

Inspection report for Cartwheels Children's Centre

Local authority	Suffolk
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable.
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable.

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, representatives of centre users, parents and carers, and members of the advisory board. They met with representatives of the local authority and local pre-school and day-care provision.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Haverhill is a small town in western Suffolk close to the borders of Cambridgeshire and Essex. Cartwheels Children's Centre is a phase one centre which was designated in September 2005; it reached full core offer in July 2009. It provides services to a community situated in Haverhill South Ward which, until recently, was one of the 30% most-deprived wards in the country. New housing and some new business developments has contributed to economic growth. However, it remains a substantially disadvantaged community.

The centre is governed and managed by the local authority. There are currently 1,360 children aged under five years living in the centre's reach area. Haverhill South has one of the highest percentages in Suffolk of people of a working age claiming benefits. Unemployment is high and both adult literacy and numeracy levels are low. There are also a higher than average rate of teenage pregnancies.

Housing in the area is a mixture of private and social housing. Large industrial estates on the outskirts of the town employ a large number of people. On entry to school, children's range of skills and knowledge are below those expected for their age.

A high proportion of families is of White British heritage, with an increasing population from minority ethnic groups including Polish, Portuguese and a small community of families from the Philippines.

The manager was appointed in December 2010. She also manages the other children’s centre serving the Haverhill Cluster area. The centre works in cooperation to provide services that complement each other and to share resources and staff. The advisory board serves the centres in the cluster.

The staff team has been through a period of significant change since the centre opened, but there is now an established staff team and stable management.

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

Cartwheels Children’s Centre is an effective and inclusive centre. A warm, friendly, welcoming environment has been created. This is as a result of the good leadership of the centre manager and the work of the well-regarded, closely-knit team of experienced staff. One parent expressed the view of many parents by stating to inspectors, ‘I don’t know what I would do without the centre – it’s fantastic.’

The care and guidance shown towards all families are good and staff work hard to give a high level of individual support to those who are in need. As a result, assessment is rigorous and personalised, ensuring families benefit from relevant support services. This has an increasingly positive impact on improving outcomes for all children and parents.

Good leadership by the recently appointed manager has secured significant improvements and more responsive provision in a relatively short period of time. Greater emphasis is now placed on analysing the data available to ensure services offered meet the requirements of those most in need. Staff have developed a core purpose which is shared and owned by all staff, and the centre’s profile has been successfully raised within the community. This has been achieved through comprehensive consultation with staff and families within the local community. Such improving collaborative work is rapidly increasing the number of families accessing and benefiting from children’s centre services. The centre works consistently hard to improve this even further.

Safeguarding is given high priority. The mutual respect between users and staff ensures the former feel totally confident in sharing any concerns they may have. Staff are well trained and ensure families identified as being at risk are closely targeted and supported. There are good procedures in place for partnership working between all key agencies to share relevant information and develop close inter-agency working. The centre is well regarded by the community, parents and other professionals.

Due to the design of the premises, the centre faces the dilemma of balancing accessibility for users with the need to ensure the safety of the families using the centre. The centre's request for extra safety equipment on the entrance to the building which would allow staff to more closely monitor who is entering the downstairs of the building has not yet been agreed by the downstairs tenants and local authority. Therefore the centre is exploring alternative ways to over-come this issue. Despite this, both adults and children feel very safe and secure when attending activities.

The centre is managed well and governance arrangements are good. This ensures all staff are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and support one another well. The centre's self-evaluation is accurate and covers all the necessary areas. As a result, the centre successfully identifies areas of strength and areas of improvement. The centre has rightly identified that the mechanisms for collecting, collating and analysing impact data are not sufficiently embedded in its day-to-day practice to fully demonstrate the impact the centre is having on improving outcomes for families. However, case-study evidence is robust and shows considerable impact for the most vulnerable families in the community.

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

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Sharpen the approach to collecting, collating and analysing impact data, so that the centre is able to prove that it is making a difference for all its users.
- Increase the opportunities for adult learning to enable a larger majority of families in the area, including those from target groups, to further improve their economic stability and independence.
- Review the security of the building to further ensure users are safe at all times.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families access a wide range of targeted and universal health services. Health visitors provide good levels of guidance, support and information about children's health through the weekly 'Weigh and Play' at the centre. Users' emotional well-being is given good attention. When needed, parents and children access counselling services which are commissioned through the centre. Baby massage is very popular and helps mothers bond with their babies. The centre funded the Volunteer Breastfeeding Network to train twelve peer support volunteers. Mothers benefit from the advice and support offered through this peer support. As a result, more mothers are initiating and sustaining breastfeeding their babies. This helps children to have a healthy start in life.

Children develop positive attitudes towards food by eating healthy snacks and fresh fruit at activities offered by the centre. For example, 'Little Angels' is a breakfast club for young parents. One parent commented that she comes to this group to ensure that her child can have fruit because she cannot afford to buy it. However, these efforts are yet to be reflected in a significant reduction in levels of childhood obesity. Activities such as 'Busy Feet' prove very popular and successfully promote the benefit of physical activities.

Families are provided with a range of free home-safety equipment in order to prevent accidents within the home. All staff are attentive and friendly; consequently, children and families feel very safe when accessing services. Individual members of staff demonstrate a high level of regard to safety issues and use their own initiative to ensure the premises are secure. For example, the door to an activity room was secured during an activity session because staff were aware that some children may try to leave the room. The security of the premises is currently being reviewed to ensure the continuing safety of all families at all times whilst allowing easy access to the premises.

Parents who access the centre's activities say it helps them to establish lasting friendships and to feel increasingly confident in their ability to cope with the challenges they face. Vulnerable adults in the community are identified and their needs are met well. The centre effectively supports children with child protection plans and those who are subject to the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process. Staff are fully aware of safeguarding procedures and follow the centre's policies to ensure that all children are safe and protected.

Children's behaviour in the centre is good and staff are good role models. Trusting and confident relationships are well developed between the staff, parents and carers enabling full and frank discussions to be shared. As a result, those facing challenging circumstances in their lives make good progress in their parenting skills through courses and individual support.

Children and parents enjoy their time at the centre and benefit from high-quality, purposeful activities. They grow in confidence quickly as a result of attending centre

based activities. The fun activities offered at sessions enable parents to become more closely involved in their children's learning and recognises the value of play in supporting development. Activities for children, such as 'Talking Tots', are well planned to help children develop their communication skills. The 'Mini Makers' group provide good opportunities for young children to follow their natural curiosity through exploring and investigating a range of textures. Many parents indicate that they are implementing the ideas they learn at the centre in the home environment. As a result, children are better prepared for school and make good progress in their learning. Data indicate that an increasing number of children are achieving 78 or more points on the Early Years Foundation Stage profile and six or more points in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development.

Arrangements for parents to contribute to decision making and influence the development of the centre are good. In discussion, parents said they feel their views are valued. Relationships are good between all adults and children and an increasing number of parents are becoming involved in the governance arrangements. As a result, parents feel passionate about the centre and its place in the community.

Families are beginning to improve their economic position as centre staff place a strong emphasis on helping them to develop the necessary skills to obtain work. For example, local jobs are regularly advertised within the centre. While the centre effectively signposts adults to educational provision through other providers, it is not clear how many adults take up courses and training to improve their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills, and thus improve their prospects to secure long-term economic well-being. The centre does not keep records of the achievements of adults that it refers to other providers, such as adult learning. A few users benefit from the community parent programme which helps develop their self-esteem and confidence. Achievement is highly valued and celebrated, which is helping to raise users' aspirations.

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	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 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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre manager has been instrumental in ensuring that assessment is now used to ensure that the range of services, including outreach services, activities and opportunities, is matched well to users' needs. In addition, the centre continues to increase its provision in response to local need. For instance, some staff have been trained to deliver the 'Freedom' programme to support vulnerable women from the local area in coping with domestic abuse. Some newer initiatives such as the 'Every Child a Talker' approach have yet to be fully embedded to impact fully.

Staff are effective in signposting parents to other organisations, and through this, parents are able to access support and advice, for example on debt management. In addition, in times of crisis families can be supported with food parcels and basic furniture through a local charity project. The commissioning of counselling services has had a significant impact on the mental health of a number of users of the centre.

There are many good examples of quality outreach work, including events in the local schools and other community locations. Working with families in their home is an established strategy which is appropriately and effectively used by many of the staff linked to the centre. Community events held throughout the school holidays have been very successful in raising the profile of the centre within the local community. As a result, a greater number and range of families are now being reached.

All the children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their parents who use the centre, benefit from a well-resourced learning environment. Through good partnership working with the youth service, young parents are very well supported and achieve well. The guidance and support given to individual families and those attending the activities, is well planned and of good quality.

Many parents and carers state that they find the different sessions and activities enjoyable. Many say that they are making a big difference to their own lives and those of their families. The centre no longer provides an on-site full day care provision due to sustainability issues. However, a good quality crèche facility and 'Side by side' funding at local childcare providers ensures parents can access care for their children while they attend activities, training and counselling.

The centre holds information on available childcare in the area which parents can access if and when they require it. The centre has developed good relationships with local childcare providers in the reach area and is starting to build stronger relationships with schools.

The quality of care, guidance and support provided to families is good. Many parents say that they feel fully supported and always feel that they can share their feelings and concerns in an atmosphere of complete trust. This is because all staff are

extremely caring and work hard to provide a secure and nurturing environment within the centre. The staff build strong relationships with users who often return to access additional services. Support is effectively tailored to meet the needs of families and this is especially so in times of crisis. The CAF procedures are thorough and, along with a 'Team Around the Child' approach, fully engage a wide range of professionals in supporting the needs of the most vulnerable children.

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 manager provides strong leadership and is supported by dedicated staff who share a commitment towards meeting the needs of local families. This is summarised by a view from one parent who told the inspectors, 'If it wasn't for the staff here, I don't know where I would be.' Persistent and concerted action is being taken to ensure the centre reaches a higher percentage of all families within the area.

Although the parents' forum is currently being re-structured, parents are represented on the advisory board and are able to contribute to good governance. The membership of the advisory board reflects relevant partners in the locality well. They bring specific knowledge to the group to influence the direction of the centre. Feedback from families indicates a high level of satisfaction. The centre uses its resources well and there are clear examples of activities being adapted or developed in response to parents' requests and needs. In addition, the centre manager is now making the best use of data to reach and tackle the needs of all families in need of support. Staff provide good levels of care, are targeting the right priorities and have a beneficial impact on those parents and children who access the centre's services; therefore value for money is good.

Equality is promoted well and diversity is celebrated effectively. Centre staff ensure that no-one is left out and everyone feels valued. Designated provision is offered to disabled children and disabled parents and this ensures these families receive specialist support. Early Years Foundation Stage data show the gaps in achievement are narrowing for those who attend. The centre is located on the second floor of the building; access is via stairs or the lift. Staff are on hand to provide appropriate assistance when required. Currently, storage arrangements for buggies are not sufficient. The centre is aware and has developed proposals to overcome this issue. However, it has yet to be finally agreed with the downstairs tenants of the premises.

Good safeguarding procedures and checks secure the children’s welfare. For example, staff are well trained in child protection procedures and have a good understanding of what they need to do should they have a concern about a child. They are supported by a suitable policy which underpins this work. Secure systems ensure that all staff directly employed by the centre are suitably and effectively vetted and that robust agreements with partner agencies ensure that equally rigorous checks cover visiting specialist staff. Strong links with external agencies provide relevant support to families experiencing crisis or challenge in their lives. This improves the emotional well-being of children and adults which has a positive impact on development and improving outcomes.

The centre manager has high expectations of the staff team and service partners. Together, they demonstrate genuine commitment, dedication and determination to improving outcomes for all children and their families. Relationships are good and staff are enthusiastic and positive about the work they do. They are proud of the impact they have on the lives of the children and families who attend.

Staff have appropriately concentrated on building relationships with the people of the reach community and gaining their trust and respect, as well as beginning to develop a wider range of services. Accurate self-evaluation is used well to identify areas for further improvement. The plan for centre improvement provides a structured approach to further development.

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	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 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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Cartwheels Children's Centre on 2–3 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

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

Procedures for keeping children and families safe are good. Staff are dedicated to providing a secure environment and they work closely with other agencies to obtain the specialist support you need. This helps them to keep children safe and reduces accidents and harm. However, due to the design of the premises, the centre faces the dilemma of balancing accessibility for users with the need to ensure the safety of the families using the centre. The centre's request for extra safety equipment at the entrance to the building, which would allow staff to more closely monitor who is entering the downstairs of the building, has not yet been agreed by the local authority. Therefore, we have asked the centre to review the security to the building to ensure users are safe at all times.

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

Many of you told us how much you and your children enjoy attending groups and developing new skills. We noted how well planned the activities are and how they help you to understand how your children learn and develop. We noted that many of you develop your confidence, self-esteem and emotional well-being. This leads to some of you beginning to undertake formal training and qualifications and be successful in returning to work. A few of you have become volunteer parents and develop new skills.

You told us that you know the centre has information on weekly job vacancies and that staff can support you or signpost you to organisations which can help you with issues so that you can obtain the benefits to which you are entitled. We noted that the current range of adult learning courses is limited and have asked the centre to address this.

We recognise how well the centre is managed. All staff work together very well and share a commitment towards meeting your needs and providing the relevant support. The centre is becoming an important part of the local community. In order to develop further, we have asked the centre to sharpen its approach to collecting, collating and analysing impact data, so that the centre is able to prove that it is making a difference for all its users.

We recognise how inclusive the centre is and staff ensure all families are welcome. The centre is aware that the current arrangement for the storing of your buggies is not sufficient and they have developed plans which will provide more storage spaces.

We enjoyed our time at your centre. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honesty and openness helped us immensely during the inspection. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future.

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