

Inspection report for North Axholme Children's Centre

Local authority	North Lincolnshire
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Althorpe and Keadby Primary School URN 117726 Crowle Primary School URN 117735
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 one Early Years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's manager and staff, representatives from the local authority, members of the advisory board and the parents' forum, various professionals who work in partnership with the centre, parents and users of the centre.

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

Information about the centre

North Axholme Children's Centre covers a large rural area to the west of Scunthorpe. The centre has premises based on the site of the primary schools in the two largest settlements of Crowle and Keadby, but also covers the villages of Althorpe, Amcotts, Eastoft, Gathorpe and Fockerby and Luddington with Haldenby. The centre has recently moved its main base from Crowle to Keadby. Travel between these communities is difficult because of limited public transport links.

The area has a diverse socio-economic population. Of the 415 children under five in the area, just over a quarter live in an area which is in the 30% most disadvantaged nationally. Unemployment levels across the area are low with 15% of children reported to be living in poverty, which is 5% below the national average. Almost all families are of White British heritage. There are five primary schools in the area. When they start school, at three years of age, children's skills, knowledge and abilities vary from year to year, but are generally at or below those expected for their age.

This Phase Two centre was designated in September 2007. North Lincolnshire Council has direct responsibility for the governance of the centre. Following a recent authority-wide restructure of children's services, operation of the centre is overseen by a children's centre team leader, who also has responsibility for two other centres. The centre has recently filled

a number of vacant posts and now has a full complement of staff. Working in partnership with other agencies, the centre delivers a range of services including outreach and family support, health, play and learning sessions, adult education and advice to support employment. The centre's designated childcare provider is Secret Garden Day Nursery, which was previously inspected in November 2011. The report for this inspection can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

'The children's centre is very helpful and my child loves coming' and 'Staff are very friendly and make everyone welcome.' These comments are typical of the views of centre users. This is because skilful centre managers have created a highly effective staff team. Staff are well informed to provide good care, guidance and support which makes a positive difference for children and their families, especially those whose circumstances make them most vulnerable. The centre provides a wide range of quality activities and services from its two bases and in families' homes that successfully support parents in caring for and educating their children. As a result, most outcomes are improving well.

The centre's work in helping to safeguard children and vulnerable adults is outstanding. All staff, partner agencies and users have an excellent understanding of their responsibilities for safeguarding and are very clear about the procedures for referring child-protection concerns. The number of children subject to a child protection plan or deemed to be children-in-need is very low as families receive timely, individually-tailored support before their situations reach crisis point.

Children's and young people's enjoyment of the activity sessions is evident. They enhance their skills, become inquisitive, independent learners and develop positive relationships with their peers and adults. Parents really value the opportunities to meet other parents, to make new friends and to improve their skills through the courses and activities offered by the centre. Despite a wide range of initiatives to support families to lead healthier lifestyles, such as volunteer-led walks and

cooking courses, obesity levels for children at the end of Reception Year are extremely high compared with levels nationally.

The centre has a good capacity to improve. Managers and staff understand the needs of local families well and have developed strong partnerships with a wide range of agencies to complement their work. Some parents and partners expressed disappointment at the reduction in some more universal services following the reorganisation. However, this has enabled the centre to focus its resources more effectively to provide services for the most disadvantaged families in the community. Managers continually reflect on what services and activities will be of most benefit.

Leadership and management are strong. The local authority's strategic vision, to ensure that children have the 'Best Start', has led to a reshaping of services in which children's centres have a pivotal role. The advisory board has become increasingly involved in evaluating the centre's progress and providing greater challenge in identifying local priorities. The centre uses a wide range of techniques to gather feedback from families in order to gauge satisfaction, measure its impact, and inform service-planning.

Development planning and target setting have resulted in improved engagement of targeted groups, particularly young parents and families with a disabled child. The centre is maintaining momentum in registering and engaging families from across the reach area. However, it has identified that not all families using the centre's services are registered and user participation is not always recorded by some partner agencies. For example, changing the time of parent craft classes has increased impressively the numbers of males attending, but this is not reflected in the monitoring data. Systematic processes for tracking outcomes of users signposted to other services are not yet fully established.

The centre benefits from continual improvements in data available to assist self-evaluation and planning. Recent acquisition of reach-level health data has led to a revision in this year's priorities. Current targets relate specifically to increased engagement of target groups but due to previous lack of reach-level data, have not included any measurable targets for improvement of health outcomes or assessment of the centre's impact over time.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with partners to reduce obesity levels of children in Reception Year.
- Increase the involvement of partner agencies in registering families with the centre, recording users of centre services and systematically tracking outcomes for families signposted to other services.
- Strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning by using the recently acquired reach-level data to set measureable targets for improving health outcomes and assess the impact of the centre's services on outcomes for children and families over time.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

A recent reorganisation within the local authority has established a single point of contact and multi-agency locality assessments which ensures an effective 'Team around the Child' approach. The use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is firmly embedded and referrals of families with circumstances that make them vulnerable are swiftly addressed as everyone is extremely confident in implementing the procedures. Parents and children are seen as essential partners in developing plans and setting small, achievable steps to improve their lives, which increases success in securing very positive outcomes.

Families using the centre feel very safe as all staff and users make health and safety a high priority, with risk assessments updated at each session. Centre users are very actively involved in identifying hazards, assessing risks and highlight their own training needs, such as information about e-safety. Parents' knowledge about how to keep their families safe is successfully increased through paediatric first aid courses, individual home-safety assessments and talks during play and learning sessions. Parents take responsibility willingly for their children during play and learning sessions, providing watchful supervision while allowing the freedom to explore and take risks. Consequently, even very young children demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe, taking great care not to run into other children when riding their bikes. Emergency hospital admissions are much lower than the national average.

When assessed at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage last year, 14% more children than in previous years reached a good level of development. Although results are variable across schools in the area, this represents very good progress overall due to children's low starting points. The achievement gap between the lowest 20% and the rest has narrowed year on year and is close to the national average. Headteachers have identified a declining trend in children's personal, emotional and social development and in their communication and language skills when they start school. New courses, including 'Me and My Baby' and 'All about Me', have been designed to support parents to enhance their children's development and track children's progress at an earlier stage. Early identification of children

who need additional help is very effective through good links with the Early Years special needs service. Appropriate help, particularly related to speech and language, is secured before children start school, thus increasing school readiness.

A wide range of courses supports development of parenting skills. Parents attending the 'Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities' course say that these sessions have helped them to understand their children's needs better. They have gained confidence in managing children's behaviour and in establishing routines, such as bedtime and toileting. As a result, parents feel calmer and more in control of their emotions. The popular 'Baby Massage' sessions also effectively promote a good sense of well-being and positive relationships.

Health outcomes are satisfactory overall. Immunisation take-up is generally good. Breastfeeding is well promoted but over the last year only half of the babies in the area were breastfed. The majority of mothers continue to breastfeed beyond six to eight weeks as they are effectively assisted by peer supporters. Current data indicate wide fluctuations from quarter to quarter in the number of mothers smoking while pregnant. Obesity levels at five years of age and of pregnant mothers is high, although parents who attended the cookery course say they now buy more fruit and vegetables and cook meals from fresh ingredients instead of buying ready meals.

Children's behaviour throughout the centre is extremely good. Staff and users respect and value everyone, regardless of their background or status. Users take responsibility for tasks at each session and a few have volunteered to support the centre. The parents' forum makes a valuable contribution to shaping centre services. Their identification of a need for facilities for older children has resulted in the setting up of the popular 'Young Persons' Group'. Those attending appreciate these sessions as they say it keeps them 'off the streets' as there is nothing else locally to do.

Jobcentre Plus has no involvement in the centre but users who receive support from outreach workers or the commissioned agency who provides employment and financial advice are well supported. Families are given assistance to reduce debt and access the benefits they are entitled to which, together with provision of household goods and furniture, materially enhances their lives. A job club effectively aids those seeking employment. Crèches are provided to enable users to access courses at the centre and almost all families take up their child's entitlement to free early education from three years of age.

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	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

The centre has a good knowledge of the needs of families in the area and works diligently to engage families from target groups. Pregnant teenagers and young parents are well supported with services in their own homes and, when viable, with a group specifically catering for their needs. Centre staff encourage them to continue their education by accompanying them to college open days and two young parents have recently volunteered to support others who want to breastfeed.

Unemployment is low so there are few children in workless households but the centre, working with partner agencies, identifies quickly families who need additional support. Engagement levels are good overall and almost all families in the most disadvantaged areas who are registered with the centre access activities or services. Fathers are less well involved and the centre has tried a range of initiatives to increase participation. The recent introduction of Saturday 'family sessions' has proved popular and resulted in the centre already exceeding the number of fathers it worked with last year. The centre is particularly good at supporting lone fathers.

Staff plan play and learning sessions well to offer progressive development from 'Wiggle and Gigggle' for babies through to 'Transition' sessions which effectively introduces children to school. Parents are encouraged to record what their children like to do at home and to observe children at play in the sessions so planning can reflect better their interests and level of development. Some parents use ideas, such as craft ideas and songs they have learned, at home, thus extending their own and their children's learning.

Adults are keen to access learning and progress smoothly from confidence-building courses to accredited training which improves their numeracy and literacy skills. Achievement is celebrated and there is evidence of raised aspirations as some learners progress to further education. There is anecdotal evidence that some learners have gained employment, but tracking of users signposted to other services is not yet fully in place. Childcare providers, including childminders, are fully integrated into the centre as users and professional partners. Childminders' practice, evidenced by inspection grades, is improving as a result of training and networking opportunities offered through the centre.

Case studies and discussions with users provide compelling evidence of the high quality care, guidance and support provided with housing issues, family relationships and financial management. Users say they get on well with the staff as they are non-judgemental and offer parents options rather than telling them what to do. This sensitive approach in building relationships with users is recognised as helping to reduce any potential barriers between parents and professionals, making other agencies' services easier to access. Partners appreciate the centre acting as a 'one stop shop' in providing them with information about other services to share with families they are supporting.

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.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management are good at all levels. Clear and well-defined monitoring and accountability systems are in place. The advisory group, made up of experienced professionals and local parents, contributes well to ensuring accurate assessment of the centre's strengths and areas for development. Regular feedback from users, partner agencies and the Parents' Forum is valued and used effectively to shape services. The development plan sets out clear and relevant priorities for further improvement of services, linked to the local authority's strategic vision and based on locally identified need. However, targets are focused on engagement and are not yet sharp enough to measure the impact of the centre's work across all outcomes areas.

Well trained staff demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of wider child protection issues, such as recognition of mental health issues. Safeguarding procedures, including safer recruitment, referral processes and information-sharing protocols are exemplary and are implemented rigorously by all agencies working with the centre. Managers hold regular, supportive discussions with staff to review their work and robust, systematic auditing of case files ensures that progress is being made to secure positive outcomes with minimal delay. The process of assessing how safe users feel, both in the centre and in the community, is particularly strong.

The centre demonstrates a strong commitment to providing an inclusive environment. Displays and resources reflect positive images that represent the wider community. Users who participated in the recent Eid party report how this has increased their awareness of the large Muslim community in the nearby town. Systems are in place to support, on an individual basis, the very few families for whom English is an additional language with

resources such as translated materials and dual-language books to loan. The rural nature of the reach area presents a challenge which is appropriately addressed through provision of individual support in the home and transport to sessions at the centre, when required.

The centre offers good value for money as the gap between the lowest-achieving children and others is narrowing and outcomes overall are good. Services initiated by the centre, such as the 'Shining Stars Stay and Play' group and the 'Tea and Toast' session, have been sustained by partner agencies as the centre prioritised its services to increase support to the most vulnerable families. Strong partnership working with health colleagues has been enhanced further by the relocation of local midwives into the Crowle 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	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	2
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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the North Axholme Children's Centre on 19–20 September 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We were pleased to spend time at the centre looking at its work, visiting 'Stay and Play' sessions and the Young Persons' Group and meeting with some of you, members of the centre staff team and other professionals who work with you.

The centre is particularly good at helping you and your children to keep safe. You are also good at protecting your children by helping to assess any risks at the centre and highlighting your training needs, such as first aid and information about e-safety. Your children behave very well and are aware of dangers when they are playing. There are fewer children in your area who need to attend hospital because of accidents than in other areas of the country. The centre is very effective in helping to safeguarding children. Staff work well together and with a wide range of other agencies to find out about those of you who might be in difficulties. There are excellent procedures in place, which everyone knows and uses, to enable them to act very quickly to assess with you what will help you cope and make things better for you and your family.

The centre has supported about half of you to breastfeed your babies and it is good to see that the majority of you continue to breastfeed until at least six-to-eight weeks. Some of you told us how much assistance you had had from the peer supporters to achieve this. Although the centre has provided activities to encourage you to lead healthier lifestyles such as cooking sessions and healthy walks, a larger percentage of your children are obese at the end of Reception Year than across the rest of the country. We have asked the centre to work with other partners to look at ways of helping to reduce these levels.

We found that most of you were very satisfied with the centre's services. The centre makes everyone feel very welcome and you enjoy coming because it provides you and your child with somewhere to come and meet with friends. You told us how you had enjoyed participating in the recent Eid party as it helped you to learn more about other cultures. Some of you were disappointed that some of the sessions which the centre used to run are no longer available. This is because the centre now focuses more of its work on working with families who need its help most. However, we found that there is still a wide range of services available to you as the centre manager constantly reviews what sessions will be of most benefit to you. We observed how you and your children enjoy 'Stay and Play' sessions and heard that some of you use activities from the sessions to extend your children's learning at home. The centre is good at working with families whose children need extra help before they start school, especially those who need support with their speech and language. This helps them to be more ready to start school. When your children are assessed at the end of Reception Year, more of them are now achieving a good level of development than in previous years.

The centre has also provided a wide range of courses for adults. You told us that these have helped you to improve your relationships with your children as you have gained confidence to manage their behaviour better and establish routines. This has made you feel calmer at home and improved your family lives. For those of you who want to improve your skills, the centre offers literacy and numeracy courses. Many of you have been successful in gaining qualifications which has encouraged you to move on to other training or to seek employment. However, the centre is not always sure how well you are doing when they signpost you to other services as it does not have systems set up with other organisations to let them know. We have asked them to improve this to help them assess whether these services are making a difference for you. The centre is good at working with many of you in the area but when some of you attend sessions run in conjunction with other partners, it is not recorded. This means that the centre is not always sure how many of you do benefit from the services it offers. We have asked them to work with partner agencies to improve this and to ask their partners to encourage more families in the area to register with the centre, so that managers are better informed about what services they need to provide.

The centre leaders and managers are good at assessing your needs and listening to what will make the most difference for you. We heard how the centre had been able to help families with managing their money better and helped you to access benefits you are entitled to. The 'Parents' Forum' makes a positive contribution by helping to identify when new services are needed, such as the setting up of the 'Young Persons' Group.' The advisory group, which some of you are part of, is good at assessing how well the centre is progressing and helping to set its priorities for the following year. We have asked the centre to use the data it now receives about the area to set targets which will help the managers measure more effectively how well the centre is helping you to improve your lives and those of your children and to assess this over a period of time.

Thank you very much for your welcome and for taking the time to talk with inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting you and sharing your experiences. We wish you every success in the future.

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