

# Inspection report for SureStart Thetford Drake Children's Centre (Phase 2)

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| <b>Local authority</b>     | Norfolk             |
| <b>Inspection number</b>   | 404497              |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>    | 12–13 December 2012 |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b> | Susan Smith HMI     |

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|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Centre leader</b>               | Diane Varney                                |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b> | Not applicable                              |
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|--|----------------|
| <b>Linked school if applicable</b>                     | Not applicable |
| <b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b> | Not applicable |

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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 manager and staff, representatives from the local authority and North Community Health and Care NHS Trust, members of the advisory board, representatives from a wide range of partner agencies and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Thetford Drake Children's Centre is a phase two centre which opened in 2007 and fulfils the core purpose of services. It has been managed by the Norfolk Community Health and Care NHS Trust on behalf of the local authority since it opened. It is fully integrated with the other two children's centres in Thetford within a 'spoke and hub' model. All centres share staff and resources. The Kingsway Children's Centre is the main hub and is home to the collocated and integrated team and is situated on the grounds of Thetford Academy. The Thetford Drake Children's Centre provided a small meeting space at Drake Infant School and Little Pirates Nursery, which is no longer the linked day care provision for the centre. These are subject to separate Ofsted inspections. Many of the centres services and staff are based at the main site at Kingsway.

Thetford is a small town with high levels of social disadvantage. The centre serves a socially and economically mixed area, covering the more affluent parts as well as a small pocket of high deprivation. The large majority of children are of White British heritage, with an increasing number of migrant worker families from Portugal and Eastern Europe. A total of 993 children aged under five years live within the area. Most children typically enter early years provision with a range of skills, knowledge and abilities below those expected for their age. Relatively, low numbers of children in the area are living in households where no-one is working.

The centre provides a wide range of supporting services, incorporating a crèche, outreach and home visiting, health clinics and support, parenting courses, and workshops. Governance of the centre is supported by an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies. It is currently without parent representation.

## 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

Drake Children’s Centre is a good centre. Staff and services are highly valued by users and partners due to the positive impact they have on meeting the needs of, and improving the outcomes for, vulnerable families. As a result, families are unanimous in their views that the centre is very inclusive and welcoming and that staff are there for them, especially in times of crisis. Their positive views are depicted by statements such as, ‘I have learnt so much since coming to the centre.’ and ‘I am much more confident now.’

A high priority is given to safeguarding and keeping children and families safe and protected, and the centre works hard to ensure that this is maintained across all areas of its work. The centre works well in partnership with different services and professionals, enabling it to offer a good range of provision and signpost families to specialist services where necessary.

Equality and diversity are promoted well and the centre works effectively with different professionals in improving outcomes for vulnerable families. Parents who are isolated, or lack confidence, benefit from individualised support from home visits.

The care, guidance and support available for families, especially when they most need it, are good. The ready availability of inter-agency working ensures all family needs are met well. Staff have high aspirations for families and show good levels of commitment to their welfare. They work sensitively and skilfully with parents and this is clearly reflected in the good outcomes for being healthy and keeping safe.

The management team is relatively new and is highly committed to improving

outcomes for families. In the short time it has been in place leaders have developed a good understanding of where the centre needs to focus its efforts in order to develop provision and improve outcomes for families. Suitable plans for further improvement are in place, although these are not always sharply focused and do not include measurable targets. The management team is fully aware of where it needs to strengthen its evaluation and planning, and there is evidence of positive changes to working practices. Therefore, the centre's capacity to improve is good.

The advisory board has been launched after a period of being inactive. It has yet to become fully established and fulfil its role in providing challenge to the centre. Despite this, governance of the centre is robust through the local authority and the health trust. The centre has rightly identified that the mechanisms for collecting, collating and analysing impact data are not sufficiently embedded in its day-to-day practice. The centre is currently, exploring the best ways of utilising the two different systems for holding data, one health lead and one led by the local authority, to fully demonstrate the impact the centre is having on improving outcomes for families.

The economic well-being of some families is improving as parents have access to a suitable range of services to support them back into employment and for advice on benefits and debt management. The centre signposts some adults to other organisations who provide adult learning and accredited courses. However, the range of courses is limited and the centre currently does not collect robust data to track and monitor the progress of these learners.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Drive improvement further by strengthening;
  - self-evaluation and sharpening action planning to include targets which are clearly measurable
  - systems for tracking and monitoring the impact of the centre's services.
- Increase the opportunities for adult learning to enable a larger majority of families in the area, including those from target groups, to further improve their economic stability and independence.

## How good are outcomes for families?

|          |
|----------|
| <b>2</b> |
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The centre has a strong focus on improving families' health, giving advice and support. As a consequence, the large majority of families in the area attend their midwife and child health checks and family health is improving, particularly among the groups identified as vulnerable. Immunisation rates are good. The centre

positively promotes breastfeeding and the health visitor and centre staff run a highly valued breastfeeding support group. Despite this, breastfeeding rates remain stubbornly low compared to the national average. In response, the centre has developed a range of initiatives which are soon to be implemented. Obesity and nutrition awareness is improving among parents at the centre and families enjoy joining in with physically active play. Good links with specialist services such as speech and language therapists ensure easy access to these for families. Groups such as 'Baby Massage' help strengthen family bonds. Adults are successfully supported towards better emotional and mental health through the availability of counselling services and the work of the outreach workers.

Children behave well at the centre and staff are good role models for parents' attitudes and behaviour. Those parents who find their children's behaviour difficult benefit from attending structured parenting courses which can be delivered on a one-to-one basis in their own homes. This enables them to quickly gain strategies for dealing with problems. Families are effectively safeguarded because of the centre's close attention to promoting their well-being and safety. Families, whose circumstances make them vulnerable and children subject to a child protection plan, receive well-targeted support. There are good outcomes for children supported by the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). Thorough risk assessments of activities and services, ensures children and their parents are safe when they are at the centre.

Outcomes for children and parents involved in learning and play are satisfactory. They have lots of fun, bond well together and parents discover how children learn through play. Staff work effectively with local early years providers to introduce projects and courses for parents aimed at supporting their children's communication and language skills. Despite this, data show that only 48.4% of children reached a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is an improving picture on the previous year but it remains well below the national average of 64%. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, although still wide, is narrowing.

Families feel fully involved in the centre and are comfortable in expressing their views to staff through frequent evaluations or the 'Friends of SureStart' forum. The recently introduced, 'Patient Stories' is a powerful tool for the collection of users' views. It has already resulted in developments such as improving the outdoor play space. As yet, the centre has not been able to secure parental representation on the advisory board to enable users to become fully involved in decision making.

The centre contributes satisfactorily to motivating and building the confidence of families. There are some opportunities available for parents to engage in further training and seek financial benefits or advice. Volunteering has been promoted by the centre in the past but the centre is keen to recruit more volunteers. A number of initiatives, such as, peer support for breastfeeding mothers, are soon to be re-introduced at the centre. The centre signposts users to a range of learning

opportunities offered by education providers. However, the centre does not always learn about the qualification or employment outcomes for all parents who are referred on.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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| <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>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>2</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?**

**2**

The centre, along with its partners, meets the needs of targeted groups well. Services are well-attended and users reflect the diverse community the centre serves. Contact with families begins with universal health services. Health visitors are based at the centre and carry out visits to all new births in the area. A robust referral system for families in need of support is in place to ensure that families receive swift access to services. By working in a sensitive and persistent way, the centre ensures that those in need of the most support do in fact receive it. Discussions with families demonstrate the successful outcomes for families through the personalised support given. As one user explained, 'The centre has helped me with my confidence and enabled me to be independent again.'

Joint sessions for parents and children are fun and staff effectively model good parenting skills. The progress and achievements of children who attend the sessions are observed by staff and verbally shared with parents. Parents have access to a range of opportunities to develop their parenting skills. An adult learning programme is in place and is being developed to build on parents' current skill level. Some are able to improve their levels of literacy and numeracy as well as improve the home learning environment, for example by understanding how to use story sacks with their children. The centre is working with other agencies to explore how best to widen the range of learning opportunities for adults. Staff celebrate parents' success; certificates are awarded on completion of training.

There are examples of good quality outreach work, including events in the local schools and other community locations. Working with families in their home is an established strategy which is appropriately and effectively used by many of the staff linked to the centre. Specialist provision is in place to support teenage parents through the Family Nurse partnership. Parents of disabled children say they feel well supported by both staff and other users as their children's needs are understood and catered for. In addition, services for pre-school children with special educational needs are provided through the portage service and the centre has a well-resourced sensory room. A group for dads, granddads and male carers, held at times most convenient time for them, is greatly appreciated.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| <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>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?**

**2**

The centre has gone through a difficult period in the last year. During these turbulent times, staff remain committed to their roles and passionate about improving the lives of the families they serve. The centre staff are fully integrated across the three centres in the Thetford area to help parents to become acquainted with them and ensuring resources are more sustainable.

Staff work very well together as a team and feel supported and valued by leaders and managers. Good professional supervision and management arrangements are in place to monitor the performance of staff and ensure their safety, well-being and professional development. The local authority challenges leaders and managers to improve. All staff and partners are committed to evaluation and reflective practice and are increasingly providing evidence to hold them accountable and to demonstrate the impact of the services and activities on outcomes. However, this approach is not always used holistically to form one vision for the centre to drive future improvement. The centre has yet to fully embed a consistent approach to evaluating its performance and demonstrating the total impact it is achieving. The centre's priorities for improvement are appropriate, challenging and realistic, although some lack precise enough detail for the centre to be able to measure fully and demonstrate readily their success. The centre has numerous initiatives planned with partners to continue to close the gap between the most disadvantaged and the rest.



Partnership working is good and users benefit from the many activities being run at the centre. Staff are confident when directing users to other agencies, knowing that their needs will be met. Safeguarding is good and all legal requirements are effectively adhered to. Staff training is appropriate and up-to-date. Robust risk assessments ensure all activities are run safely. Families with circumstances that make them most vulnerable receive good support during times of crisis through the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework process. Staff's knowledge of safeguarding ensures that families receive the support they need at the time they need it most. Safe recruitment procedures are followed and all relevant checks are made to ensure that all staff, partners and volunteers are suitable and safe to work with children.

The inclusion of all families is promoted effectively as the centre has a good understanding of the needs of the families it supports and knows who the most vulnerable groups are. Strategies to break down barriers to engagement with key target groups, such as utilising translation services for families who do not speak English, are well established. Outcomes for vulnerable families in the reach area are consistently improving and services have a good impact on safeguarding children. Therefore, the centre provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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|---|----------|
| <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 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>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>3</b> |

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

None.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the SureStart Thetford Drake Children's Centre (Phase 2) on 12–13 December 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time to talk to us about your involvement and experiences at the centre. It was very enjoyable to meet with you and your families. You made it very clear to us how much you appreciate the children's centre and the support you receive from staff. Many of you told us the positive impact the centre has had on your lives, particularly when you may be experiencing difficulties. We found the staff are extremely caring towards you and provide you with the relevant guidance you need.

The provision for helping you and your families develop healthy lifestyles is good. The links with health professionals are good within the centre. This enables you to regularly seek advice from health visitors which supports the healthy development of you and your children. The centre is a very happy and well-resourced place.

Your children and families are safe when using the centre and staff are swift to intervene early with any safeguarding concerns to ensure that children are safe and families are fully supported. Staff work very well with other professionals to ensure that your families get the right support when you need it. You receive good care, guidance and support, particularly when facing times of crisis. Caring and dedicated staff are knowledgeable about your community and the families they serve. They are enthusiastic and committed to improving the outcomes for your families. They have worked hard to establish the centre at the heart of the community it serves.

Your centre gathers and listens to your views about what your families need most. As a result, services and activities are matched to your needs and are successfully encouraging many more families to use them. This is particularly the case for those of you with circumstances that make you most vulnerable. This ensures your centre provides good value for money.

Many of you told us how much you and your children enjoy attending groups and developing new skills. We noted that many of you develop your confidence, self-esteem and emotional well-being. This leads to some of you beginning to undertake formal training and qualifications and be successful in returning to work. A few of you have become volunteers in the past and develop new skills. The centre is keen to offer this opportunity to more of you and it would like you to become more

involved in the decision making by being represented on the advisory board. We noted that the current range of adult learning courses is limited and have asked the centre to address this.

The centre is becoming an important part of the local community. In order to develop further, we have asked the centre to strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning to ensure that they provide an up-to-date picture of the centre and to sharpen action planning to include targets which are specific and clearly measurable. We have also asked the centre to strengthen systems for tracking and monitoring the impact of the centre's services.

Your children's centre has a good capacity to improve further the outcomes for families living in your community and to continue to narrow the gap between the most disadvantaged and the rest.

We enjoyed our time at your centre. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honesty and openness helped us immensely during the inspection. 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).