

Inspection report for Stalham and Sutton Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
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Linked school if applicable	Stalham Community Infants School URN 120854
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Stalham Community Pre-School URN EY363293

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 representatives of the local authority, centre staff, advisory board member, health professionals, voluntary and statutory partner organisations, one local headteacher and parents.

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

Information about the centre

Stalham and Sutton Children's Centre is a purpose-built phase two centre located in the grounds of Stalham Community Infant School and next to Stalham High School. Until July 2012 it was one of four Children's Centres in the Poppyland Sure Start Children's Centre cluster group operated by Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. At the time of the inspection Stalham and Sutton Children's Centre was no longer part of this cluster and from October 2012 it will be linked with Broadland Children's Centre. It continues to be operated by Action for Children. These changes have resulted in a period of uncertainty and instability for the centre. During this period the centre's advisory board has not been meeting.

The centre offers a full range of services for families and children under five years. These include child health services, family support, and signposting for those seeking employment. The centre serves the rural communities of Stalham, Sutton, Catfield, Happisburgh and East Ruston and surrounding villages. There are pockets of deprivation with some parts of the reach area being amongst the 10-30% most deprived wards in the county. The economic position of families is mixed. The issues affecting the families suffering from some form of deprivation are the mixed economy of the area, rural isolation and poor access to services due to lack of transport.

There are 498 children under the age of five in the reach area. The majority of children are from White British backgrounds. 178 children live in the 10-20% most deprived areas, 69 in the 20-30% most deprived and 251 in the 30-70% most deprived. Around 10% of children are living in households dependent on workless benefits.

The centre does not provide early years childcare, but offers advice and guidance to parents and carers on the day-care and childminding facilities available within the local community. On entry to early years provision, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age.

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

The Stalham and Sutton Children's Centre makes good provision for the needs of families with children under five in the reach area, resulting in mainly good outcomes for all users engaged with the centre. The centre reaches the majority of those eligible for services across a very rural area where transport can be a barrier to accessing provision.

Staff display a strong sense of teamwork. They are highly self-motivated, resourceful and enthusiastic about providing the best possible levels of service and care for families. The whole staff and leadership team are self-critical and constantly search for ways to do things better. It is a testimony to their abilities that service delivery has been relatively unaffected throughout a period of significant uncertainty. The advisory board has been suspended for sometime. Despite this, governance is good, and clear lines of accountability are effectively in place.

Effective management and supervision arrangements are in place and leaders have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development. Future service planning is robust, which ensures that the centre's provision continues to meet the needs of the families in the reach area, including target groups. As a consequence of these features there is good capacity for sustained improvement. While all staff are involved in evaluating and planning their services, evaluation is

sometimes inconsistent and does not always capture the impact the activities have on improving outcomes.

Staff have built strong relationships with a range of partner agencies. This is particularly true of their partnership with the health visiting team. Both agencies work closely in order to develop comprehensive packages of support for specific families and together offer good service delivery. Collaboration with early years providers in the area is also good and supports children's positive achievement.

The centre's safeguarding procedures are outstanding. Children are extremely well safeguarded and very robust safe working practices are employed by staff and partners that work with the centre. The centre offers a good variety of activities to support parents to develop their parenting skills, including one to one support in the home environment. Staff ensure that parents have access to employment and training advice. However, opportunities for families to improve their numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology skills are currently limited at the centre.

Users are encouraged to contribute ideas and evaluate the success of the various activities and courses that the centre provides; they are not so strongly involved in decision-making as they have not had representation on the advisory board or have their own separate forum to be consulted on issues and express their views. Although, users have previously volunteered in the centre and the local community, at the time of the inspection volunteering opportunities were not being encouraged by the centre. Therefore, outcomes for making a positive contribution are satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Resume the work of the advisory board and ensure that users of the centre have a greater opportunity to become involved in the decision-making process at the centre.
- Build upon the existing good practice; to develop a consistent approach to the monitoring and evaluating of all activities and services offered to ensure that impact can be fully demonstrated.
- Improve opportunities for parents to participate in;
 - adult learning courses in literacy, numeracy and Information Communication Technology (ICT)
 - volunteering at the centre and in the local community.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Health outcomes are improving as a majority of families in the reach area access the

centre's services. The centre successfully promotes the importance of attachment between children and their parents; activities such as baby massage and the use of Care Index (CI) assessment tool support parents in strengthening their emotional bond with their child. Obesity rates in the reach area are higher than the local and national average and the centre is tackling these effectively through the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity. For example, the outside play area has recently been redesigned to provide a stimulating environment which encourages children and adults to enjoy the outdoors and to be physically active. In addition, some staff are trained in the Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young (HENRY) programme and use their knowledge to promote healthy eating throughout all activities offered by the centre. Breastfeeding rates are good, and improving, with 47.23% of mothers sustaining breastfeeding at 6 to 8 weeks.

Staff act as good and highly positive role models and children and adults are encouraged to be safe. Safety signs are strategically placed throughout the centre to gently remind adults of safe practice; such as not leaving children unsupervised on the nappy changing unit. Home safety checks are regularly carried out and support is provided to access relevant equipment to keep children safe. As a result parents and children are developing a good understanding of how to stay safe. Children are well behaved. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used highly effectively to tailor support towards individual need and results in excellent integrated working. Children who are subject to a child protection plan, are supported well.

Parents and children enjoy a broad range of services to promote achievement, such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Music Group'. Consequently, children are making increasingly good progress. The percentage of children achieving 78+ scale points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is improving and is just below the national average. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is narrowing. In 2011 it was at 24.7% which was below the national average of 31.4%.

There are frequent examples of adults benefiting from attending parenting courses and, to a lesser degree, accessing adult learning and further training. The 'Beyond the Bump' group for teenage mothers delivers effective advice and support around playing and learning with their children and provides good support networks to enable many to get back into education. Support with housing, advice on benefits and training and learning opportunities are improving the economic well-being of parents and their children.

Children and families from a wide range of backgrounds get on well together and new friendships are forged. As a result, social isolation is reduced and community cohesion is enhanced. Families who attend the centre have strong and positive relationships with all the staff that help to promote their well-being and raise self-esteem. These help them to be confident to share their views. However, parents do not as yet have a strong enough voice in making important decisions and the governance of the centre and opportunities to participate as a volunteer have reduced in recent times.

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	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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides a wide range of services and activities that meet the needs of the reach area well. It is particularly successful in engaging with young parents. Continuous evaluation ensures changing needs are met. For example, the 'About Boys Course', was developed to support an identified need from parents and early years providers with regard to managing challenging behaviour. Users comment that the course was 'Brilliant, non-judgemental, supportive and put across in a human way'.

The centre's outreach services such as the toy library have a high profile in the community and offer isolated families and early years service providers easy access to a range of safety equipment, breast pumps and a good range of high quality toys and play equipment. The hardship fund is used effectively to support families particularly with transport and the centre is very supportive in helping parents apply for funding for two-year-olds to attend early years provision.

The centre promotes the purposeful learning, development and enjoyment of children well, as reflected in their good achievement by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents develop a greater awareness of the importance of play and this helps them to support children's learning at home. Parents who have attended some parenting workshops and courses confirm they help them feel more confident in managing their children's behaviour. The centre recognises that opportunities for parents and carers to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are currently limited.

Parents praise the good level of care, guidance and support received from the staff at the centre. They state that staff are approachable, friendly and make everyone feel welcome. This is because the staff adopt a sensitive, friendly and non-threatening approach to assessing need, thereby successfully engaging users in the

process. Those who experience crisis in their lives confirm that they are confident to turn to staff in the centre, knowing that help would be provided to ease their personal situation. Users who feel isolated reflect how they truly appreciate the social relationships they have developed. 'It is reassuring to chat to others,' is a common view. Effective signposting to other services takes place frequently, and staff are beginning to record the take up so that they can better demonstrate improved outcomes.

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

Centre staff are well led by committed and passionate senior leaders whose skills are complementary and result in a cohesive leadership team. Consequently, high expectations are shared by all staff. Teamwork amongst staff is very good and contributes well to the positive ethos and welcoming environment in the centre.

Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Procedures for performance management are thorough and used well to develop the skills and expertise of centre staff. Staff supervision is valued by staff, as are the professional development opportunities they receive. Action for Children and the local authority provides a clear framework for the centre and effective oversight. As a result, the effectiveness of governance and accountability arrangements are good. However, opportunities for users to contribute to decision making has been limited due to the suspension of the advisory board. The centre has quite rightly identified the re-launch of the advisory board as a priority and to ensure the membership of the group reflects the locality well.

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 extend the centre's reach and tackle the needs of all families, including those most in need of support. Good evaluation systems are in place for some activities and programmes offered by the centre. However, the approach to evaluation is not systematic across the whole range of activities offered and therefore fails to capture fully the effectiveness of the range of activities on offer and their impact on improving the outcomes for families.

Safeguarding users is a very high priority at the centre and keeping children and

families safe is at the forefront of their work. The centre's comprehensive policies and procedures are well embedded and applied rigorously. Staff monitor families closely, liaise extremely well with relevant agencies and maintain high levels of effective case recording in order to ensure children are well protected. Procedures to check the suitability of all adults who might come into contact with children are thorough. Robust risk assessments are carried out for all of the centre's activities. There is a strong emphasis on safety in the groups and activities provided for users. Staff provide good levels of care, are targeting the right priorities which have a beneficial impact on those parents and children who access the centre's services. As a result value for money is good.

Equality and diversity are promoted well. Centre staff ensure that no-one is left out and everyone feels valued. Designated provision is offered to disabled children and their families through the 'Daisy Chain' group which operates at another centre. This ensures these families receive specialist support. Early Years Foundation Stage data show the gaps in achievement are narrowing for those who attend.

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	1
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

The findings from the inspection of the Stalham Community Infant School and Stalham Community Pre-School were taken into consideration in reaching judgements.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Stalham and Sutton Children's Centre on 19–20 September 2012. 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 it was very helpful to hear what the centre means to you and your families. You made it very clear to us that you greatly appreciate the staff and services at the centre. Many of you told us about the positive impact the centre has had on your lives, particularly when you may be experiencing difficulties.

You told us that you think that the centre is a safe place for parents and their children. Inspectors agree with this view and think that staff work very well to ensure the health and safety of all who use the centre. Safeguarding receives the highest priority within the centre.

Staff are helping you to keep you and your children healthy by encouraging new mothers to breastfeed and by promoting healthy eating. The re-developed outside play area is successfully encouraging you to enjoy physical activities with your children outdoors in the fresh air. 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 that children are making increasingly good progress. The percentage of children achieving 78+ scale points across the Early Years Foundation Stage profile is improving and is just below the national average.

You told us that you know the centre has information on 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. You participate enthusiastically in activities and courses which build your confidence and develop your parenting and life skills. We noted that the current range of adult learning courses is limited and have asked the centre to address this. We have also asked the centre to provide more opportunities for you to volunteer to give you additional opportunities to develop further your confidence and self-esteem.

The care, guidance and support that you and your children receive are good. This is because the staff are very successful at helping you to decide how to improve your

lives and then making sure that you access the right services to do this. Those of you we spoke to said how much you appreciated that there is always someone to help when you need advice. Many of you who have felt isolated and alone with your problems say you have made friends as a result of the centre's work. You commented on how you find it 'reassuring to chat to others'.

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. Good evaluation systems are in place for some activities and programmes offered by the centre. However, the approach to evaluation is not systematic across the whole range of activities offered. We have asked the centre to develop a consistent approach to evaluating its activities so it can capture fully the effectiveness of the range of activities on offer.

The centre actively seeks your views and comments and many of you will have been involved in surveys and you are encouraged to make comments and suggestions at the end of activities. The advisory board has been suspended for sometime. We have asked the centre to resume the advisory board and to ensure that you are able to contribute your ideas fully and be more involved in the governance of the centre. The centre highly values the contribution of parents and is keen for more of you to become involved.

We recognise how inclusive the centre is and staff ensure all families are welcome. Designated provision such as 'Daisy Chain' is providing good support to children and their parents with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The hardship fund is used effectively to provide you with transport to get to activities and the centre is very supportive in helping parents apply for funding for two-year-olds to attend early year's provision.

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 you every success in the future.

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