

Inspection report for East Street Children's Centre

Local authority	Oxfordshire
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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	Grimsbury Family Association

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader and senior leaders, members of staff and professionals from other partner agencies. Discussions were held with representatives of the advisory group, parents, carers and representatives of the local authority. Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

East Street Children's Centre opened in 2006. It is a phase two children's centre providing the full core offer of services. A range of agencies, including midwives, health visitors, social workers, careers adviser and family support workers, are available through the centre. The centre management arrangements have very recently been changed so that the governance of the children's centre is now delegated to an advisory group and the early years pre-school provision is managed separately from the children's centre, by a local charity.

The centre serves areas that are among the 20% most deprived in England. There are 840 children under five in the reach area. The percentage of lone parents is 17.6% and around 20% of children are living in households dependent on workless benefits, which is above the Oxfordshire average. Most families are from White British heritage, with a range of other ethnic groups represented. The largest groups represented are from Pakistani and Polish origins. On entry to early years provision the majority of children's skills, knowledge and abilities 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

Outcomes are good because the centre provides a wide range of services that are effectively raising the knowledge of parents and carers about healthy lifestyles and about the ways their children learn and develop. Parents and carers were very keen to share their experiences of the centre and how they have been helped to improve, even transform, their lives because of the excellent quality of care for families at the centre. 'My life is here.' 'I would always come to the centre for help.' 'They're always here for me, always someone to talk to.' These are representative of the many positive comments made throughout the inspection. The centre consistently provides excellent support and guidance for families and their children, especially in times of crisis. This is due to the outstanding partnerships between agencies who work effectively together to meet the needs of families.

The centre is highly effective in helping families understand how to keep their children safe. The centre works closely with the local fire brigade to help families understand the danger of fire in the home and to put detection devices in place so that the main causes of hospital admissions, locally, reduce. This links to the rigorous and highly effective safeguarding procedures.

Through working with other local agencies, the centre encourages parents to participate in adult learning, especially in developing basic English and mathematics skills. In the last year, 28 parents and carers from different groups, including lone parents, those from ethnic minorities and from workless households, have taken qualifications, including GCSE English. The centre has particular skills in supporting the Pakistani community develop their literacy skills, including the older generations, through a multi-generational weekly session.

The centre strongly encourages the use of the exciting and imaginative outside space. Families were involved in its design and enjoy participating in a range of activities, including Forest School. This has been a focus for Dads' activities which fathers praise as it gives them time to be with their children and to give them 'daddy' time. Outside activities help families know how they can use the environment to

encourage the learning and development of their children and to lead healthy lifestyles.

Strong leadership by the centre manager, extremely well supported by the senior leaders, ensures that morale is high and relationships between staff and families are very strong. As a result, the centre is always able to respond to the needs of the families that come to the centre. Self-evaluation is accurate and based on feedback from families and also the interpretation of internal and external data. However, some of the data being used are in the early stages of development and hence it is difficult for the centre to fully analyse the results in order to be clear about the impact of services on different groups of users. The leadership recognises that this currently limits their ability to identify activities that would further increase the percentage of families that access the centre.

There are clear arrangements for the governance and accountability of the centre through the newly created advisory group and the local authority. The local authority provides strong support and challenge to the leadership of the centre. The advisory group, which is representative of the area, including parents, acknowledges that it needs to develop its skills so that it is more effective in understanding the work of the centre and can fully support the strategic development of centre services. As a result, the centre has a good capacity for further improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop the skills of the new advisory group so that it can fully support the centre's further strategic development.
- Make more effective use of available information in order to maximise engagement with families in the reach area by:
 - summarising centre data so that the impact of services is clear
 - using local information to identify new activities that will attract more families.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families respond well to the promotion of healthy lifestyles, especially through the training and visits linked to the use of the outside space. Support for breastfeeding mothers is good and highly valued. As a result, the number of children being breastfed at six to eight weeks has risen and is now nearer to the local average. This success is reflected in the number of parents providing breastfeeding peer support in the centre and in the hospital. Parents are encouraged to provide healthy lunchboxes and the Henry course helps the understanding of whole family healthy eating. Data show that obesity levels in early childhood are slowly falling, although it is unclear how the centre's work is affecting this. Case studies show the persistence of centre staff in working work alongside health visitors with families affected by the misuse of

drugs or alcohol or wishing to give up smoking. Evidence of success is, as yet, limited.

The centre's partnership with other agencies to ensure the safety of the children is excellent. There is convincing evidence through discussion and case studies that there is a strong understanding of how the Common Assessment Framework helps to ensure that those most at risk receive well-targeted support at an early age, with the centre often taking the lead.

Children make good progress in personal and social skills and in their communication and physical skills because of activities such as Babbling Babies, Wiggly Jiggles and Time for Talk. Through these sessions parents deepen their understanding of how their children develop. Transition between the different groups ensures that children can make good progress and move on to the pre-school as confident youngsters ready to make further good progress. Targeted activities for children with particular needs ensure that they have appropriate activities to make good progress and support their families in understanding their needs. In all activities children learn to make positive relationships and interact well with adults and their peers. Available information shows that children who have attended the centre make good progress throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage and, as a result, the percentage with skill levels in line with those expected is rising and nearing the national expectations. The gap between the achievement of different groups, especially the more vulnerable, is closing.

The centre is particularly successful at improving the emotional well-being of families, particularly young mothers and lone parents, and can point to examples of individual cases that have benefited from support in resolving personal issues, such as mental health problems that threaten the stability of family life. Good advice is given to parents about training and future employment options so that they can make the right decisions. Parents value the childcare provision that enables them to attend training, such as a crèche to support an evening training session.

Parents are encouraged to volunteer and this is particularly successful in supporting families learning English as an additional language when they and their children are able to talk to someone and have information translated into their own language.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	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 very clear understanding of the needs of the families in its reach area. Strong links with partners such as health visitors and midwives mean that they meet the needs of most of the families who attend the centre. Individuals and families are well known, views and opinions sought and activities put in place to meet their needs. Assessments of children's needs that involve parents, as well as monitoring progress of children as they undertake different activities, ensure that individual needs are met. Individual action plans for disabled children and those who have special needs and vulnerable children subject to protection plans are very thorough, effectively monitored, reviewed and implemented. Parents who have children with disabilities and special needs commented how the targeted individual support has helped them, often giving them 'space' for themselves, and made a real difference to their children in developing self-confidence and independence.

Highly personalised support for many families ensures that they receive excellent guidance. Home visits support families to gain confidence, deal with crises and access activities at the centre. Excellent advice and signposting ensure that parents access the right support and training that improve their lives. Many spoke of how their lives have been changed because of the centre, the coordination of the multi-agency provision and of their complete trust in the centre staff.

The centre celebrates achievement with photographs and supporting text of children and their families in a variety of activities displayed around the centre. One of these clearly demonstrated how a young mother had understood how her child learns and so was able to facilitate that learning style at home. Staff achievements are celebrated also with certificates on display.

All activities are of a good quality. They are set up by staff who have a thorough understanding of how to meet the needs of children and their families. For example, Wiggly Jiggles enables parents and carers to understand the processes involved in children's developing movement skills. The use of a wide range of equipment, such as soft play, fabrics, spinning bowls and steps, enables children to experience a range of sensations and ways of moving. Parents also value this as a chance for their children to socialise and begin to experience structured sessions. Participation rates at most activities are high, but the centre knows that not all vulnerable families in its area are accessing the centre and benefiting from its services.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre is managed very effectively by senior leaders on a daily basis. Good performance management systems operate at all levels that include plans to meet the professional development needs of individual staff. Staff are highly committed to making a difference for the children and families in the local area and have identified a key priority to increase further the number of families who access the centre. The centre and outside partner staff work very effectively as a team to deliver services that meet families' needs and, as a result, those using the centre are fully involved in planning activities and evaluating the effectiveness of what is provided. A striking example of this is the flourishing group for autistic children set up by two parents.

Senior staff and the local authority have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre. The newly formed advisory group acknowledges that currently it is too reliant on information from the manager and the chairperson for its understanding of how well the centre is doing. The members check policies thoroughly and the chairperson of the group has regular meetings with the centre manager to remain well informed. There is good representation from parents on the group and a clear commitment and ambition for further improvement of the centre's work.

Safeguarding arrangements are exemplary. All staff are fully vetted through the Criminal Records Bureau before working in the centre. Training in child protection procedures is regularly updated and new staff are helped to understand their roles and responsibilities through the induction process. Effective procedures ensure that concerns are recorded and shared between agencies, thus ensuring early intervention. Staff swiftly respond to any parents' concerns. Risk assessments are fully in place, including those for specific individuals to ensure their complete safety in all activities. Training ensures that staff are alert to signs of domestic violence and are able to support families in these situations.

Equality and diversity are very effectively promoted through all frontline services, and very well supported by policies and procedures. All ethnic groups are fully included and valued so that diversity is celebrated. Children with behavioural or special educational needs or disabilities are fully included and supported in activities. The centre has no evidence of any discrimination and parents from a range of groups

speak of how they 'feel safe'. Overall outcomes are good and, consequently, value for money is good.

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 secure 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	1
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	1
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

The inspectors took into account the inspection findings for the linked provision which had taken place earlier. The inspection found that the children make good progress in the Grimsbury Family Association.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the East Street Children's Centre on 4 and 5 December 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who met with us during the inspection, agreed to let us sit in on your groups, or spoke to us about the centre. We were very grateful for your help with the inspection and interested to hear your views.

Many of you went out of your way to tell us how important the centre is to you, what a difference it has made and how much you enjoy the activities provided. You told us that the staff are very welcoming, listen well and give you excellent support. We found the centre to be very welcoming to all families. The staff offer excellent practical and emotional support to families who need it. We found out that, although there are many of you who use the centre, there are probably others in the community who do not yet benefit from the support the centre could give them.

The extent to which the centre keeps you and your children safe is excellent. It is very effective in supporting you, especially at times of crisis. We know that you are asked frequently for your views on activities and that staff respond to what you say. We also know that staff have helped you set up groups that you have identified as being of help to you and others.

Those of you who spoke to us were very clear about what you have learned at the centre and how well informed you are about the needs of your children. You appreciate the help to provide a healthy lifestyle for your families. Several of you told us how you have been able to improve your own skills and confidence and what a difference this has made to your lives in so many different ways.

The senior staff do a good job in the way they run the centre. They provide a welcoming, bright environment with an exciting outside environment where all are welcome. There has recently been a change in the way the centre is governed and the newly created advisory board knows it needs to develop skills that will help it to be more involved in the further development of the centre.

Thank you very much for your welcome and willingness to speak to the inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and sampling the centre's work. We wish you every success in the future.

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