

# Inspection report for Thorplands Children's Centre

---

<b>Local authority</b>	Northamptonshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	384179
<b>Inspection dates</b>	05–06 February 2013
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Wendy Ratcliff HMI

<b>Centre leader</b>	Louise Paterson
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Centre address</b>	Farm Field Court Thorplands Northamptonshire NN3 8AQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01604 741131
<b>Fax number</b>	01604 671322
<b>Email address</b>	lpaterson@northamptonshire.gov.uk

<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Thorplands Primary School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	EY331027 – Thorplands Children's Centre Nursery

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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080).

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



## 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, the headteacher, representatives from the local authority, members of staff, partner agencies, including a representative from the health services, members of the advisory partnership forum and the governing body. They also held informal discussions with families using the centre's services.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. This included key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, the centre's development plan and data about users of the centre.

## Information about the centre

Thorplands Children's Centre is a phase one centre that was designated in August 2006. It is managed on behalf of the local authority by the governing body of Thorplands Primary School. The day-to-day management of the centre is the responsibility of the centre manager. The governing body and the advisory partnership forum contribute to the management of the centre and include representatives from a number of community and statutory partners and parents. The parents' forum, recently re-established as 'Parent Voice', feeds into the advisory partnership forum. The centre works in partnership with four other children's centres in the East Northampton locality.

The area is ethnically, socially and economically diverse. There is a high proportion of social housing, including temporary housing, resulting in a high level of mobility in the population. The largest ethnic groups in the area are White British and families of African heritage. There are smaller percentages of other minority ethnic groups and an increasing number of White European families. Around 30% of families speak English as an additional language. Around 1020 children under five live in the

centre's catchment area; around 36% of children under five are considered to be living in poverty. Overall, the centre serves one of the 30% most deprived areas nationally. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities when they enter early years provision are typically below the levels expected for their age.

The centre offers a range of services for families and children under five years. These include child health services and family support, including outreach and signposting for those seeking employment. The centre runs a crèche for some of its activities. The services are run from the centre and different community venues, including Lings Forum Leisure Centre, Lumbertubs Primary School and Weston Favell Library.

The centre has registered early years provision providing the equivalent of 67 full-time places for children under the age of five. The children's centre and the nursery are open from 8.00am to 6.00pm each weekday for 50 weeks of the year. The nursery was previously inspected as part of the school inspection in March 2012.

## 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

Thorplands Children's Centre makes a good contribution to improving the outcomes of families. The centre is highly welcoming and considered by families as an inclusive place in the community where they feel respected and safe. A particular strength of the centre is the family support work which is helping those who are experiencing difficulties in their lives to make significant improvements. Parents report, 'I was really poorly but I have come on in leaps and bounds. I have someone to listen to me now,' and 'The centre has changed our lives.'

Staff are highly enthusiastic and passionate about their work. This is because the senior leadership team provides a clear sense of direction and purpose, which is driving improvement. Leaders have a secure understanding of the centre's strengths and what needs to improve further. They work with partners to deliver a cohesive set of services both at the centre and in community venues. As a result, the centre has a good capacity to improve further.

The centre uses data about the area and local knowledge to identify need, and to plan and review services. Despite a transient population, the centre is successfully increasing the number of families it reaches, including lone parents, fathers, families from minority ethnic groups and vulnerable families. The programme of activities has recently been reviewed to ensure services are targeted at reaching even more families. Self-evaluation is accurate and supported by evidence of impact and leads to the identification of key priorities for improvement. Leaders recognise that the evaluation system does not yet include all available information, such as data indicating the success of those accessing training provided by partners, to provide evidence of the centre's full impact on outcomes.

The percentage of children who achieve a good level of overall achievement by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has substantially increased in the last five years and, at 61%, is now just below the national average. Around 73% of children who move into Thorplands Primary School reach this level of achievement, showing good progress from their low starting points. The centre is now looking to develop a system to track the achievements of all children when they move to other pre-schools or school. The gap between the lowest-achieving 20% and the rest is closing.

Children's safety and well-being are enhanced by the effective implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures. Staff initiate Common Assessment Framework (CAF) referrals to ensure families receive the most appropriate level of support and intervention. Case files, for example, confirm there is significant and sustained improvement for children subject to child protection plans or identified as children in need.

The provision to help children and adults learn and develop is good. Parents engage in training courses, such as those to develop parenting skills or family learning. Take-up rates are increasing and case studies show some families are improving their economic stability. Parents and their children enjoy a range of activities and opportunities to learn together. For example, the session at the library, 'Story Stomp', helps to develop children's communication skills and an enjoyment of books. One parent said, 'I cannot afford a nursery place and activities like this make life worthwhile.' Families are developing a satisfactory understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy. Staff plan workshops such as, 'Grubs Up' and 'Get into Gear', to promote healthy eating and regular exercise. However, the percentage of Reception Year children living in the area who are obese continues to be higher than both the local authority and national averages.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve the rigour of the centre's evaluation cycle to ensure all available data are analysed more robustly and used more precisely to target services to increase reach and to enable outcomes for children and families to be more explicit.
- Develop further the centre's systems to monitor and measure the longer-term impact of the centre's services by:
  - working with the local authority, early years providers and schools in the area to develop a system to track the achievement of children when they move on to the next stage in their learning
  - developing a consistent method to track the progress made by adults who have accessed training courses.
- Work with health partners to improve health outcomes for children and families including reducing obesity levels.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>2</b>
----------

Families have a satisfactory awareness of how to lead healthy lives, and a majority engage well with health services at the centre. The centre has a range of initiatives and activities to promote improved health outcomes. One parent told inspectors how she had received support to continue breastfeeding, and another parent who suffered from postnatal depression successfully bonded with her baby as a result of baby massage sessions. 'Dads' Football' and 'Ladies Health and Fitness' are helping adults to understand the benefits of physical exercise for themselves and their children. The centre does not collect wider health information, such as immunisation take-up rates, or measure the longer-term benefits of such activities to show the full impact of its work.

High regard is given to promoting safety to support families to feel safe both at the centre and in their daily lives. For example, children are developing a good understanding of how to keep safe and be seen by drivers when walking in the dark through promotions, such as 'Be Bright, Be Seen'. Families have extremely high levels of confidence and trust in staff. The centre has been proactive in building links and engaging with families who have experienced domestic violence. 'The Whole You' programme, which is tailored to the individual concerns and needs of parents, is having a significant impact on empowering and supporting families. Parents say how the 'Video Interactive Guidance' (VIG) has helped them to make positive changes to how they manage their children's behaviour.

Sessions such as 'Messy Play' and 'Stay and Play', have a strong focus on children's learning and development. Any potential concerns are identified early and referrals made for specialist support, such as speech and language therapy or occupational therapy. The 'Every Child a Talker' (ECAT) programme, coupled with input from speech and language therapy, is improving children's language and communication skills. The centre provides support to early years providers and schools in their work in preparing children for the next stage in their development, such as a music group

for families who speak English as an additional language, and the implementation of ECAT. It is now looking to track the impact of the support for and achievement of these children when they move to the next stage in their learning.

Families are enthusiastic about attending the centre. They make good progress in achieving personal, social and educational goals. Children behave well and families show high levels of respect for each other. Parents, from all target groups confidently share their views through regular evaluations, parental consultations and feedback to 'Parent Voice'. Their views contribute to shaping services, such as 'Rainbow Mums', a mothers-only support group which embraces mothers, including Somali women, from a variety of different cultures.

Parents report that their engagement with the centre has improved their confidence and independence, which in turn has led to a better quality of life. Family learning courses, such as sewing, build adults' confidence and empower them to attend further courses, such as English and mathematics, that lead to functional skills qualifications. English courses for speakers of other languages (ESOL) are helping parents to participate in the life of the community. There are examples of parents who, as a result of accessing services, including 'Time for Change', have returned to work or further education. However, the centre does not systematically track the progress of adults and the longer-term benefits of the work to support skills' progression and employability once it has laid the initial foundations.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>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>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 knows the families in the area well and, with partners, skilfully identifies the ones whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. Family workers use assessment well to plan specific tailored support for families. They build trusting relationships with families so they can access the correct support, including support that the centre commissions, such as, Home-Start and Relate. Parents greatly

appreciate the good care, guidance and support they receive from staff and feel confident to approach staff when they experience a crisis or change in circumstance. Parents reported, 'I was in such a bad place and the centre saved me and my family,' and 'My confidence has grown and they have asked me to be a volunteer.'

The centre analyses the available data from the local authority to identify the needs of the community. It has recently commissioned a private company to complete a detailed analysis of the area and now has more specific, up-to-date and detailed information on its reach area, which it plans to use to target provision even further. For example, the centre receives new birth data and ensures each family receives information about the centre's services, resulting in an increase of families registering. Staff make attempts to visit families who have not made contact and the new data helps to focus efforts in the areas of greatest need, such as where children are living in households dependant on workless benefits.

There is effective support for children with disabilities. The centre works in partnership with portage to facilitate the 'Little Stars' drop-in group for children with disabilities and developmental delay. Children benefit from the opportunity to play in a relaxed and calm atmosphere, and parents value the opportunity to seek support from other parents.

The centre provides a good range of weekly activities, which promote purposeful learning for children and adults, and the majority are well attended; the attendance at some newer groups is smaller but increasing. Childminders greatly appreciate 'Doddle Dots', a weekly drop-in facilitated by the children's centre teacher, which is helping to improve their implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage for the children in their care. Achievement is celebrated well and certificates are awarded at the end of courses. This is much appreciated by proud recipients and provides a great boost to their self-esteem.

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>2</b>

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

**2**

The centre is managed well and there are clear arrangements for professional supervision linked appropriately to governance and accountability. Staff feel supported in their work and morale is high. Day-to-day management ensures that the premises are used effectively. Resources, including the deployment of staff expertise and the use of volunteers, are managed effectively. Outcomes are good,



and the centre, therefore, provides good value for money.

The advisory partnership forum and the governing body support the centre in its work. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development. They regularly review the self-evaluation and development plan and are becoming more effective in challenging leaders. Good partnerships with other services and key partners ensure services are integrated and are making a difference for children and families.

A range of monitoring and evaluation systems ensure services are improving outcomes for families and help staff to identify where they need to develop services further. As a result, self-evaluation is accurate and leads to the setting of priority areas for improvement. However, data are not always used to full effect to enable outcomes for children and families to be explicit, and systems to measure the longer-term impact are in their infancy.

Safeguarding procedures are embedded in all of the centre's work. Staff are proficient in instigating and managing referrals under the Common Assessment Framework, including 'Team Around the Family' meetings. Specific work with families where children are subject to a child protection plan or identified as in need has led to significantly improved outcomes reducing the risk of harm to children. Recruitment practices are effective and ensure all adults working with children are suitable. Staff carry out daily risk assessments to ensure the centre and community venues are safe.

Everyone at the centre is treated with high levels of respect, and the range of families who access services reflect the community it serves. The centre is successful in removing barriers to services, such as signposting adults to dyslexia assessments with family learning and providing crèche places so parents can access training courses. User engagement is positive and parents who are engaged with the centre are invited to evaluate the impact of services they receive. The centre responds to the views of parents, such as advertising forthcoming events safely using a social network site. A recent 'One Stop Shop' event run in partnership with the four other children's centres in the cluster and health partners at Western Favell shopping centre is an example of how the centre captures the views of those who do not use the centre.

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 secure 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 Thorplands Children's Centre registered early years provision was previously inspected in March 2012 as part of the Thorplands Primary School inspection. The inspection of the children's centre was informed by the findings and judgements of the Early Years Foundation Stage made at the time.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

### **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Thorplands Children's Centre on 5 and 6 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

During the inspection, we held meetings with the centre's staff, some of the other people who work from the centre, members of the local authority and the advisory partnership forum. We looked at evaluations of the centre's work and a range of other documentation. We were pleased to be able to talk to some of you about the centre and the activities. The children's centre is making a good contribution to improving outcomes for you and your families.

We agree with you that staff are welcoming and provide you with good levels of care, guidance and support, especially when you need it the most. You were keen to tell us how the centre has helped you make improvements in your lives. This is confirmed by comments such as, 'I was really poorly but I have come on in leaps and bounds. I have someone to listen to me now,' and 'The centre has changed our lives.'

We found that staff are highly enthusiastic and passionate about their work. This is because the senior leadership team provides a clear sense of direction and purpose,

which is driving improvement. Leaders have a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and what they need to do to improve. They work with partners to deliver a range of services both at the centre and in community venues. The centre uses data about the area and what it knows about the community to identify need, and to plan and review services. The centre is successfully increasing the number of families it reaches, including lone parents, fathers, families from minority ethnic groups and vulnerable families. The programme of activity has recently been reviewed to ensure services are targeted at reaching even more families. Self-evaluation is accurate and supported by evidence of impact and leads to the identification of key priorities for improvement. Leaders recognise that the evaluation system does not yet include all available information, such as the success data of those families accessing training provided by partners, to provide evidence of the full impact on outcomes.

The percentage of children who achieve a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage has substantially increased in the last five years and, at 61%, is now just below the national average. The data show that 73% of children who attended the nursery and then moved into Thorplands Primary School made good progress. The centre is now looking to develop a system to track the longer-term achievements of all children when they move to other pre-schools or schools. The gap between the lowest-achieving 20% and the rest is closing.

Children's safety and well-being are enhanced by the effective implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to ensure families receive the most appropriate level of support and intervention.

The provision to help children and adults learn and develop is good. You told us how much you and your children enjoy the range of activities and the opportunities to interact with others and make new friends. For example, the session at the library, 'Story Stomp', helps to develop children's communication skills and an enjoyment of books. One of you told us, 'I cannot afford a nursery place and activities like this make life worthwhile.' We found out how you and your families are developing a satisfactory understanding of how to keep yourselves and your children healthy. Staff plan workshops such as, 'Grubs Up' and 'Get into Gear', to promote healthy eating and regular exercise. However, the health data show the percentage of Reception Year children living in the area who are obese continues to be higher than both the local authority and national averages so we have asked the centre to look at ways to reduce this.

You told us how the centre asks for your views through regular evaluations and feedback to the parents' forum, known as the 'Parent Voice'. We heard how all of your views contribute to shaping services, such as 'Rainbow Mums', a mothers-only group which embraces mothers, including Somali women, from a variety of different cultures.

You can support the centre by continuing to share your views and getting involved as a volunteer or joining the 'Parent Voice'.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us during the inspection. We are grateful for your views and comments and wish you a successful future.

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