

Inspection report for Nar Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	384022
Inspection dates	16–17 October 2012
Reporting inspector	Daniel Grant

Centre leader	Jeanette Nowrung
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	St Michael's Church of England Primary School 121077
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	St Michael's Family Centre EY 411778 Nar Playgroup EY39923

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 additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with parents and representatives from the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Nar Children's Centre is a phase two centre which opened in December 2009 and fulfils the core purpose in its services. It has been managed by the governing body of St Michael's Church of England Primary School since 1 October 2012. Prior to this, the centre had been managed by St Michael's Family Centre. The centre is based within the same building as the school and St Michael's Family Centre. It provides services from the main centre and through four other locations within the local area. The majority of children live in areas that are within the 30% most deprived in the country, with pockets of greater deprivation. The area served by the centre includes the coastal town of King's Lynn and the villages of St Germans, West Winch, Middleton and East Winch.

A total of 1137 children under five live within the area. The number of children attending school who are known to be eligible for free school meals is high. Approximately 32% of the children in the area are living in households where no-one is working. A very large majority of families within the area served by the centre are of White British heritage. Most children typically enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities below those expected for their age.

The centre provides a wide range of supporting services, incorporating outreach and home visiting, health clinics and support, parenting courses, volunteering opportunities and workshops. Governance of the centre is overseen by an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and parents. The centre manager leads a team of two family support workers, a community midwife, a healthy eating advisor and an administrator.

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

3

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory. Leadership of the centre changed very recently and staff are settling into their new roles. Managers and leaders are beginning to establish new priorities and objectives for the centre but it is too soon to see the impact of these changes. Nevertheless, the centre’s performance is improving steadily in many areas and outcomes for the majority of families, although currently satisfactory, are improving. The local authority provides the centre with useful data and information about the families in the area it serves. The centre is well-established in the community but not all of the key partners are aware of the full extent of its core purpose.

The centre has a satisfactory capacity to improve. New leaders are determined to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of the local communities and are beginning a process of consultation with partners and local people to gather information. The centre’s self-evaluation process ensures that leaders have an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. The centre has appropriate arrangements in place to gather the views of staff and partners to help plan for improvements. However, arrangements for gathering the views of families are generally informal as the centre does not have a parents’ forum, and the role of parents on the advisory board is under-developed.

The number of families using the centre, including those from targeted groups, is satisfactory. However, the centre recognises the need to increase registrations and extend engagement so that more families can benefit from its services, especially those with the greatest needs. Children behave well at the centre and develop

positive relationships with each other and with adults. Families attending the centre are encouraged to contribute positively to their community and the life of the centre. Outreach provision offers satisfactory support for vulnerable families. The centre has a community midwife who provides good pre- and post-natal support, particularly for targeted groups. The rate of mothers who continue breastfeeding is high and increasing. The level of childhood obesity has increased recently and is being appropriately addressed through several initiatives at the centre.

Staff generally have good skills and understanding about risks and how to safeguard children, which they use effectively to provide a safe and secure environment within the centre. However, at one of the sites used by the centre, staff were unclear about appropriate use of fire-safety equipment. The centre works effectively with social workers and health visitors to provide high quality services for families with children subject to child protection plans, and the Common Assessment Framework process is used well. Families attending the centre develop a good understanding of dangers and how to keep themselves and each other safe. Parents share their concerns with staff because they trust their experience and skills.

Children who use the centre's services enjoy themselves and make satisfactory progress as they prepare for school. However, the centre does not measure the effectiveness of its own contribution to increasing children's levels of skills, knowledge and abilities. The proportion reaching a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is below average. The centre contributes effectively to adults' personal and parenting skills. However, opportunities and support available for parents seeking work, or wishing to undertake training or gain accredited qualifications are limited. Only a few parents have benefited from further learning opportunities.

Leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory. There are clear lines of accountability and priorities for the centre are currently under review. The advisory board provides useful support and some challenge for the centre but is not yet fully involved in setting targets. The development plan contains targets which are too vague and do not allow the centre to measure performance. The centre's new leadership team has identified the need to improve outcomes for more families, including those from target groups.

Arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity and the promotion of diversity are satisfactory. Families with the greatest needs are prioritised for interventions and the centre uses its resources adequately to ensure support is provided at an early stage. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest increased in 2010 but has shown very slight improvement in 2011. The centre has rightly identified that it needs to do more to engage targeted groups, such as fathers, disabled children and young parents.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase registration and user participation through better promotion of the centre's provision, extending outreach work and by more precise identification and targeting of those most in need.
- Improve the assessment of children's knowledge, skills and abilities so that the centre has an accurate view of how well they achieve and can adjust provision accordingly.
- Enhance users' economic well-being by Jobcentre Plus working more effectively with the centre, adult education and other training organisations to provide better information, support and opportunities for those interested in seeking paid work, training and education.
- Increase the effectiveness of development planning and decision-making processes by:
 - setting specific and measurable targets
 - establishing a parents' forum
 - encouraging more parents and key partners to become active board members.
- Ensure risk assessments of all sites are rigorous and that staff understand the importance of appropriate use of fire-safety equipment.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes for the children and parents who use the centre are satisfactory overall. Many health outcomes are improving: the teenage rate of conception is reducing, and effective support is promoting an increased awareness of the benefits of immunisation and stopping smoking. However, the obesity rate has increased significantly. Staff work effectively with health visitors to conduct home visits and regular health clinics are held in the centre and at one other location within the area. Pre- and post-natal support from the community midwife is very well targeted and ensures families benefit from close attention to their individual circumstances, such as using a translator to help prepare birth-plans in languages other than English.

The centre provides a relaxing and inviting environment where families engage well with activities because staff build strong, trusting relationships with them. These relationships help to improve outcomes for families through the work undertaken for the Common Assessment Framework, with those subject to child protection plans and looked after children. Support is valued by users and one parent told the inspectors, 'Staff at the centre have helped me deal with my child's disability. They have shown me how to cope with it and what to do to get more help and support.' Homestart works effectively with the centre to provide families with vital practical help in times of crisis. Home visiting is used effectively to support a few of the families who face the greatest challenges.

Children and adults enjoy attending activities and they feel safe. Arrangements to

help keep children and families safe when accessing services are effective because staff have a good level of expertise. However, staff at St Michael's Family Centre do not always observe some fire-safety guidelines and obstruct automatic closure of fire-doors and access to fire extinguishers. Staff otherwise use their experience and skills well to encourage children to explore and understand risks and dangers through play experiences. Children's behaviour in the centre is good.

The centre has correctly identified and focused attention on the support it provides to improve children's skills, knowledge and abilities as they prepare for school. An average 63% of children gained at least 78 scale points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. The centre has appropriately focused support on improving language development and case studies show that this has had a positive impact. A range of activities including the book-bus, singing and dancing and coaching of staff by a speech and language therapist have improved children's learning and promoted parenting skills. One parent commented, 'There is a good range of books for us to choose and take home, including ones written in Russian to help my daughter to read and have fun.' Data show the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest reduced slightly in 2011. Adults benefit from support to improve parenting and understand child development. However, opportunities for adults seeking to improve their educational qualifications, undertake training or find paid work, are limited and not promoted well enough.

The centre works very effectively with a community of Travellers, providing stay and play sessions on the Travellers' site and gaining the trust of families who access a wide range of activities and services. All families are encouraged to contribute positively to their community and the life of the centre. However, parents' involvement in decision-making and governance of the centre is under-developed.

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	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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 quality of provision is satisfactory overall. The centre has an adequate understanding of the needs of each community and the number of families registered has increased steadily, including those from target groups and those most in need of support. The number of families served by the centre increased significantly recently when the centre's reach area was extended. Although progress has been made to encourage more families to register and use the centre's services, families from some target groups have been slow to respond, such as fathers, teenage parents and the parents of disabled children. It is too soon to see any impact from the new leadership in addressing these issues.

Opportunities for parents to extend their personal, social and parenting skills are satisfactory. However, support and guidance arrangements for those seeking to improve their education and find paid work remain under-developed. Staff assess the needs of families appropriately and plan individual support to ensure their needs are met. Families using the centre receive satisfactory care, guidance and support. Systems for tracking progress are not yet fully established but the centre does keep case studies which illustrate progress and success. Outreach provision for families facing challenges is satisfactory and improving.

The centre provides a broad range of activities to help improve outcomes for families, such as help in the home from Homestart, healthy eating advice, translation services, breastfeeding support and programmes to help deal with the effects of domestic violence. Parents have fun at the centre while increasing their knowledge and building their confidence, relationships and parenting skills. Families from targeted groups are the focus of prioritised support and the needs of those who use the centre's services are adequately met. One parent commented, 'One of the best things about the centre is that you can just be yourself. Children can play safely together and you are made to feel as though you matter.'

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	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. New leadership arrangements are now in place but systems and processes to ensure the centre delivers high quality services and continues to improve have not yet been finalised. Staff are supportive of the recent changes and are now settling into their roles. The centre manager and her team have the confidence of partner agencies and the local communities. The local authority provides the centre with good support and continues to help leaders to

identify key priorities. A strong feature of the centre is the goodwill that exists between those involved in planning and delivering services.

Arrangements for the governance and accountability of the centre are satisfactory. In the past year, the centre has made reasonable progress towards achieving the majority of targets set by the local authority. The local authority provides the centre with good data and information about families in the area it serves. The centre recognises the importance of assessing the needs of the communities within its new reach area, of identifying target groups and increasing the number of families registering with the centre. However, there has been insufficient time to begin this process.

The centre’s advisory board has been in place since the centre first opened and is generally supportive of its work and provides a degree of challenge for the manager. However, membership and involvement from parents is limited. The advisory board is not sufficiently involved in setting and reviewing performance targets for the centre. The centre provides satisfactory value for money because it uses its resources appropriately to meet the needs of an increasing number of families who use its provision.

Partnerships with key organisations are appropriately in place, including childminders, health, social care and voluntary and private sector organisations, and these ensure the centre meets its core purpose. However, not all of the key partners are entirely aware of the full range of services provided by the centre. Outreach provision is effective and results in satisfactory support for the most vulnerable families.

Everyone is made to feel welcome at the centre. Equality and the inclusion of all children and their families are promoted effectively, particularly families for whom English is an additional language and the Traveller community. The centre supports community cohesion and celebrates cultural diversity well. Discrimination, where it occurs, is dealt with promptly and effectively. The centre is committed to inclusion and removing barriers, including those faced by users with the greatest needs. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest has narrowed slightly in the past year.

The centre has effective arrangements to ensure all safeguarding requirements are met and result in centre users being protected. Staff receive regular and appropriate training, have satisfactory levels of awareness and know what to do if action needs to be taken. Staff have ready access to expert advice on safeguarding and protecting children. Arrangements for staff vetting comply with requirements.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<p>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</p>	<p>3</p>
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The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting 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	3
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	3
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

The findings from the most recent inspection reports for St Michael's Family Centre, Nar Playgroup and St Michael's Church of England Primary School have been taken into account.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Nar Children's Centre on 16–17 October 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We enjoyed our visit to your centre and wish to thank those of you who helped us with our inspection work.

Staff have many skills and they use these well to make sure your time at the centre is enjoyable and of benefit to your family. We saw how effective they are in providing specific support for individuals when they most need it. The services provided, for example, by the community midwife, Homestart and family support workers, are benefiting many of you and helping you to overcome the problems you are facing. The centre is a safe place for you and your children and we have asked the manager to make sure the whole staff follow all safety guidance and procedures fully.

There is an interesting variety of sessions and activities organised at the centre which an increasing number of local families are using. We found the staff to be committed and keen to support your children's learning and development and to help some of you become more confident parents. The centre's work has a positive effect on helping your children get ready for school. However, the centre does not measure the progress made by each child so we have asked them to do this.

The children we saw enjoyed what they were doing during activities. The staff are determined to become even better at supporting families with the greatest needs. They want more families to join the centre so that they can benefit too. We have asked the centre leader to tell more people about what the centre offers and to encourage more families to use it. The increased engagement of targeted groups, such as children with disabilities, young parents, and fathers, has been identified as an area for improvement.

Good effort has been placed on increasing your children's learning and development through many interesting and exciting activities. Appropriate partnerships have been built with other professionals and organisations to ensure you have full access to a range of support and guidance to help keep your families healthy and safe. However, we found that the centre and its partners do not provide enough opportunities for adults who want help to find work, undertake training or enhance their education.

The new leadership team has only just started working together to set the right priorities to take the centre forward. The centre has an active and supportive advisory board and we have asked the leadership team and the advisory board to work more effectively together to make sure the centre gets even better. We have also asked them to find ways of encouraging more of you to join the advisory board and to set up a parents' forum so that you have a greater say in how the centre is run.

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