

Inspection report for East Whitby Children's Centre

Local authority	North Yorkshire
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY277871 The Wooden Horse

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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.

An inspection of the co-located primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre service manager, the integrated service manager, other local authority representatives, members of the steering group, parents and carers and staff. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

East Whitby Children's Centre serves a large coastal area that includes both urban and rural communities. It is a phase one Sure Start children's centre, designated in April 2006. The centre delivers a broad range of services from three community locations, each co-located with a primary school. In April 2011, the reach area increased by almost a third due to boundary changes. The area is geographically isolated with poor public transport services. Almost all of the population in the reach area are of White British heritage with a small number of families from Eastern European or Black minority ethnic communities.

A fifth of people in the reach area are out of work and three quarters of families receive tax credits. Employment opportunities in the area are limited because much of it is seasonal. The annual average income is half the national average. Domestic abuse, mental health problems and homelessness are prevalent issues. Over a third of children under the age of five are designated as being in need or requiring child protection. Children's attainment on

entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is well below average. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average.

The children’s centre is governed by a steering group, which consists of local community and county council members and representatives from healthcare as well as users. The children’s centre services manager also manages the Whitby and District Children’s Centre where the administrative centre for both children’s centres is located. The children’s centre services manager took up post in January 2010 following the local authority re-grouping of children’s centres into cluster groups managed by an integrated services manager.

The onsite Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children from birth to five years is provided by The Wooden Horse Nursery. This provision is inspected separately and inspection reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

East Whitby Children’s Centre provides a satisfactory level of service for its users. It makes a significant difference to those who use the centre and to the lives of their family members. The centre has good partnerships with other services and agencies, especially the health team, so users have swift access to assistance. The centre is particularly effective in helping victims of domestic abuse deal with their problems, helping homeless families to find accommodation and giving individual, personal support. Other strengths include good safeguarding procedures, which ensure that children are safe and protected and their welfare needs fully identified. The good provision for enjoyable purposeful learning for both children and parents and carers results in good levels of achievement. Children make good progress in their communication, language and literacy skills and in their personal, social, emotional and physical development as a result.

The centre has very little data from the local authority to ensure it meets the needs of all of the children in the reach area. It does not have access to new birth data. This means that valuable time is wasted trying to identify vulnerable families, which in turn makes it difficult to forward plan efficiently. Very few fathers use the services provided by the centre. The centre has identified this gap and the parents who currently access parenting courses have also identified that they tend not to attract fathers. The parents' forum has many good suggestions and ideas but this is very much at an early stage. It has yet to play a full part as an active member of the children's centre team and put these ideas into practice.

The children's centre services manager has built up a strong team in just 20 months. The centre now has in-house and outreach services operating from three well-resourced locations instead of one multi-purpose room, which used to exist. These are increasingly well attended by users. The centre has met its key priorities which included training and motivating staff and setting up an effective steering group, specific to this children's centre. In addition, it has established a strong network of integrated service providers who work well together to enhance the resources the centre can currently offer. Self-evaluation is absolutely accurate. The rapid pace of change, good teamwork, user satisfaction and effective leadership and management demonstrate the centre's good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should provide the children's centre with data relating to new births and the children aged up to five in the reach area, so that the centre can ensure it meets the needs of all families and forward plan more efficiently.
- The children's centre should find more ways to involve fathers so they can play a greater part in their children's learning and development.
- Develop the parents' forum as active members of the children's centre team.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre is slow to reach every family because the local authority does not provide it with up-to-date information about which children are aged under five and where they live. The independent 'Breast Start' group runs successful drop-in sessions at the centre for breastfeeding mothers but because the children's centre does not receive information about new births and relies on health visitors for information, valuable time in the early stages of motherhood is lost. Consequently, although two-thirds of mothers start breastfeeding their children, the numbers decline sharply during the first ten days and further reduce at six weeks.

Through parenting courses, healthy snacks and individual guidance, parents and carers are more aware of why it is important to lead healthy lives. They are beginning to make healthy choices and young parents feel more confident to take their children outside for a walk. Parents and carers requested that the gardening club, 'Little Green Fingers', continued during the holidays because they enjoyed picking the fruit and vegetables they had grown and turning them into healthy snacks. These measures have yet to have a profound impact on childhood obesity, which is much higher than the rest of North Yorkshire. For example, 15.8% of young primary aged children in the Scarborough area, which includes Whitby, are overweight and 20.5% are obese.

Good quality family support is improving parental awareness of how to keep themselves and their children safe. Most parents and carers confidently share their concerns with staff. There is strong evidence to show that early intervention has a positive impact on improving children's safety. The number of children involved with the Common Assessment Framework process, for example, has reduced sharply because they have good quality support to help them at a very early stage. Looked after children and those who are on the child protection register are also well safeguarded. This is because of the vigilance of personal support advisers who have one-to-one contact with vulnerable families. Several people spoke about how the centre had helped to make their lives safer. Comments, such as 'I don't know where I'd be without them', 'they are just like friends, they don't talk down to you' and 'they changed my way of thinking,' are typical.

Children make good progress from low starting points in personal, social, emotional and physical development and in communication, language and literacy skills. In the nursery, staff talk animatedly with children who quickly learn the words to respond. Sociable snack times, songs and rhymes, both in the nursery and crèche, further develop children's skills. They learn to make independent choices and to concentrate for longer periods of time. They behave well. At the same time, staff talk to parents and carers about their children's development, especially at the non-verbal stage. As a result, adults recognise how their children use gestures and eye contact to communicate with them. In 'Chill Out' sessions, parents and carers have time away from their children to develop their creative skills and make new friends. In these ways, those who attend the centre gain confidence and self-esteem. The impact is seen in the growing number of parents and carers who go to university or college to gain qualifications.

Few fathers come to the children's centre. Mums say, 'There's nothing specifically for them.' 'If there was my partner would attend.' At parenting courses, such as 'The Terrific Toddlers,' mums explained how, 'We now sit on the floor and play with the children and use lots of praise.' They point out how their own improved knowledge and skills causes some conflict at home because they have different approaches to parenting. This in turn has a negative impact on children's physical as well as their emotional development. As a result, children have low level of skills and physical coordination when they first start nursery. They are reluctant to go outside, are unsure how to use wheeled toys and are not keen on playing with sand and water. Parents and carers comment on how they have learnt to listen and

talk to their children, saying, 'I didn't realise how much I used to interfere.'

Parents and carers are well represented on the steering group committee. The meetings are accessible to them because they can bring their children. The parents' forum is less well established and is currently over-reliant on the children's centre services manager. The centre can demonstrate success in helping families to find homes and sort out their finances. Courses such as 'Money Matters,' and the advisory service at Jobcentre Plus are instrumental in engaging more people in part-time employment and thus improving parents' and carers' economic stability. This is leading to rapidly improving outcomes for some families.

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	3
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.	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre has a satisfactory range of services to meet the needs of families that are known to it. It has good relationships with these families and tailors courses to their needs. Its assessments show that parents and carers value these and that outcomes are positive. However, it depends heavily on the parent support advisers to gain information from the health team and on local information including visits to outlying village playgroups to identify vulnerable families. The centre has evidence to show that it reaches 65% of workless households. It has no data to help it make sure that it reaches the vast majority of other potentially vulnerable families. The centre gives good care, support and guidance to those it comes into contact with.

The centre provides good quality, well-located learning opportunities that are accessible to adults and children. The centre's case studies confirm users' increasing levels of enjoyment and engagement. Through sensitive one-to-one support, parent support advisers help

parents and carers to tackle the issues that impede learning, development and enjoyment. As a result, users gain in confidence and independence. The centre is successful at putting families in touch with different services to help them with housing, debt management, income support and protection from domestic abuse. Parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities explained how play therapy, baby massage and help filling in forms for disability allowance had made a big difference to their lives. The following comments are typical of the extent to which they feel supported: 'They made me feel at ease', 'gave me emotional support to help me get out and about' and 'got me special help for my child.' A major strength is the provision for children and adults with mental and emotional health problems through weekly clinics where they receive specialist advice and support at the centre.

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	3
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.	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The day-to-day management of the centre is good. For example, providing a receptionist for the weekly mental health drop-in service helps them to provide timely, specialist support. Staff are given clear direction and work as an effective team with other service providers, especially the health team. Governance is satisfactory. The steering group and centre services manager have accurately identified what the centre needs to do next to improve outcomes for users, but they are hampered by lack of data to help them forward plan efficiently. As a result, they are at an early stage of setting targets and evaluating their actions towards these, despite having clear, long-term objectives. Outreach to target groups such as fathers and those in rural isolation, is developing slowly because of the shortfall in personnel with the recent increase in the reach area.

The centre promotes equality and diversity satisfactorily. It is most successful at promoting inclusive practice for children and adults with mental health problems and/or disabilities. The centre adopts recommended good practice in all aspects of safeguarding. Training of all staff, especially in child protection, is of good quality. The centre has effective procedures for making referrals and sharing information between relevant agencies so that parents and carers get help swiftly. Its good partnerships with other agencies help to reduce the risk of harm to children and vulnerable adults. Relationships between different partners are clear, understood and well managed. The effective running of these integrated services enhances opportunities for families in the area and contributes to positive outcomes for users. Users'

views are taken into account have most impact on the types of courses on offer and where these are held. The centre gives satisfactory value for money.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use of ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
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.	3

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the East Whitby Children's Centre on 13-14 October 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to everyone who spent time talking to me and my colleague and also to those of you who spoke to me when I telephoned you. Your views are very important and our report refers to them. We think your centre has some important strengths but also some areas to improve. This is why we have judged it as satisfactory overall.

These are the best things about your centre. We agree with you that your children's centre is warm, friendly and very welcoming and that the personal support assistants are extremely helpful. Many of you said that you do not know what would have happened to you if they had not come along. We can see that they do a great deal for you. You gave us lots of examples as to how they helped you and many said they changed the way you think about things. We agree that this is a really good part of the children centre's work.

Your children's centre has lots of good things about it. It has good links with the health visitors and other members of the health team. The drop-in clinic on Fridays for those who feel low or are depressed or have other mental health problems is good. The support you get if you have problems with housing, managing debts or if you are abused at home is also good.

The centre is good at making sure you and your children are safe. It puts on interesting courses that help you become more confident. As a result, several of you have gone on to university or college to gain qualifications. Your children make good progress in the nursery and crèche and many of you said how much you enjoy playing with your children and meeting other parents and carers. You told us how much calmer your children are when you praise them and how they play better when you do not interrupt them too much. Those of you who have children with disabilities were also very pleased with the help you receive.

Your centre has changed a great deal in the 20 months since the centre services manager started. It now runs from three different sites instead of just one room. It is good that the management team took your suggestions into account and started courses at Airy Hill and also at the Whitby and District centre. This means that the centre can reach out to many more people. Nevertheless, it takes time for things to work in the best possible way. One of the things that is holding your centre back is that it does not know where all the children aged under five are in its particular area. It does not know when babies are born unless a health visitor happens to tell them. This means that some new mothers may not get the help they need quickly enough. It is the local authority's responsibility to give the centre this information. Then the centre can use it to plan what to do and make sure everyone gets help when they most need it. We have asked the local authority to give the centre this information.

At the moment, the staff at the centre are concerned that not many dads get involved. They come to a walk in the woods but feel that parenting courses are not for them and that the 'Terrific Twos' course is mainly for mums and children. Those of you we spoke to agree that this is a problem. You have lots of good ideas as to how to get dads involved and to make them feel just as welcome. The trouble is the parents' forum has not really got going and so it is hard for it to represent what you think and put some of your ideas into practice. So we have asked the centre to find more ways of involving fathers. We have also asked them to develop the parents' forum so it can play a more active part in the children's centre.

These areas for improvement will turn your children's centre into a good centre for all families, including dads as well as mums and children. You can help by making lots of suggestions, coming to courses and telling everyone, including dads, what a difference it makes so they will want to come along too.

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