

# Inspection report for Thirsk & Sowerby Children's Centre

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Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	383843
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY423229, 154 Club Thirsk

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 children's centre service manager, staff members, members of the steering group, a range of providers, partner agencies, users and local authority officers linked to the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at sessions in operation in the children's centre and in nearby locations. They also looked at a range of documentation including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

## Information about the centre

Thirsk Children's Centre is located within Hambleton District, in the county of North Yorkshire. It is a phase two centre and was designated on 31 January 2008. It is run directly by North Yorkshire County Council and is one of 37 universal children's centres across the county. The current children's centre service manager has been in post since October 2012.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by the provision of a range of targeted and universal services for children from birth to four years of age and their families. These include child and family health services, advice on parenting and access to specialist services, for example antenatal and postnatal groups.

The reach area has a population of 19,380 with 1000 children aged under five, of whom 100 live in households dependent on workless benefits. There are 342 lone parents with dependent children, 140 of whom have children under five, and 105 children live in poverty. The reach area is made up of urban and sparsely-populated rural districts with a number of villages, some of which are up to 11 miles from the centre. Transport is a major problem for some people.

According to the 2012 schools' census data, 4.2% of children in the area are from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is below average for children's centres in North Yorkshire, including Eastern European families, particularly Polish and Latvian. There is also a local authority Traveller site, one mile from the centre on the southern outskirts of Thirsk.

Alanbrooke Barracks, located in a remote area five miles outside Thirsk, is also within the centre's reach area. The barracks house a very transient population and can be home to service families from a wide range of different countries and cultural backgrounds. Many of the mothers, including some from Fiji and Africa, are quite young and away from support networks such as friends and family. The centre operates services on the barracks using 4<sup>th</sup> Dimension, the Army Welfare Services' community building.

Children's levels of knowledge and skills on entry to Early Years provision are below those expected for their age.

## 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

Thirsk and Sowerby Children's Centre is a good and improving centre. Some of its features are outstanding. A warm welcome awaits all who enter its premises or outreach venues and high quality services and provision meet the needs of the community well.

The centre has good capacity for sustained improvement. The leadership, staff, steering group and professional partners are passionate about the centre and are determined to ensure that it continues to develop and flourish. Self-assessment is comprehensive and largely accurate. Local data available are used well to identify priorities for improvement. However, some health data are difficult to obtain and those that are available are not always up to date, although plans are in place to remedy this. Similarly, the centre does not always receive feedback from adult learning and Jobcentre Plus about the progression that adults

make in their learning or employment so the centre is not able to assess fully the impact it is having on improving families' long-term economic stability.

Staff effectively engage with groups whose circumstances make them vulnerable or hard to reach and they are having some considerable success in improving their lives. While the majority of outcomes are good, the centre is particularly successful in improving families' positive contribution by empowering adults to take an active role in making decisions which affect their lives and encouraging their active involvement in the 'user group' (parent forum) and the centre's steering group.

Effective provision is a result of accurate assessment of need. The centre's ability to offer care, guidance and support to all families, particularly those most in need, is exceptional. Parents praise the centre staff highly. One said, 'They don't judge you; they just offer you the best support they can and make you believe in yourself.'

Activities and services are evaluated regularly to ensure that they meet needs of users. Parents are encouraged to share their views directly with staff, through questionnaires, evaluation sheets and the user group. Additionally, the extremely active steering group enables parents to contribute very effectively to decision-making and holding the centre to account.

Families thoroughly enjoy the many opportunities for them to play, have fun and learn together. As a result of high quality services and good quality Early Years provision, children make good progress in their learning and development, particularly in their speech and language. Adults are supported and encouraged to engage in a wide range of learning opportunities and the centre can demonstrate significant progress with some individuals.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective with clear information-sharing protocols, sound vetting arrangements, knowledgeable staff and robust child protection procedures. Staff are skilled in safeguarding children and families and in supporting families' own knowledge and understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Parent support advisors are trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and use this effectively to identify individual need and support. Consequently, children and families are protected and supported well.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Health partners should ensure that the planned system to share timely health data is implemented as soon as possible.
- Adult learning and Jobcentre Plus should work with the local authority to provide the centre with timely feedback on the progress adults make in their learning or employment.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2

While most outcomes are good, those for positive contribution are outstanding. Children behave exceptionally well during centre activities and develop very positive relationships with one another. For example, very young children show concern for one another by offering toys and comforting distressed friends. Families using the centre are fully engaged in centre governance by clearly expressing their views and shaping provision. Parents also take an active role in the 'user group' and the centre's steering group, which is extremely effectively chaired by a parent and user of services.

Health outcomes are good and improving as the large majority of families in the reach area engages well with appropriate health services. There is good attendance at the health visitor clinics run at the centre. The baby drop-in clinic run at Alanbrooke Barracks enables families with significant transport difficulties to access services easily. Mothers report how breastfeeding support is helping them to maintain breastfeeding and data show that it is improving the numbers of mothers sustaining breastfeeding at six weeks. Families access a good range of healthy eating courses, such as 'Cooking on a budget', 'Healthy eating' and 'Healthy lunch boxes'. These courses are very popular and parents report that they have a significant impact on improving their families' diets. However, some health data are out of date so it is difficult for the centre to assess the effectiveness of services quickly. Health partners anticipate that a new, electronic data-collection system, which has to be implemented, should alleviate this problem.

Families feel safe and are well-protected in the centre. Comprehensive risk assessments for all venues and activities reduce risks and parents receive good quality advice and information on safety in the home. Children and vulnerable adults using the centre are safeguarded well and the majority of children subject to a child protection plan and those subject to CAF procedures are supported well and have improved outcomes.

Good opportunities for both accredited and informal learning are offered through partnerships with adult learning services. Parenting courses are popular and improve parents' confidence in parenting skills, particularly for those families from target groups, such as young parents. Comments such as, 'I feel I stay calmer with the children and now use some of the techniques, rather than getting stressed' are typical. In addition, families access a good range of advice and support on finance and employment issues through the Citizens' Advice Bureau and Jobcentre Plus. Some parents have become volunteers and have been successful in gaining employment or have embarked on professional training, such as a degree in nursing. However, the centre receives very little information from adult learning and Jobcentre Plus about the progress adults make in their learning or employment.

Children make good progress in their learning and development. The number of children gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile with at least six points in communication, language and literacy, and personal and social and emotional development, dropped last year. However, there is evidence to show that the latest scores were affected by reach area boundary changes and the low number of children in the cohort. The centre effectively tracks children who access centre services and can demonstrate that children who attended the centre performed better than those who did not. In addition, the gap between the lowest-achieving 20% of children and the rest is narrowing and is, at 24%, below national figures.

There are many opportunities for parents and children to play and learn together. Good information and advice on child development is given to parents at play activities, all of which are planned with children's development and learning in mind. Good training and support are offered to the private, voluntary and independent Early Years sector and the vast majority of Early Years provision in the reach area is of good quality. The centre promotes the development of children's speech and language very well with 'drop-in' sessions for parents to access advice and support rapidly.

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>2</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>2</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>1</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>2</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre uses assessment well to determine the individual needs of families and offers exceptional care, guidance and support, securing swift support to families in times of crisis. Staff work well with partner agencies to ensure that assessments carried out under the CAF are robust and well-informed. Local data are analysed and used to determine the needs of

families within the reach area. As a result, centre staff know the community well and successfully match services to individual needs.

There are many examples of good outreach and support work, including regular 'Stay and Play', baby clinics, parenting programmes, baby massage, craft sessions, and healthy cooking activities, all of which are offered in Thirsk, Sowerby and Alanbrooke Barracks. The centre sensitively and successfully supports teenage and young parents through the young parents' group run by parent support advisors and Early Years workers. The centre promotes purposeful learning well; provision to help children learn and develop is good and activities are of good quality. All adults are encouraged to take up some of the many learning opportunities and individual achievements are recognised and celebrated.

Skilled and experienced parent support advisors work hard to make contact with traditionally hard-to-engage families, including Travellers, who live within the reach area. As a result, engagement with all groups is increasing. Parents report that all staff, including the receptionists with whom many first make contact, are 'very kind and welcoming' and say they are highly valued and respected. All staff are very aware of the difficulties and challenges faced by families within its reach area, including those who feel isolated in the community. They sensitively support and encourage them to join in activities and establish their own support networks.

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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.</b>	<b>1</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

Leadership and management arrangements are effective. The children's centre service manager has a clear vision and communicates high expectations to staff. All staff are fully committed to improving the life chances of families in the reach area and they each understand how they contribute to this. For example, receptionists know how important a warm welcome is and data-collection staff know they play a key role in identifying the needs of the reach area. Each is as much a part of the delivery of services as any other staff member.

Professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are good; accountability and strategic leadership arrangements are clear and effective. Comprehensive development plans are based on evaluation of services and activities and assessment of community



needs, although the lack of some data from health, adult learning and Jobcentre Plus makes it difficult for the centre to assess its effectiveness in all areas fully. However, there are clear links between strategic planning and service delivery so that outcomes for the large majority of families are at least good.

Steering group members are exceptionally strong at challenging and supporting the centre and play an effective role in helping the centre to improve and develop. The large majority of users reports high levels of satisfaction with the centre. The inclusion of all children and families is prioritised well and the centre fulfils its statutory duties effectively. Staff ensure that all children and families have equal access to the provision available, adapting activities as necessary. Families with disabled children are supported particularly well and they value the specialist activities and support they receive highly.

Robust systems are in place to check the suitability of those working with families. Comprehensive safeguarding training enhances staff's awareness of their safeguarding and child protection responsibilities, which are shared clearly with families. Staff demonstrate good knowledge of safeguarding procedures and know what to do if they have concerns, both in the centre and when delivering outreach activities. Robust procedures and clear protocols for sharing information, together with strong partnerships with other agencies, ensure that needs are prioritised well. However, some partners report that additional work may help to further reduce the number of children on second and subsequent child protection plans. The centre, strategic managers and partners are already working on this issue.

Relationships with partners are clear, understood and effectively managed. The centre actively encourages the private, voluntary and independent sector to use the centre. Early Years professionals from all settings have access to many of the local authority training opportunities. In addition, there are productive partnerships with users and community groups whose views help shape provision. The centre focuses on activities that are sustainable, building upon existing provision and sharing costs and resources, including staffing, with other agencies where possible. This, together with good outcomes for users, demonstrates that the centre offers good value for money.

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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</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>2</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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</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>2</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>2</b>

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

The findings from a random sample of the most recent inspections of local childcare provision and schools have contributed to the centre report and judgements.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Thirsk and Sowerby Children's Centre on 14 and 15 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

As part of the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation, and talked with a range of children and adults, including parents, staff and partnership workers. We really enjoyed talking to you around the centre and in the various activity sessions in which you were engaged. You made your views very clear to us and we appreciated your honesty in telling us how things really are.

We are pleased to tell you that the centre provides good support to you and your families. A warm welcome awaits all who enter its premises or other venues and high quality services meet the needs of your community well. The centre does some things particularly well, such as the way everybody works together to make things better for you when you are most in need of help and support. Also, the way you are encouraged to take part in decision-making and shaping centre services is very positive.

The centre is well placed for continuing to improve and make things even better for you. Leaders, staff and members of the steering group are passionate about the centre and are

determined to ensure that it continues to develop and flourish. The centre is good at evaluating what it does well and what could be better and uses local data to identify priorities for improvement. However, some health data are sometimes out of date by the time the centre receives them, although plans are in place to remedy this. Similarly, the centre does not always receive feedback about the progress that some of you make in your learning or employment. As a result, we have asked that health partners, adult learning services and Jobcentre Plus provide the centre managers with this information to help them assess how well things are going.

The centre is extremely good at offering you care, guidance and support, particularly in times of crisis and many of you told us how good the staff are to you. For example, one user reported that, 'They don't judge you. They just offer you the best support they can and make you believe in yourself.'

The centre regularly evaluates its activities and services to ensure it continues to meet your needs and you are encouraged to share your views directly to staff, through questionnaires and evaluation sheets, and through the 'user group'. In addition, you have good opportunities to become involved in the centre's steering group where you can contribute effectively to decision-making and holding the centre to account. The current chair of the steering group is a parent herself who understands how valuable the centre is to you and your families.

The large majority of you engages well with health services. The drop-in baby clinics are very popular, as are the healthy-eating cooking courses, which you told us are having a significant impact on improving your families' diets. Equally, we could see how you and your children are learning how to be safe and stay safe, both in the centre and at home. The centre works hard to keep you and your children safe. Staff are thoroughly vetted to make sure they are suitable to work with children and they work well with other agencies to protect those whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

We could see how you all enjoy your time at centre activities. You told us that you thoroughly enjoy the many opportunities to play, have fun and learn together with your children. As a result of high quality services and good quality Early Years provision, your children make good progress in their learning and development, particularly in their speech and language. Equally, you told us that you are supported and encouraged to engage in a wide range of learning opportunities and some of you have made significant progress in building your confidence, gaining qualifications and/or employment. We were delighted to see how the centre is making a real difference to improving your lives and to hear how much more confident you feel.

Thank you once again for your welcome and your willingness to talk to us. We can see why the centre means so much to you and we wish you every success in the future.

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