

Inspection report for West Walton Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	362618
Inspection dates	13–14 July 2011
Reporting inspector	David Speakman

Centre governance	Norfolk County Council
Centre leader	Carol Bouch and Liz Hilton
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	School Road West Walton Wisbech PE14 7HA
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Linked school if applicable	West Walton Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Little Acorns Day Nursery (257910)
	Skylarks Pre School Ltd (EY428394)
	Terrington St John Pre School (EY414472)
	Walpole Area Pre-School (EY424864)
	West Walton Primary School Nursery (120890)

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.

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 additional inspector and one early years inspector. The inspectors had meetings with the centre co-managers, the early years team manager and the deputy team manager. Inspectors held discussions with the centre's staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and representatives from the advisory board. They met with a number of representatives of services who work through the children's centre. Inspectors spoke to groups of parents and carers and with the headteacher and Early Years Foundation Stage leader at West Walton Primary School. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

West Walton is a phase two children's centre that offers full core provision. The centre operates from a modular building on the site of West Walton Primary School. The premises are shared with the school's extended services. The centre serves a large rural area (approximately 64 square miles) on the Norfolk/Cambridgeshire border and covers six villages. There is no main town and public transport links are poor.

The spread of the reach area and restricted space in the centre mean that most services take place in venues away from the centre. In addition to the centre, services are provided from Terrington St John Methodist Church Hall, Tilney St Lawrence Village Hall and Walpole St Andrew Community Centre. Early Years childcare for nursery-age children is through West Walton Primary School Early Years Foundation Stage, Walpole Area Pre-School, Terrington St John Pre School, Skylarks Pre School and Little Acorns Day Nursery. Levels of entry of children who attend the nurseries are well below those expected for their age, especially in communication, language and literacy.

Ethnicity within the reach area is primarily White British with a small transient Traveller community and a few families from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Levels of deprivation in the area are high. About a fifth of children under the age of five in the reach area live in the lowest 20% most deprived areas with a further half in the 20%-30% most deprived areas. Unemployment rates are in line with East of England regional figures and an average proportion of children come from homes claiming benefits. Local employment opportunities tend to be low paid, unskilled and often seasonal resulting in the need to travel significant distances to access higher paid or skilled work.

The county council has allocated overall responsibility for running the children's centre to the governing body of West Walton Primary School as the lead partner. An advisory board is answerable to the governing body of the school. Norfolk County Council has recently announced a restructuring of its children's centre services. The centre is subject to a proposed merger with a neighbouring children's centre in April 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 users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

2

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of West Walton Children's Centre is good. As a result of good-quality provision, outcomes for children and families are good. The centre is led and managed effectively. Within this overall good judgement, there are outstanding elements in the care, guidance and support provided for children and their families. One parent, for example, said, 'I feel the children's centre has helped me in so many ways. They supported me when I was at rock bottom and give me much support during my studying.' The centre has established good collaborative working practices with a wide range of professional partners to provide effective support for children and their families. Leadership and management structures are effective and there is much information sharing to keep all involved well informed. The centre is highly effective in assessing the needs of individuals and families and in providing high-quality services that address these needs very well through focused support. This results in an outstanding level of care, guidance and support. Centre staff and

service providers use self-evaluation well for continuous improvement, although self-evaluation is not yet supported by quantifiable data. Effective processes for monitoring the performance of all staff ensure good provision and ongoing improvement. Consequently, the capacity to improve further is good.

Users' views are gathered and the centre has lots of anecdotal evidence, which enables leaders and managers to evaluate outcomes through customer satisfaction. Centre managers have a good idea of how well the centre is performing but the use of data to evaluate impact is not yet developed well enough. The local authority is in the early stages of implementing a database through which the children's centre intends to measure its own effectiveness, identify any changes in the reach area and set priorities. Centre managers are trained in data management systems, but information is not yet collated or in a format which enables the centre to compare its outcomes with a wider database. The centre sets targets, but these are not based on data nor are they measurable through the use of statistics.

The centre excels in providing high-quality care, guidance and support for children and their families. Targeted support is exceptionally well thought out and, because intervention programmes are negotiated, parents and carers feel ownership and engage fully. In times of crisis, families feel confident in turning to the centre for help. Testimonies from parents and carers confirm that the centre managers and staff show exceptional care and ensure all are very well looked after and supported. Attending courses helps build relationships between parents and carers, and children get to know others.

One parent stated, 'If they know about it, they will do something about it.' This statement sums up the centre workers' commitment to improving the lives of families in their area. Health visitors inform centre staff about families new to the area and newly born babies. Parents who already have children registered with the centre and find that they are expecting another baby receive a great deal of support from the centre during their pregnancy. 'Pregnant again.' said one mother. 'I will certainly be returning to the centre while on maternity.' However, the centre does not routinely receive notification of potential births and is not, therefore, in a position to support all expectant parents. This is an area in which the centre would like to be able to expand its work.

The centre adopts recommended good practice in relation to safeguarding. Procedures are regularly updated. Staff work effectively with other agencies to reduce risk of harm to children. Agreed and well-understood procedures to follow up or share concerns with other agencies as appropriate support the centre's good safeguarding procedures. Most concerns have been minor, but have effectively 'been nipped in the bud' to prevent possible escalation. The centre is committed to supporting all families where there is a need.

A support group for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities brings together relevant professionals who meet to discuss cases and identify any infants who may be showing early signs of needing support. Even though there are very few

who pupils who speak English as an additional language, the centre managers identify potential translators from among the centre users. Services' venues and times ensure convenient access for all community members.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Complete the collation of all available data and use the information to:
 - evaluate precisely any changes in the needs of the families in the reach area
 - set service priorities
 - set challenging but achievable and measurable targets for each service
 - use the whole range of available information to assess the impact of each service and hence the centre's overall effectiveness.

- Negotiate with the appropriate authorities to provide centre managers with information at an early stage regarding new pregnancies so that the centre can support expectant parents.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Parents are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy. Baby yoga, demonstrated in a calm and supportive atmosphere, includes exercises for parents and carers to keep them fit. Physical activity is promoted in sessions such as 'Mini-Movers' and there is ample outdoor space available for play. Parents and carers are developing good ideas about nutrition, and healthy eating is promoted in all of the groups, with healthy snacks provided. Help with infant nutrition is well received and takes parents and carers through the process from breastfeeding to weaning. Parents and carers recognise the health benefits of courses offered and have reported positive changes to their children's eating habits. However, some issues around obesity in the reach area remain. Centre staff help willing community members to give up smoking and report some success this year with a few people giving up.

The children's centre staff are outstandingly successful in promoting the emotional health of parents and carers in times of crisis. A number of testimonials from parents support fully this judgement. One parent said, 'The best thing I have ever done was transfer to this centre. The whole family is very well looked after. They have helped with my feelings of isolation and depression.'

Front-line workers put keeping children and families safe at the heart of their work. Family support workers work effectively with groups of parents and carers and in targeted support. The counsellor supports families to help them function in difficult times. Most of his work is highly focused and families are directed to him from other services. Centre staff work very effectively as a team and with professional partners to support the whole family. Children who have child protection orders are monitored very closely. Supervision takes place with the full cooperation of the family with the

safety and well-being of all family members at the forefront. The Common Assessment Framework process is used very well, in collaboration with parents and carers, to develop a package of support that matches individual needs very well. Those who are supported by the counsellor speak very highly of his work in helping keep them and their families safe. Parents say they feel totally safe in the centre. 'My child has no sense of danger and staff make extra efforts to ensure he is safe so he can take part in activities,' reported one mother. The premises used are secure. Everyone visiting signs in and out so staff are aware of all present at any time.

Both adults and children achieve well and enjoy their time at the centre. Babies clearly enjoy the baby yoga sessions. These help mother and child to bond and support babies' emotional development well. A parent attending the baby yoga session said she really enjoys the activity. 'It gets me out. I get to meet other mums and my baby can socialise.' Children progress well in the childcare provisions linked with the centre. A good balance of tasks led by adults and chosen by children themselves helps children to become independent. They help prepare their own snacks, for example. They are free to learn inside and out of doors. Analysis of early years' data for children about to enter school shows that the average attainment levels for those benefiting from the centre's childcare are higher than the whole cohort and much higher than those who have not attended. Nursery staff say that children who have experience of the children's centre integrate easily into the nursery and they start to learn straight away. Children clearly enjoy learning.

Adults progress well in developing their parenting skills and in their academic achievements. 'Taming Toddlers' helps parents and carers deal with young children's behaviour by modelling positive behaviour patterns themselves. Through links with local colleges, the centre has helped parents take up training and further education opportunities. Records of recent achievements show that 30 parents and carers have achieved National Vocational Qualifications at Level 2 and Level 3. Six have gained an information technology qualification. Thirteen are now employed in local schools as teaching assistants and five are now employed at the centre. One mother has gone on to a degree course studying psychology and intends to go into teaching. These outcomes have an obvious benefit in helping parents and carers improve their prospects in achieving an improved life for their families.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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	2
The extent to which all users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2

The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2
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How good is the provision?	2
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Assessing the needs of individual parents and carers and their families in order to provide focused support is a strong feature of the centre's success. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework to assess needs and to tailor specific packages to meet individuals' needs well. The family is fully involved in discussions and decisions and, because they feel they have ownership of the support package, they engage and cooperate fully. Much of the work in assessing community needs to inform the provision of universal services is through users' assessments and anecdotal evidence. Centre leaders have a good idea of community needs, and evaluations of all services by staff and service users are used well to achieve on-going improvement. The toy library staff monitor and evaluate what toys are popular and effective and so shape further development. All sessions are planned carefully to ensure they fulfil a community need. For example, staff are aware of poor communication, language and literacy and so sessions such as 'Baby Talk' are linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning. All sessions are evaluated to help the centre improve on what it does.

Universal services provide learning which is purposeful to those attending. Children participate in recreational and learning activities that promote communication, language and literacy effectively and prepare them well for starting school. Most parents and carers at the 'Baby Yoga' session said they found out about the course by word of mouth. They have since found out about other courses available and plan to go on to others such as baby massage or 'Mini-Movers' because they see the health benefits. Support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families through the support group is excellent. Multi-agency representation on this group gives parents and carers direct access to specialist support services such as those provided by speech and language therapists. One parent who has received a great deal of this type of support is currently setting up a group for parents and carers of children with dyslexia to help them understand and support their children at home. The centre is successful in meeting the needs that it is aware of for different groups in the community. The centre managers do not yet receive early notification of expected births in the reach area. Consequently, it is in the early stages of developing this area of its service provision.

Because of the widespread nature and size of the reach area, much of the centre's work is through outreach into the community. Groups and courses take place in venues that are accessible to parents and carers living far away from the centre and who would otherwise find travelling to take advantage of services difficult. The toy library is van based and visits outreach venues at set times each week. The key worker managing the toy library has responded to need and has started making home visits to give specific advice and to lend appropriate toys to support particular

special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Provision meets needs well. A mother whose baby is due soon has already planned to attend a range of courses such as breastfeeding and baby massage. She said, 'My support network is set up right here.' The staff of this children's centre have helped with both practical and emotional support for the parents and carers of children with physical and emotional special educational needs. Staff have researched the children's conditions and shared this with the parents to help them understand. The centre staff go well beyond the basic requirements, recommending and providing small items of specialist equipment. Learning opportunities give children a good start into the nursery, and adults who choose to engage in educational opportunities have a good chance of improving their own and their families' lives.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management at all levels are good. Governance arrangements are well organised. The governing body has devolved responsibility for the children's centre to the advisory board. There are clear lines of accountability and productive liaison between the different levels of governance and leadership makes sure that all are fully informed and involved. Reports from service leaders feed into the advisory board, which in turn feeds information to the governing body through its reports. The Chair of the Governing Body has a high level of direct involvement with the children's centre and is fully aware of its strengths and areas in need of improvement. He attends the advisory board meetings and accompanies the toy library on some of its visits into the community. The county council is fully involved and contributes well to the leadership and monitoring and evaluation processes.

Centre leaders and managers are fully committed to equality of opportunity. Services such as baby yoga are modified when necessary, so that all can engage, regardless of capability. The toy library includes resources to raise awareness of diversity and promote equality. Specific toys and equipment support special educational needs and/or disabilities. The toy library is mobile and visits outreach centres and makes home visits so that its services are available to all. Translation is available through other parents for children, parents and carers who speak English as an additional language or who have very little English. Children with special educational needs

and/or disabilities and their families are very well supported through the group which is set up to support them. This is a very open process, and parents and carers know how to link into services. There have been nine referrals in the past year.

The centre works effectively with a number of partners, such as health visitors and counselling services, and there is a growing relationship with Jobcentre Plus. Considering the effectiveness of services and their availability to all, the centre provides good value for money.

Safeguarding procedures are monitored regularly and kept up to date as is child protection training. Staff are fully trained to a level appropriate to their responsibility and job requirements. All staff and volunteers have been subject to clearance checks and the centre holds letters of confirmation from employers for other workers. Risk assessments are clear and thorough. They cover children's centre premises and other venues used. Risk assessments are prepared for specific categories of users, new mothers for example, and for the toy library. The lone worker policy includes risk assessments on visits made to domestic premises. Common Assessment Framework processes are used well to deal with a range of family-based difficulties. Documents are kept secure and can be accessed only by authorised personnel. These records demonstrate that the children's centre and other agencies work well together to keep children safe from harm. Parents and carers understand the centre's safeguarding procedures and would speak to the centre manager if they have any concerns about a child or a staff member.

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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the	2

range of provision	
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Reports from recent inspections of the centre's early years, childcare or nursery provision partners were used to inform the outcomes of this inspection. Reports confirm that childcare and nursery education linked to the centre is of a good quality and outcomes are good.

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. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the West Walton Children's Centre on 13 to 14 July 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for making us welcome when we inspected your children's centre. We appreciated the time you took to talk to us at sessions such as 'Baby Yoga' and at the 'Baby Sign and Talk' group. You gave us lots of helpful information and this helped us to make judgements about the effectiveness of your children's centre. We are pleased to hear that you value and enjoy the centre's activities and services. Many of you told us how the centre has helped you in a number of ways to improve your lives and those of your families. The care, guidance and support provided by centre staff are excellent. You and your children enjoy learning and because the centre staff have helped many of you understand your children's behaviours, you play with them more often and support their development well.

Many of you value the personal advice and support you receive from centre staff and the opportunities to build friendships with other parents by attending centre activities. The centre helps you to keep your children healthy, and a number of you told us how much you have enjoyed learning about nutrition so that you can keep your babies healthy. You told us that you and your children feel safe at the centre. We judge that safeguarding and safety at the centre are good. The centre works well with other services to help families experiencing particularly difficult times.

Children make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development and in building communication, language and literacy skills. Staff at the centre and those who visit to provide particular sessions work well together to support children's development and help adults gain confidence and learn new skills. Support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their parents and

carers is particularly well organised and very effective. Some of you spoke to us about the specific help you had received to access services linked to family welfare and those providing support for children with special educational needs. Your views and ideas are valued and are used to guide the work of the centre. However, the centre does not yet make enough use of statistical data to evaluate any changes in the needs of the families in the reach area to ensure that it is setting the right priorities and targets. We have asked the leaders and managers of the centre to build a database to provide the information on which to base improvement and judge the impact of services and its overall effectiveness.

The centre works effectively with a number of partners, such as health visitors and counselling services, and there is a growing relationship with Jobcentre Plus. These provide the centre managers with important information so they can support you when it is important. They do not receive information about families in the early stages of pregnancy. We have suggested that centre managers negotiate with the appropriate authorities to receive information regarding new pregnancies at an early stage so that they can support expectant mothers and fathers.

The centre staff work hard and are committed to giving you all the best they can provide. Many of you live far away from the centre, and limited public transport means that you would find travelling to West Walton very difficult. The centre workers realise this and they come out to you and provide services at venues closer to you, and the toy library visits outreach venues regularly. This means that more of you can take advantage of what the centre offers than if all services were taking place at the centre itself.

It was a pleasure to meet you and your children and we thank all of you who found the time to talk to us. We wish you and your families all the best for the future.

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