

Inspection report for First Steps Children's Centre

Local authority	City of Peterborough
Inspection number	404505
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Welland Primary School (URN): 110731
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Stars Pre School Welland (URN): EY455308

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 manager, members of staff and professionals from key partner agencies. Discussions were held with members of the advisory board, parents, and representatives from Barnardo's and the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Situated on the eastern edge of the City of Peterborough, First Steps Children's Centre is a former Local Sure Start Programme centre that was designated as a phase one children's centre in January 2005. It is situated on a shared campus with Welland Primary School, although governance arrangements are separate. In March 2012 the local authority commissioned Barnardo's to manage the four children's centres in the Central and Eastern locality, of which First Steps Children's Centre is one. All four centres work together as part of a locality delivery model. The centres are in close proximity to each other and work in cooperation to provide services that complement each other and to share resources and staff.

The centre manager has been in post for four weeks, as part of a restructuring which is not yet complete. She also has responsibility for Fulbridge Children's Centre, which has previously been inspected. In addition some activities are delivered from a satellite facility, 'Parents United'. The children's centre's advisory board provides advice and support and there is an active parent forum (Voices4Action) in place. The centre's core purpose is provided through a range of integrated services that include health, family learning and support, outreach and universal provision.

The centre serves a community that is ranked one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The area has the highest percentage of economically inactive people in Peterborough and 33.8% of households with dependent children have no adults who are in employment. Approximately half of the housing in the area is owner-occupied and half social and privately rented housing. The majority of the local

population is White British with a growing percentage of other minority ethnic groups including Eastern European and Asian. Across the reach area there are 34 different languages spoken.

There are currently 824 children aged under five years living in the centre’s reach area. In 2011 35.1% of residents had no qualifications. Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are below those expected for their age, particularly in their communication, language and literacy development.

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

First Steps Children’s Centre provides a good service and meets the needs of the community it serves well. Recent management changes and a restructuring of services have not adversely affected delivery. There is a clear vision for improvement and the enthusiasm and commitment of all staff is driving the centre forward. An increasing proportion of families make good use of the centre’s services to improve their lives. Effective partnership and outreach services lead to good outcomes for most target groups, including those in circumstances that may make them vulnerable. Good systems of governance provide challenge to the centre. As a result, the centre has a good capacity for sustained improvement.

The centre is effective in ensuring the safety of the children and families it supports. Parents feel safe, cared for, and know that their children are well protected. The safety and security of families is given a high priority by all staff, and parents recognise this. Good integrated services and outreach work ensure families receive timely support. There are systems in place to ensure all children subject to child protection plans are identified and supported by the centre. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes are used well to support those with circumstances that may make them vulnerable.

An extensive range of activities to promote healthy lifestyles is beginning to have a positive impact on the health of families in the area, however, breastfeeding rates remain low and there are significant incidences of low birth weights, teenage pregnancy and smoking during pregnancy. The centre is inclusive. Families from

minority ethnic groups are well represented in most activities, however, the centre is not consistently proactive in removing barriers to access for those families with English as an additional language.

There are improving standards for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, however, the gap between the lowest achieving group and the rest is widening primarily due to the increase in the number of children born outside the country moving into the area. Children using the centre make good progress from their starting points and generally attain a higher level on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile than their peers. Adults also achieve well, engaging enthusiastically in a range of training opportunities. For some parents this enables them to go on to further training, become volunteers and then gain employment. Other families are supported with debt and benefit advice which allows them to improve their economic stability.

The centre is well known in the community and children and families using the centre treat one another with respect. Parents are actively engaged in running the centre, as volunteers, and as members of the Voices4Action parent forum and advisory board. Staff at the centre are knowledgeable about the needs of families in the area, and parents' views are key in deciding the nature of the services and activities the centre offers. Programmes are well attended and of a good quality. Individualised support for families is very effective, particularly in times of crisis. Parents recognise this, a typical comment being: 'The service is non-judgemental but supportive when I need it'. This quality support and provision enables individuals and families to improve their circumstances, achieve educationally and improve their personal development.

Partners, parents and staff work closely to ensure that there are clear links between self-evaluation, strategic plans, the centre's development and provision. Everyone is aware of the challenges facing families in the area, of the centre's strengths and where there is need for further improvement. However, the new data systems introduced as part of the change of management are not sufficiently embedded, and analysis is not yet robust enough to provide highly accurate evaluation of the centre's performance.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Build on existing health improvement programmes, in order to impact positively on the health of children and families in the area.
- Improve the health outcomes of children and families. Specifically:
 - Improve breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks
 - Reduce the proportion of mothers who smoke during pregnancy
 - Support a reduction in the rate of teenage pregnancies
- Increase support to children and families accessing the centre, who have

English as an additional language, in order to improve outcomes and reduce the achievement gap

- Improve the use of newly introduced data management systems to ensure that the centre has more detailed data to help it better evaluate its performance and improve its services.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families using the centre treat each other with respect and consideration. Strong bonds develop between parents, children, and with staff. Parents identify how their positive engagement with the centre has changed their lives for the better and are keen to put something back. Voices4Action is very involved in the decision-making for the centre, and in organising fund-raising and community activities. Volunteers enthusiastically support sessions such as 'Cook and Eat' and 'Sing and Play'.

The courses to support children's early learning and development make a good contribution to their enjoyment and achievement. Sessions such as 'Little Treasures', 'Messy Play', 'Family Play' and 'Sing and Play' promote early learning well. Effective transition arrangements give children a good start at pre-school. One mother said, 'My child will make a better start at pre-school because of his experiences at the centre'. The Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores for the children in the reach area have steadily improved particularly in personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. In 2012, 65.8% of children who attended the centre achieved a good level of development, which is above the local average of 56.7% and the national average of 64%.

Much of the adult learning programme is delivered at the satellite centre (Parents United) which places an emphasis on meeting the needs of parents thus enabling them to better support their children. Parents gain qualifications in subjects such as 'Keeping Up With Your Children' (literacy and numeracy), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and food hygiene. Together with partners the centre provides good opportunities for parents to gain accreditation and improve their employability skills. As a result of their engagement with the centre, some families improve their economic and social well-being. Information on benefits and debt advice has a positive impact on the finances of families. Take up rates for family learning courses are good, with a few parents progressing to further and higher education.

Children and families feel safe at the centre and for some of them the centre provides a safe haven. Families that seek support in the centre are often in circumstances that make them extremely vulnerable. They gain self-respect, improve their self-esteem and confidence, and become better parents as a result of the support they are given. Robust procedures ensure that children are safeguarded well. Relationships between staff, children and families are very trusting and staff know them very well. Consequently, early identification and prevention of potential risks play a key role in reducing harm to children. There is significant and sustained improvement in outcomes for children subject to child protection plans, and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used appropriately as part of the centre's

work with families.

The centre actively promotes healthy lifestyles. It delivers an award winning programme 'Love Local', which is a healthy grow, cook and eat programme. It also encourages users to eat healthy and take more exercise through healthy breakfast and lunch clubs, a physical activity programme for children and 'Cook and Eat' sessions. The 'Baby Café' encourages and supports mothers to breastfeed and there has been a small increase in the number of mothers initiating and sustaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks. However, breastfeeding rates remain below the national average, and there are significant incidences of low birth weight in babies, smoking in pregnancy and child mortality in the area.

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	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

Parents, carers and children who use the centre are enthusiastic about it, saying how, 'Staff are brilliant and really supportive'. Outreach is an integral part of provision and is effectively used to work with those families identified as in most need of intervention and support. Families facing complex difficulties are assessed and supported effectively through positive, good quality inter-agency working and communication. The centre successfully meets the needs of the wider community and targets services to meet that need.

Learning opportunities provided by the centre, result in children and adults' personal development and positive achievement. Sessions are designed around planned outcomes and in activities such as 'Sing and Play', 'Messy Play' and 'Family Play' children are happy, relaxed, engaged and learning. Parents improve their skills in group activities by being actively engaged in the sessions.

Children and parents from different target groups take part regularly in activities and the centre often provides the main interface between families and a range of other

services. Families with complex needs receive effective integrated support. Information, advice and guidance are of a high standard and empower families to improve their circumstances. Sensitive, individualised support helps families achieve positive outcomes and, in times of crisis, families feel well supported.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre has experienced considerable change in the last year and the current manager has been in post for a very short period of time. Staff and managers are rightly proud that the delivery of services to children and families has largely remained unaffected. All staff are enthusiastic and share a common sense of purpose. There is a good commitment to training and professional development at all levels. The advisory board, which is representative of the partners and the centre's community, provides a good range of support and guidance. Voices4Action provides a focus for parents' engagement in the governance of the centre and is the source of parental representation on the advisory board. As a result governance and accountability arrangements are strong.

Self-evaluation is good, although the centre has identified the need for more precise data to help it better evaluate its performance and make the very best improvements to its services. Flexible staffing, good partnership working, and enthusiastic volunteers enable the centre to meet targets and improve outcomes for users. Management support and staff training from Barnardo's provides added value, and helps ensure the service is providing good value for money.

User engagement is good. An increasing percentage of all target groups within the reach area engage with the centre's services thanks to the skill, enthusiasm and commitment of all staff. All members of staff demonstrate a commitment to inclusion and to tackling any discrimination. Families of minority ethnic backgrounds are well represented in all activities. However, the centre recognises that more can be done to support, those families with English as an additional language, to achieve their full potential.

Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and include the safe recruitment and vetting of staff, volunteers and others who have unsupervised contact with children and vulnerable adults. All statutory requirements are met. Early intervention arrangements are effective, reflecting the positive partnerships with a wide range of agencies and services. Child protection procedures are thorough and well recorded.

Good quality training in all aspects of safeguarding, including the use of the Common Assessment Framework, is provided for all staff and regularly updated. Staff have a sensitive approach to the variety of needs the centre’s users present, which ensures that families feel comfortable with staff and are well protected. Security procedures and the attentiveness of staff mean that children are kept safe on site.

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	3
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	2

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 First Steps Children's Centre on 6–7 March 2013. 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.

We heard how welcoming the centre is, and how staff respond to your needs. We know that all families are made welcome, however, we have asked that staff provide a little more help to those of you who have English as an additional language so that you can join in all the activities fully. We heard of the wide range of ways that the centre helps you and your families be healthy, such as 'Love Local' and the 'Baby Café'. However, we have asked the centre and partners to do even more to help the community become healthier because breastfeeding rates are low and too many pregnant mothers smoke.

It is clear that the centre staff, the manager and partner organisations are trusted and provide good support that makes a difference to many families' lives. Many of you told us how much you and your children enjoyed the different sessions at the centre. Inspectors observed you and your children enjoying activities such as 'Sing and Play' and 'Cook and Eat'. These activities are of good quality and support your children's learning and development.

Many of you shared with us your stories of how the centre had made a difference to your lives. You were keen to tell us how important the centre is to you, what a happy place it is, and how much you enjoy the activities provided. You told us that 'Parents United' is a very important part of the centre and we agree with you. Some of you feel so strongly about what the centre has done for you that you become volunteers so that you can help other people who need support.

The centre is good at supporting those of you who need extra help from time to time. You told us how safe you and your children feel in the centre and we agree. For some of you, it provides a safe haven and a place to go in times of crisis.

We found that the centre staff and managers are committed to improving the work they do and welcome the ideas and feedback from people using the centre. 'Voices4Action' represents your views well at the advisory board meetings and raises funds to help pay for the summer trips you all enjoy so much. Many of you have taken training courses on parenting, and literacy and numeracy classes to be able to help your children learn. Taking part in these courses has given many of you the confidence to go on to further training and some of you have been successful in getting jobs.

We judged the centre to be well led and managed and found that it is in a good position to continue to build on its many strengths. However, currently data that the centre has on how well it is doing is not yet at sufficiently detailed level for them to judge their performance accurately and make the very best improvements to its services. We have asked that the centre improves its use of the new information system it has to address this.

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.