

Inspection report for Ormiston Children's Centre

Local authority	Suffolk
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
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 senior practitioners, users of centre services, the centre manager, the area manager for the Ormiston Trust, health professionals, integrated team professionals, a representative from the local authority, and members of the advisory board.

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

Information about the centre

Ormiston Children's Centre developed from a family centre to a phase two children's centre and was designated in June 2007. An advisory board acts as a link between the centre's users and the Ormiston Children and Families Trust who manage the centre on behalf of Suffolk County Council. The centre is located in premises in East Ipswich. Services delivered by the staff team and partners include health services, family support, a range of play activities and signposting, for example to adult education. The centre also provides targeted support for those affected by domestic abuse, for families and a support group for the Polish community throughout the North and East Ipswich locality.

The children's centre has 875 children aged from birth to five in its reach area. The reach area is an inner city area which has high levels of unemployment and low educational expectations. Cases of child poverty and the proportions of families on benefits and/or living in unsuitable housing are high. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are below those expected for their age. The local population is mostly White British with a growing percentage of minority ethnic groups including Asian, Portuguese and Eastern Europeans. The percentage of families where English is not the first language is increasing.

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

Ormiston is a satisfactory children's centre, which knows its users well and has a clear understanding of its reach area and the related issues. The centre faces a number of issues which it has strived to overcome. These include: its close proximity to a well-established phase one centre; a main road which acts as a physical divide within the community that the centre serves; not being positioned on the main walk routes to school, other services or the shops; and, the transition from a highly respected family centre to a children's centre.

Staff work well to ensure that the day-to-day running of the centre is smooth and efficient. Leaders are aware that they are not reaching enough families in the most deprived part of their reach area and plans have been developed and agreed with the advisory board to increase registrations and engagement of these families. In addition, there is a concerted effort to increase engagement of families in the whole reach area, but these are at a very early stage of implementation. It is, therefore, too soon to measure the impact they are having. However, case study evidence indicates that for the people with whom the centre comes into contact, including its target groups, the help that is given is good and often very good. Difficult problems are resolved through detailed and sensitive help from staff at the centre and there is good multi-agency working.

Parents feel comfortable in the centre and know they will get a warm welcome from the staff. Users told inspectors: 'I could not have done anything without the children's centre' and, 'I would not take my children anywhere else'. These comments are testimony to how users value the centre.

Working with health practitioners, the centre helps to secure good health outcomes. Baby clinics run by health visitors are well attended, and families get ready access to good quality health information and advice. Protecting children is embedded in the centre's practice; good safeguarding arrangements ensure the safety and well-being of children and all service users.

Users of the centre have access to a range of services to support them back into

employment and to support parenting, and the centre signposts users to other appropriate organisations which offer adult learning, such as numeracy and literacy courses. However, the centre does not collect robust data to track and monitor the progress of these users. As a result, the centre is not fully able to demonstrate the impact it is having in improving employability skills and economic stability for families.

The advisory board has recently been successfully re-launched and it is now attended by a range of appropriate professionals who work in the area. They are increasingly sharing their knowledge of the needs of the local community and becoming involved in developing and monitoring the services delivered by the children's centre. Staff seek the views of parents to help them evaluate which services are meeting their needs. This feedback gives the staff a general view of what needs to be improved. However, their participation in the parents' forum and advisory board is still developing. Consequently, the role of parents and service users in influencing decisions about the centre's development is limited.

Self-evaluation is reasonably accurate. The centre manager has, rightly, requested additional support to assist her with the analysis of data more precisely and to implement a more systematic approach. As a result, the centre has yet to develop effective mechanisms for measuring precisely the impact its services have on outcomes for all users. Given satisfactory outcomes overall and the current range of provision, the centre demonstrates satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the involvement of users in the governance of the centre to further determine and shape its services.
- Take action to improve the engagement of hard-to-reach families.
- Improve the tracking of achievement for all users, including progress into employment and further education, to accurately evaluate the impact of the centre's work.
- Improve the analysis and presentation of data and information so that it is:
 - easily obtainable and clear
 - used to develop the centre's services
 - informs users and partners of the centre's priorities.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

For those in contact with the centre, there are often good outcomes in all aspects of health and safety. There is a wide range of health services available from the centre, which engages the majority of families so that they make good progress in developing healthy lifestyles. Friendly staff and professional counselling sessions help

parents to overcome low self-esteem and raise their self-confidence. Baby massage sessions encourage mothers to bond with their babies. Initiatives such as the 'breastfeeding workshop' offer a relaxed environment, where experienced midwives are on hand to discuss concerns and anxieties around breastfeeding. This is supporting women to initiate breastfeeding, and encouraging them to continue to breastfeed for longer.

Families feel safe and well supported in the centre. Parents develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe from hazards through the positive role model offered by staff and one-to-one support which increasingly takes place in the home. Well-established partnerships between the centre, health and integrated team professionals ensure that families receive timely help because they use the Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child processes effectively. Case studies show positive impact and improved well-being and welfare for children subject to child protection plans, including looked after children.

Activities such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Music and Rhyme' music sessions are planned broadly in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage and successfully engage parents and children. They are much enjoyed and appreciated by those who participate. Although increasing numbers of children living in the reach area are achieving 78 scale points or more on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, the achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest is not reducing.

A few parents provided strong testimonies to the inspectors, demonstrating how the centre's support has raised aspirations and encouraged them to attend training to develop skills. Some expressed how their confidence has been raised through attending programmes offered by the centre, through support from the senior practitioners and through volunteering roles. Users are signposted to courses such as literacy, numeracy and English as an additional language appropriately. However, the centre does not pursue information and data from training providers to confirm successes or achievements, so outcomes are unknown.

There are some chances to act as volunteers in the centre and it is keen to expand these opportunities. One volunteer has successfully completed the community parent programme.

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	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal	3

and social development	
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 meets the needs of the community reasonably well. Assessment of needs in the wider community is underway. The use of services by target groups is increasingly being monitored by the manager who, rightly, recognises that the use of data is an area that needs development. Although feedback from parents and carers who access the services shows high levels of satisfaction, the centre does not systematically contact non-users of the services to identify whether it should improve the range of provision to meet their needs. Outreach services are improving and targeting identified needs in the wider community. Nevertheless, the centre is aware that the traditionally harder-to-reach families are not sufficiently involved in the centre's activities.

Overall, staff plan and resource stimulating activities which encourage children to play and learn alongside other children and their parents. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage at the centre meets their needs appropriately. They are provided with a satisfactory range of learning opportunities from birth that aptly support their development. Good quality resources that are age-related and interesting encourage children's engagement and promote purposeful learning. For example, a parent said, 'My daughter loves it, the different songs and the chance to meet with others.'

Users have easy access to a very good range of information, guidance and advice on a range of topics which are relevant to them. Staff are sensitive to the fact that users may wish to access information privately and enable this to happen. For example, information about domestic violence and sexually transmitted diseases is displayed within the toilet cubicles so users can access this without being observed by others.

The centre reacts rapidly to requests for help and support and this makes a discernable difference to those families it engages with. Senior practitioners are extremely skilled in building trusting relationships with families in order to offer appropriate support for those identified in most need. Many users, often with very complex needs, report that they have found the support, advice and guidance given by children's centre staff to have been invaluable, though the centre is not yet able to demonstrate fully the impact of this work.

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

Governance and accountability arrangements are satisfactory overall. Roles and responsibilities are clear and well understood. There is a clear management structure with effective line management and supervision. As a result, staff are supported well. The local authority has recently set general improvement points in its annual conversation. The centre is run by a manager who is motivated to seek further improvement and effectively focuses staff on continuing to improve services. The manager and staff work hard to meet the community's needs. All of the programmes delivered are evaluated routinely, although these evaluations are not always brought together sufficiently to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the centre's work.

The centre's arrangements for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults are good and staff are well trained. The highest priority is given to safeguarding and all policies and procedures are consistently implemented. Effective risk assessment procedures are followed and there are good recruitment and vetting procedures for staff. The centre is proactive and collaborates effectively with other key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. Good multi-agency working ensures that families experiencing crisis or in complex need, including domestic violence, are well served through a package of individualised supported.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. Members of staff are very welcoming and the building is well maintained, bright and accessible to all. Parents and other professionals say that staff are friendly and accommodating. Resources are looked after well, and toys and books are of good quality. There are examples of services being withdrawn if they are not popular in order to secure satisfactory value for money. Some sessions are targeted at particular groups, such as Polish families, to encourage their attendance at the centre. Parents with disabled children are signposted to specialist support through the 'Opportunities Group'.

Partnerships with other agencies are good. The centre has established good links with relevant agencies which have proved beneficial to families in the area. Key agencies are now well represented on the advisory board; they provide useful feedback to the centre as well as agency updates regarding the services they provide to families in the area. However, the advisory board has struggled to appoint a chair and to have consistent representation from parents. Therefore, parents are not yet sufficiently involved in the development of the centre. Plans to re-launch the parents'

forum are in place.

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	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	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 Ormiston Children's Centre on 11–12 July 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 is a happy and welcoming place for adults and their children and strives to meet the needs expressed by those who use it. The centre is run by a manager

who is motivated to seek further improvement and effectively focuses staff to continue to improve services. The centre staff team is committed to improving the lives of families in the community especially those of you who are in most need. 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 a high priority. The centre manager 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. It gives you somewhere to go to meet other parents and carers and to get ideas on how to play with your children. Some of you have gained confidence through programmes offered by the centre, while others have been signposted to numeracy and literacy courses. We have asked the centre to track and monitor the progress of learners more closely especially those who they signpost to other organisations to obtain qualifications. This will assist the centre to monitor more closely the difference it is making for families in the area and target more closely to meet needs.

Some families who live in the centre's area use it regularly, but many families do not. We have asked the centre to increase the outreach work it is currently doing so that it can reach out to families who are, for what ever reason, not attending the centre. The centre is considering ways in which it can get more of you involved with making decisions about how it is run through being on the advisory board.

We are aware that some of you have brought about changes to the centre by making suggestions to the staff. We are also aware that the centre did have a very active parents group; however, this is not currently the case. We would like more of you to join this group and offer more suggestions on how to improve the centre. Finally, we have asked the centre to improve its monitoring and evaluation systems, to clearly show the impact of its work on outcomes for children and families and to provide you and the advisory board with a clear understanding of the centre's priorities.

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.