

# Inspection report for Spring Lane Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Northamptonshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	404503
<b>Inspection dates</b>	17–18 October 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jean-Marie Blakeley

<b>Centre leader</b>	Catherine Keohane
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
<b>Centre address</b>	Spring Lane Northampton NN1 2JW
<b>Telephone number</b>	01604 620484
<b>Fax number</b>	Not applicable
<b>Email address</b>	ckeohane@northamptonshire.gov.uk

<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Spring Lane Primary School: URN 121918
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	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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**Report published:** October 2012



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Piccadilly Gate  
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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior managers from the centre. Inspectors also met with parents and representatives from The Spring Charity and Northamptonshire local authority as well as members of the advisory board and a number of partners including those from health and education services.

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

## Information about the centre

This phase two children's centre is co-located on the site of Spring Lane Primary School, in Spring Boroughs, a densely populated area, in the centre of Northampton. The centre meets its core purpose through the range of services delivered. The Spring Charity, a company limited by guarantee, is commissioned to manage the centre on behalf of Northampton local authority. A board of trustees provides governance for the centre. An advisory board made up of parents, professional and community partners provide advice, support and governance to the centre.

The centre serves a diverse and transient community living in one of the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. Accommodation in the area is a mixture of privately rented and social housing including some high rise-tower blocks. Most of the families are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the highest proportion being of Bangladeshi, Somalian or East European origin. There are 1252 children under the age of five in the area, 30% are living in households dependent on workless benefits. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age on entry to early years provision.

## 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

Spring Lane Children's Centre provides a satisfactory service for local families. The manager, trustees, advisory board and centre staff are highly committed to improving the centre's services and their actions are leading to improving outcomes, for example through well-located outreach provision. However, there is limited analysis and use of data to monitor outcomes and inform the setting of precise and measurable targets and some systems of evaluation are not yet fully embedded. For these reasons the centre has satisfactory rather than good capacity to improve

Policies and procedures for safeguarding, including the recruitment, vetting and training of staff meet current statutory requirements and are given the highest priority. Family workers provide particularly effective support and guidance to targeted families and promptly share any concerns with relevant agencies. As a result, this helps families who may be vulnerable due to their circumstances to stay safe. Parents and carers told inspectors that they and their children feel very well protected at the centre and that the support they receive helps them to stay safe. One parent told inspectors 'The staff are brilliant, they always help with anything and if they don't know- the next week they have an answer for you.'

Children's achievements, as demonstrated by their results in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile in 2012, are below national and Northampton averages with 53.4% of children in Reception Year achieving at least 78+scale points including personal and social, emotional development and communication, language and literacy. However, this has improved slowly from 42.7% in 2011 and 49.4% in the previous year. The gap between the 20% lowest achieving children and the rest is narrowing overall. However, there is little analysis of data by gender or ethnicity, in order to further develop and target the centre's provision. Tracking data on individual children who have targeted support from the children's centre teachers indicates that their progress and achievement are good. However, the centre has not sufficiently developed strategies to identify and engage with all children who may benefit from early years intervention and support.

Adults improve their parenting skills through carefully planned courses and by staff modelling how to play with children. Effective partnerships with colleges and adult education providers enables some adults to benefit from courses such as; Paediatric First Aid, Food Hygiene and English for speakers of other languages. Other effective partnerships results in some parents accessing employability guidance and training. Case studies indicate that some adults gain qualifications and progress to employment or further training although information on the progress and destinations of adults is incomplete.

The centre meets the duties that apply to it for equality and diversity. The engagement of target groups is satisfactory however the centre has not fully developed its strategies to increase its engagement with families from different ethnic minority groups, fathers and workless families. In consequence, value for money is satisfactory.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve evaluation and target setting by increasing:
  - the use of data to carefully monitor outcomes and develop the centre's provision
  - the use of systems to monitor and track the progress of children and adults.
- Developing strategies to increase the engagement and participation of key target groups and in particular fathers, workless families and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Improve children's achievements by developing further strategies to identify and engage with all children who may benefit from early intervention and support.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>3</b>
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The centre's close attention to promoting the well-being and safety of families, particularly in supporting families whose circumstances make them vulnerable, leads to good outcomes in being safe. Families benefit greatly from individual advice and the promotion of safety. As a result, they have a good understanding of how to keep their families safe and there is evidence of a reduction in the escalation of child protection issues. Close partnerships with two local women's refuges has a positive impact on some families. One parent said 'I feel calmer and more confident as a mum.'

Children and parents enjoy the fun sessions such as 'Stay and Play and 'Song Time'.

Typical comments from parents include: 'I don't know what we would do during the week if we didn't have this. My child would be in the flat with me all day. It's helped him learn to talk.' Partnerships with local primary schools result in effective targeted support for individual children. As a result, the progress of these children is good. However, the centre's systems to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of all of its activities on outcomes have not been fully embedded. Adult learning courses and access to employment advice are helping to improve the economic well-being of some families.

Centre staff listen to, and use the feedback of families, to help shape and develop its services. Children behave well and develop useful skills for the future, such as cooperation and independence, and families from a wide cultural and educational background demonstrate respect for each other. Some parents benefit from opportunities to make a positive contribution to the centre through membership of the parents' forum or the advisory board.

The centre promotes healthy living through its sessions and families increase their understanding of how to stay healthy. The centre's activities such as 'Tiny Cooks' helps promote a healthy diet and adults value the access provided to a gym. Working closely with the centre, education psychologists, occupational and speech therapists provide effective targeted support which helps families improve their emotional and physical health and well-being. Immunisation rates have increased as a result of targeted local action by the centre and health visitors. However, it is difficult for the centre to measure its impact on some health outcomes because of the highly transient nature of the community and the lack of some timely, centre-specific data. For example, in 2011, the percentage of mothers sustaining breastfeeding at six-to eight weeks was 40%. However, there is no comparable data to measure if this represents an increase or decrease from previous years.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

3

The centre provides effective and timely support for families who are vulnerable due to their circumstances. Parents value home visits and the good quality individual support they receive in times of personal crisis. One parent, reflecting the views of several others, said, 'I have been coming for four years, since my baby was three-weeks-old. I would not have kept breastfeeding if it wasn't for them here. I have now trained to be a breastfeeding mentor.' Effective partnerships ensure that adults have full access to good quality information, advice and guidance on training, benefits and work.

The centre provides a satisfactory range of sessions and activities and is extending opportunities for families to engage with its services through well-located outreach provision. Joint sessions for parents and children are fun and staff effectively model good parenting skills. One parent said: 'The children love coming here. We moved here recently and don't have family nearby. My child now thinks of the centre staff as our family. I have attended courses such as First Aid. It has really helped me be a parent.' However, the majority of sessions are 'drop in' for any families to attend as the centre has not sufficiently developed strategies to target its provision at specific groups and increase their engagement.

The centre's effective partnership working means that there is an increasing range of adult learning opportunities to meet the needs of adults. Some adults benefit from courses such as English for speakers of other languages. The provision of a free crèche enables them to attend while their children are safe and enjoy the fun activities provided. However, the centre is not yet following up the progress participants make and this is an area for improvement.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leadership, management and governance are highly committed to the work of the centre. Staff are effective in their roles and are appropriately supervised. The centre manager sets high expectations and has taken clear action to improve the quality of provision during the last two years. Governance arrangements are clear and understood but there is insufficient use of data to monitor outcomes and set precise

improvement targets. The current analysis of data does not ensure that there is a sufficiently clear understanding of what impact the centre's services have on improving all outcomes and specifically for different target groups. This limits the centre's ability to set precise and challenging targets and prioritise developments.

The use of resources is having a satisfactory impact on outcomes for families. The accommodation is welcoming and staff strengths are used well to benefit families. As a result, the centre currently provides satisfactory value for money. Action to promote equality has resulted in the increased participation of teenagers, disabled children and parents and is helping to narrow the gap in children's achievements.

Safeguarding arrangements meet current statutory requirements. The centre has good procedures in place for recording information related to the vetting and recruitment and training of staff. Staff are well trained and identify and report concerns promptly. Multi-agency co-operation is particularly effective and leads to timely interventions that reduce the risk of harm to children and helps keep the most vulnerable families safe.

The energy and enthusiasm of the manager has been instrumental in developing strong local partnerships. As a result, the centre is becoming the focal point for the community. Services are mostly well-integrated and generally deliver cohesive provision leading to satisfactory outcomes for families. However, current changes within the health services and health personnel limit the integration of health services with other centre services. Outreach provision in partners' venues effectively extends the opportunities for families to benefit from contact with the centre.

The centre seeks and makes use of feedback from families to develop the range and quality of its provision and some families participate in shaping the strategic direction of the provision through their participation on the advisory board. The centre is seeking ways to ensure the parents' forum is fully representative of the local community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable</b>	<b>2</b>



<b>adults</b>	
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection**

Inspectors used the findings of the most recent inspection of Spring Lane Primary School to inform the judgements on this inspection.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Spring Lane Children's Centre on 17–18 October 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you very much for talking to us and welcoming us into your sessions. The information you gave and the stories you shared with us helped us to make our judgements. Some parents told us how the centre has supported them to improve their lives and how much more confidence as parents they now have.

You enjoy the sessions with your children such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Song Time' and an increasing number of families attend these sessions. We found that children and adults benefit from accessing services at the centre, but the centre has not fully introduced systems to measure the impact of all its sessions and particularly the progress of adults. We have asked them to improve this. Some children in local schools or the nursery benefit from individual support for the centre's teachers which results in their good progress. However, the centre has not fully developed strategies to identify all children who may benefit from early intervention and support in order to help them achieve educationally.

The centre is becoming increasingly successful at engaging with families that need most support for example, by targeting its outreach provision. Nevertheless, more work remains and we have asked the centre to continue to develop ways of reaching even more families that most need their support. The centre works with adult education providers to give families' access to courses, which help to improve the education and future employment opportunities for some of you.

You told us how your involvement with the centre and involvement in courses such as 'First Aid' are improving your ability to keep your children safe. We found that staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures and that they are well trained and promptly report any concerns to relevant agencies. This is having a good impact on helping keep families safe. Your children behave well and you learn more about how to stay healthy through advice from staff and sessions such as 'Tiny Cooks'.

Everyone seems to get on well together at the centre and there are some opportunities for you to contribute to the decision making of the centre. The centre listens to you and asks you what you think of the services and activities it offers.

The centre works well for everyone in the community, irrespective of their background or disability and is increasing the participation of those who most need their support. We found that the centre is keen to promote equality and diversity. Families treat each other with respect.

The manager sets high expectations and her clear focus on improving the centre is proving effective. The centre has a satisfactory grasp on its strengths and weaknesses. However, there is incomplete use of data to measure the full impact of its work and set precise improvement targets. We have asked the centre to improve the use of data so it can more carefully monitor the full impact of its services on the families and set targets for improvement.

We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre, meeting you and your children, and we wish you and your families all the best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).