

Inspection report for Wellington 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 the centre management team, the local authority, health professionals, representatives from the advisory board, frontline staff, parents and partner agencies. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Wellington is a phase two children's centre which opened in 2006. Services are delivered from the centre and at five other locations across the reach area. The centre shares a building with Wellington Day Care which is located to the west of Ipswich town. The Wellington Day Care is subject to a separate Ofsted inspection.

The centre was without a substantive manager last year while the post holder was on maternity leave. The manager returned in May and shared the management role of Wellington and another children's centre with a colleague; they both work two and a half days a week. This arrangement finished in November of this year with both centres being managed by one full-time manager. The partner centre, Meredith Children's Centre, is subject to a separate inspection. A partnership advisory board provides governance for both children's centres and comprises representatives from partner agencies and parents, while the county council is the appropriate body. There are six centres in total in the south-west locality and, although currently each centre has its own management arrangements, most services are delivered through an integrated locality model. An integrated services manager oversees the work of five of the six centres.

A total of 1294 children aged under years five live within the reach area. Approximately 18% of the children live in households which are dependent on benefits. The majority of families are of White British heritage and a wide range of

minority ethnic groups, including Roma Gypsies families, also live in the area. Families live in a mix of social, privately rented and owner-occupied housing. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities when they enter early years provision are typically below the level expected for their age.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by providing a wide range of supporting services, incorporating outreach and home visiting, health support, parenting courses, volunteering opportunities and workshops. The centre is open for 51 weeks per year and runs special events and holiday activities. On two Sundays of each month the centre opens for activities for fathers.

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

Wellington Children's Centre is a satisfactory centre that provides adequately for the majority of local families who achieve satisfactory outcomes overall. The centre has been through an extremely difficult period over the past year. However, throughout this challenging period, staff continued to show great commitment to improving the life chances of families by continuing to offer a full range of services. As a result, the centre continues to be viewed by users as exceptionally safe, welcoming and friendly and a central part of the community it serves. All families were extremely positive about the staff and the services they offer. Typical parents' comments include: 'The centre has been a lifeline,' 'It is somewhere to go where there is always a friendly face and a listening ear,' and 'It is a second home.'

Procedures for safeguarding are comprehensive and robust. The centre is rightly recognised by users as a place of safety. Centre staff model positive behaviour and safe practice and help users to understand clearly how to keep children safe and protect them from dangers. Vulnerable families and those known to be facing crisis are supported well. Effective multi-agency working, such as with the health visitor, the locality team and the financial inclusion officer, ensures that these families are given good care with appropriate information and support tailored to their individual needs.

Equality and diversity are promoted sensitively in all of the centre's activities to ensure the centre serves its diverse and transient community. An effective, robust approach is taken towards ensuring the inclusion of all centre users. The range of activities provided at the centre is supplemented by outreach provision enabling families to have wider access to services. However, the centre's evaluation of its impact across all the services and activities that it provides is not yet consistent. Parents have a strong voice in helping to shape services and make a good contribution to the life of the centre, including through their involvement in governance.

The centre has satisfactory capacity to improve further. The recently appointed manager has a clear vision and commitment to develop the centre's services and has already started to implement new strategies and systems. She has rightly focused her initial efforts on developing a cohesive staff team to provide a solid foundation upon which to build. The staff team, some of whom have only been in post for a very short period of time, share the vision.

Self-evaluation is reasonably accurate because the centre manager is beginning to analyse data more precisely. However, the centre has yet to develop effective mechanisms for measuring the precise impact its services have on outcomes for users. Plans for future development are based on a satisfactory analysis of need, although some individual targets lack precise detail. Timescales for completion are not always clear and targets are not always clearly measureable which limits the centre's and advisory board's ability to know when targets have been successfully achieved.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Clearly focus the approach to collecting, collating and analysing data so that the centre is able to improve self-evaluation and to prove that it is making a difference for all its users.
- Ensure the action plan contains sharp, measureable targets to enable the advisory board to provide challenge.
- Develop a consistent approach to the monitoring and evaluation of all activities and services offered to ensure that impact can be fully demonstrated.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre works well with the health visitor to help individual families improve their health and well-being. Health clinics are well attended, and parents and carers

receive good-quality care, support and guidance about their babies' development and needs. Mothers who choose to breastfeed are suitably supported; centre staff are trained in UNICEF breastfeeding management, and on-going support is offered through 'Booby Tuesday' support group. As a result, breastfeeding rates remain stable but below the national average. The centre has identified the need to improve breastfeeding rates in the area as a priority within the delivery plan. Activities such as Karate sessions are encouraging families to be active, and children enjoy healthy snacks. Although the Healthy Child Collaborative has been slow to develop, it is beginning to ensure families in most need of support receive the help they need. Staff place a suitable focus on supporting parents' emotional well-being. Through attendance at baby massage classes, new parents are provided with help to enable them to bond with their babies and prevent social isolation.

All staff are attentive and friendly; consequently, children and families feel very safe when accessing services. Effective safeguarding arrangements mean that vulnerable children and their families are protected. Children subject to a child protection plan, looked after children and those involved in the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) are supported well. As a result of good targeted support and early intervention, some children have been removed from the child protection register to receive support as children in need, and some no longer need additional support as children in need.

Activities provided at the centre give good opportunities for children and their parents to have fun learning together. Children behave well and develop useful skills for the future, such as cooperation and independence. Parents are guided to support their children's learning and development through role modelling by staff in groups as well as through attending parenting programmes. Some parents are replicating the ideas they obtain in the centre when at home with their children. The overall level of skills and abilities of children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has increased in recent years, although it remains below the national average. However, the gap between the lowest-achieving children and others has widened.

Parents value the opportunities the centre provides for them to meet with others and form friendships. Families recognise that the centre is a place in their community where they can receive trusted support and advice. Relationships among centre users are harmonious, with children and parents from different ethnic backgrounds enjoying having fun together. Parents share their views readily with staff and play a key role in governance at the centre and sit on the advisory board. The current chair is a local mother.

Case study evidence shows that some families' economic stability has improved as a result of the centre's partnership work which includes involvement with various charity organisations. Specific target groups, such as those with no recourse to public funds, have received support and guidance to access short-term financial support. Other parents whose circumstances also make them vulnerable have received support to access the correct welfare benefits or to deal with issues related to employment or housing. Some parents have successfully moved on to learning,

training and employment. Consequently, families are improving their economic stability and independence and outcomes are improving satisfactorily.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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

How good is the provision?

3

The range of activities and services provided at the centre is appropriate and becoming better matched to the needs of the users as the centre extends its understanding of the community it serves. A number of exciting new activities and groups have been programmed, for example, the use of drama with families and a parenting opportunities group (POP), but it is too soon to demonstrable impact on improving the outcomes for families.

All activities are routinely evaluated by staff using their own observations and comments given by parents. This information is discussed by staff in team meetings to make on-going adaptations to activities and groups. However, the centre does not have a consistent approach to recording evaluation across the range of services it offers. As a result, the centre cannot fully demonstrate the impact of services on improving lives for all users.

The care, guidance and support families receive are good. All parents who spoke to inspectors identified how positively the centre is helping them and their families to improve their lives. Families with circumstances that make them vulnerable that have been referred to the centre receive good individual support through outreach work and attending the centre. They report that they are offered good support in times of crisis, saying that staff are warm, enthusiastic and committed. The centre gives good support to families in the home or at specific and tailored groups. Families receive good support during times of crisis. As one parent said, 'They are there for you when you need it most.'

Provision to help parents and children learn and develop is satisfactory. Volunteer parents can progress to the Community Parents Scheme which develops their self-belief and skills and enables them to run groups and activities successfully within the centre. Links with the local adult education service provide access to education for some parents, particularly for those for whom English is an additional language. However, the centre is not routinely tracking adults' and children's achievement as a result of its work with families. The 'Parent Voice Group' has recently reformed and is effective at engaging users to voice their options. The group also provides a range of activities which enhance the centre's provision and are greatly appreciated and valued by the centre users.

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

The manager is dedicated and enthusiastic and has high aspirations for improvement. Since her involvement with the centre, a strong staff team has formed, morale is high, and all are committed to providing children and their families with services of a good quality.

The well-developed partnerships are particularly productive. All partners are able to refer families to a full range of services which are tailored to meet individual needs. Multi-agency collaboration leads to good practices in safeguarding children and there is high-quality work to protect vulnerable children. The safety of children and their families is embedded in the centre's work. The effective use of the Common Assessment Framework ensures that vulnerable families receive timely and effective support. There is rigorous attention to child protection and recruitment procedures.

The centre is fully committed to supporting equality and diversity across its area and wider community. It has an inclusive approach towards all services in order to eliminate any discrimination. Access to facilities, such as a washing machine to clean clothes and a warm, safe space place to have a cup of tea, are greatly appreciated by families who often live in overcrowded and poor housing conditions. Crèche facilities enable parents with young children to attend training. Successful outreach work, particularly with the Roma Gypsies, has led to a wide range of services being made available to families and children from this marginalised community. Engagement levels are currently satisfactory and improving across most target groups. However, the families who use the centre represent a diverse range of

communities, religions and ethnicities.

Governance arrangements are fully understood. The advisory board, while undertaking its role satisfactorily, is not yet providing a sufficient level of challenge for the centre. Day-to-day management is well organised, professional supervision is conducted regularly and performance management meetings are appreciated by staff. Planning for improvement is satisfactory, but lacks clear and measurable targets specifically linked to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable groups in the reach area. Centre leaders acknowledge that not enough is yet done to evaluate the impact of the centre's work on target groups and to use data to plan more effectively to meet the needs of all groups in the area. As a result, the centre is developing systems to demonstrate the impact of its work. Resources, including the deployment of staff and the use of community volunteers, are appropriately managed. As a result, value for money is satisfactory.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Not applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Wellington Children's Centre on 28–29 November 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 how well the centre is doing and we have mentioned some of your comments in the report.

The centre has undergone much change over the last year. In that time, new management arrangements have been put in place to oversee its development and management. These have succeeded in putting the centre on a stable footing and staff are working hard to improve the centre further. They have developed a sound understanding of the issues which matter to you. They have begun to develop a range of action plans and initiatives so that the centre meets your needs even better.

Those of you who spoke to us told us how well you feel supported by centre staff, especially when you are going through a difficult period in your home life. The professionals at the centre work very well together to share information about families so that any concerns about individual children or family members are identified quickly and dealt with promptly. Centre staff are well trained in safeguarding and report any concerns promptly to ensure that the risk of harm to children in the most vulnerable families is minimised.

We agree with you that the staff provide a welcoming environment where you enjoy time with your children, playing and learning together. It is a safe place for you and your children, and good procedures are in place should staff have any concerns. 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 families treat each other with respect.

You told us how you enjoy the sessions with your children, such as 'Baby Massage' and 'Messy Play', which you say give you and your children opportunities to play together and meet other people. Some of you have become parent volunteers. You told us how much you enjoy being involved and how much your confidence and self-belief have improved as a result. The support from the children's centre has enabled some of you to go on to further training and gain qualifications. 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. We have asked them to improve this.

It was good to see how you contribute towards shaping the centre's services through being involved with the partnership advisory board and by talking to staff and

sharing your views. Some of you are active members of the 'Parent Voice Group'. Through this group you have provided a range of activities which enhance the centre's services. This is greatly appreciated and valued by users of centre.

To ensure that further improvements are made, we have asked senior managers and the advisory board to better oversee the work of the centre. We have asked the centre to develop sharp measurable targets within its action plan to enable the advisory board to provide challenge. The centre collects a great deal of information about the difference that activities and services make to the community. However, this information is not always analysed well so that the progress of the centre can be judged accurately. In these areas, we have made recommendations for further improvements.

It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future. The full report is available from your centre or on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.