national average over the last three years.

All children who access the centre's services behave well and along with their parents develop positive relationships. Parents are represented on the advisory board and contribute adequately to the governance of the centre. The centre staff also collect parents' views regularly at the end of group sessions and respond well to their ideas. A few parents are attending training to encourage them to form a parents' forum which will enable further opportunities for users to get involved in decision making at the centre.

Families are beginning to improve their economic position as centre staff place a stronger emphasis on helping them to develop the necessary skills to obtain work, for example, offering an 'Essential Skills' course at the centre. While the centre

effectively signposts adults to educational provision through other providers, the centre does not keep records of the achievements of adults that it refers to other providers, such as adult learning. Currently, opportunities for users to develop skills through volunteering at the centre are very limited.

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	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	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?

2

There is a sufficient range of services to meet the needs of users who access the centres across the cluster group. 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. Specialist support for those experiencing domestic violence and for young parents is available at centres within the cluster and reflects local need well. Outreach provision is being developed and is offering some opportunities for families in the community to access services, such as providing a 'Stay and Play' session in the parish room at Stretham. Services across the cluster centres are generally well attended and they are increasingly engaging the families with the greatest need. However, the centre has not yet evaluated the extent to which the services offered meet local needs across the area effectively. As a result, the current level of universal and targeted services offered is not sufficiently balanced.

The centre is effective at assessing the needs of the children and families who use its services. All centre users report they feel valued and respected. Advice, support and guidance given to all families are good. Staff are skilful at listening to those who come to it for help. As a result, parents develop the confidence to share their concerns. They feel that they are supported well by the staff, who develop a good understanding of the needs of those who attend. Well-tailored support effectively improves families' well-being. Although a good range of information for parents is displayed throughout the centre, information on sexual health is limited.

There are examples of good-quality purposeful learning activities, including regular baby clinics, play sessions designed to meet varying needs of children and crèche facilities. Children attending crèche sessions are regularly assessed for their progress and interests in the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning. These are carefully recorded in individual folders and accompanied with photographs of significant moments in children's development.

There is a strong emphasis on developing parenting skills and promoting children's development. Parents in the greatest need take part in a range of targeted adult learning activities such as baby resuscitation and the Peers Early Education Programme (PEEPs). The centre has started to offer basic skills courses, but it is too soon to gauge their impact. Adults are signposted to adult learning opportunities elsewhere. However, the centre does not systematically track how many take up these opportunities or what impact they have.

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	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory. Staff show high levels of commitment and work well together in order to meet the needs of users. They have a good understanding of the quality of the services they offer. Self-evaluation is accurate and informs the priorities set out in the development plan. The centre is increasingly analysing the data that are available to it in order to plan services and ensure that they fully meet the needs of the whole community. As a result, they have introduced a number of new projects. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of some of these new projects, but a strong sense of forward planning is clear.

They are currently exploring different ways, such as completing more case studies, to track the outcomes for families over the time they engage with the centre in order to enhance staff's understanding of the impact of their services. The advisory board provides good support for the centre. It has a clear understanding of its purpose and role and is becoming increasingly involved in setting targets and providing challenge. The local authority is supporting developments and monitoring the centre effectively through its annual conversation and interim topic audits.

On the whole, partnerships are sound. Over the course of the year, the centre has

gained a full complement of staff. Health visitors and midwives have been recruited which has resulted in strengthened partnerships with health colleagues. Nevertheless, the centre currently works effectively with the health services in both an outreach capacity and by running clinics to promote improved outcomes for some families. Partnerships with some organisations, such as local pre-schools and local primary schools, are not yet operating sufficiently well. However, the centre has plans in place to build upon the sound relationships it has with these organisations to ensure that they work together for the benefit of families in the community.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily within the centre. Activities are free and the centre provides a crèche and covers transport costs for those most in need to enable adults to access services. Increasingly, the centre is engaging a greater proportion of users from the most disadvantaged communities in the area. The centre has identified working with Traveller families as a priority within its development plan. Individual support takes good account of the particular needs of users, including their language and literacy needs. The centre has successfully engaged with some fathers through 'Men and their children' (M.A.T.C.H) which is held on the first Saturday of the month. There is no discrete provision for disabled children or young parents in the centre. However, this is provided elsewhere in the cluster.

The centre's safeguarding arrangements are good. The environment within the centre is safe. The vetting of staff is robust and staff are well trained. The centre's staff are aware of key safeguarding policies and are vigilant in identifying and responding to any potential dangers that users may encounter. Information is shared effectively with the relevant agencies, and the centre supports multi-agency working well in order to support vulnerable families and keep children safe.

Governance is good because the local authority fulfils its statutory requirements and oversees the centre's provision to assure accountability. The advisory board is functioning well, increasingly holding the centre to account and challenging the centre to improve further. The recent introduction of 'Learning Walks' allows board members to see at first hand the services offered by the centre, and serves not only to monitor performance but also to promote the advisory board to staff and users of the centre. Supervision arrangements are good and ensure staff are well supported and have clear direction.

The centre, resources and equipment are of good quality. Resources are used adequately to provide services for the range of users who access the centre's services. They achieve satisfactory outcomes; therefore, the centre's value for money is satisfactory.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
---	----------

The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	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	2
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

There were no other inspections of services and Early Years Foundation Stage provision that directly informed these inspection judgements.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Growing Places Children's Centre on 16–17 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.

We observed the centre's work, looked at a range of documents and judged that the centre provides a satisfactory range of services that are mostly tailored to your particular needs. The centre is inclusive and welcoming, and is run by dedicated adults who are keen to serve you well. You told us that the centre is a place where you feel safe, secure, included and supported and where you feel staff listen to what you have to say.

You are well supported in making your homes safe and many of you, including fathers and grandparents, attend training in Baby Resuscitation to help you take the correct action in the event that your children have an accident.

The centre's safeguarding arrangements are good. The centre's staff are aware of key safeguarding policies and are vigilant in identifying and responding to any potential dangers that you may encounter. Information is shared effectively with the relevant agencies, and the centre supports multi-agency working well in order to support vulnerable families and keep children safe.

The fun activities offered at sessions enable you to enjoy time with your children, playing and learning together. You reported that attending the centre's activities had improved your confidence, self-esteem and social skills, especially for those of you who felt isolated or were finding it hard to cope. Others of you said that you had developed better relationships with your children, better parenting skills and were making positive relationships.

Some of you are beginning to improve your economic position. Staff signpost you to job opportunities and local adult learning courses, including those offered at another centre in the cluster. Although, the centre has recently started to offer their own Basic Skills course in partnership with a local college, we have asked the centre to place a stronger emphasis on helping you to develop the necessary skills to obtain work.

Staff do not routinely encourage you to engage in voluntary work, either in the centre or elsewhere, in order to increase your confidence and give you experience that may prepare you to undertake training or gain employment.

Managers and staff are working hard to improve the centre further. They are establishing the centre as an important part of the local community and attracting more families to attend. Governance is good because the local authority fulfils its statutory requirements and oversees the centre's provision to assure accountability. Some of you are involved in the advisory board which is functioning well, and the centre is in the process of developing a parents' forum to give more of you the opportunity to share your views with the centre.

An increasing number of families who need additional help are being supported well by centre staff. We have seen that the care, support and guidance the centre staff provide for those who have challenges at home are good. Relationships between the staff and you and your families are very good and we saw the warm welcome that all visitors to the centre receive.

The centre has undergone much change over the last year. The new manager has succeeded in putting the centre on a stable footing. They have a number of new projects starting, however, it is too early to evaluate the impact of some of these new projects but a strong sense of forward planning is clear.

We have asked the centre to analyse the available data to further develop services and measure the impact which the services have over time for your children and your families.

Over the course of the year, the centre has gained a full complement of staff. Health visitors and midwives have been recruited which has resulted in strengthened partnerships with health colleagues. The centre works effectively with the health services in both an outreach capacity and by running clinics to promote improved outcomes for some families. Partnerships with schools and early years settings are developing and we have asked the centre to do more to work with these organisations.

Although the centre offers a satisfactory range of services and activities for all the families in the community, which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals, we have asked the centre manager to review the provision offered 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.