

Norfolk - 4C West (Lots 31 and 32)

Swaffham Infant & Nursery School, White Cross Road, Swaffham, PE37 7RF

Inspection date 12–14 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The local authority does not routinely share information about the children and families who have social care involvement, such as children subject to child protection plans, as a result, the centres are not able to support all families who may benefit from what they offer.
- Not enough adults, particularly from workless households, access literacy and numeracy courses to improve their education and skills. This limits their prospects for employment and does not help them to support their children's language and communication development.
- Leaders do not always ensure they receive or make enough use of information from all partners to show the difference services are making to families' lives. For example, they are not yet using information about children's achievements at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage to help them measure the impact of services to support children's readiness for school.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Leaders have made effective use of available information to review and prioritise what they offer. As a result, a rising number of families are accessing services, including those at risk of isolation and in most in need of help.
- A strength of the centres' staff team is their enthusiasm and commitment to making a difference to the children and families they serve. Parents highly value the care, guidance and support they receive and feel welcomed when accessing services. Parents say the staff are, 'friendly, inviting and helpful' and 'vital and very beneficial to families'.
- The work with the Traveller community is extremely successful. The 'Splashes' play session provides an excellent opportunity for children to play and learn together. Their parents now recognise how activities help their children to gain the skills they need for when they start school.
- Families identified as needing specific help to reduce the risk of harm to children make significant changes to their lives as a result of one-to-one support.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children’s centre group was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. The centres that form part of this children’s centre group are Swaffham Children’s Centre, Downham Market Children’s Centre and Methwold Children’s Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty’s Inspectors and an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives from the commissioned provider 4children, a senior leader from the local authority, Traveller support, health partners, education and early years partners, parents, family outreach workers, other centre staff, volunteers and representatives of the advisory group. The inspectors visited a range of activities across the three centres and play sessions at the Traveller site and RAF Marham. Visits to activities were undertaken with the commissioned provider, who also attended all team meetings. Inspectors looked at the groups’ self-evaluation documents, delivery plans, case files, safeguarding procedures and a range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Wendy Ratcliff, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Sue Smith	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Jackie Cousins	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Norfolk 4C West is a group of children's centres in Norfolk run by the charity 4children on behalf of the local authority. The group is made up of three centres: Swaffham, a phase two children's centre, and Downham Market and Methwold, phase three centres. 4children has been responsible for running the children's centre group since October 2012. The centres have had some changes in staff including a new cluster manager who started in April 2013. There are two advisory boards, which include key partners; one for Swaffham and one for Downham Market and Methwold. The children's centre group offers a range of services to meet its core purpose. Services are provided at each of the centres and at community venues, including RAF Marham, the Traveller site and the Methodist hall in the village of Feltwell. The centres are open each week day from 9.00am to 5.00pm, for 51 weeks of the year. Swaffham Children's Centre shares a site with Swaffham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School and Swaffham Pre School. Methwold Children's Centre is on the same site as Weeting Voluntary Controlled Primary School. There are two registered early years providers, Clackclose Pre School and Kids' Korner who offer childcare places at the same site as Downham Market Children's Centre. These providers are subject to different inspection arrangements. Reports can be found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>.

There are 3,230 children under five years of age living in the area the centres serve. This includes a large rural area, with the two market towns of Swaffham and Downham Market being the most densely populated. The economy is based on agriculture with a large majority of people working on the land. Although the area is not identified as deprived overall, there are pockets of deprivation among areas considered to be more affluent. Around 15% of children are living in households dependant on workless benefits. Transport links are limited and can be a barrier to accessing services.

Most of the population is White British with smaller percentages of families from minority ethnic groups. A small number of families from Traveller backgrounds live on a dedicated site in Swaffham. Within the area there is also a large military base, RAF Marham and an American airbase in the village of Feltwell. Children's skills when they start early years provision varies across the area with communication and language being the weakest aspect.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- The local authority should develop a protocol for information sharing between social services and children's centres to support early intervention.
- Increase the number of adults who access literacy and numeracy courses in order to improve their future employment prospects and enable them to support their children's language and communication development more effectively.
- Leaders, managers and those in governance should ensure that systems to monitor and track the work of the centre are fully embedded by:
 - working with partners to improve the quality of data available at a local level
 - making best use of all available data in order to demonstrate the impact services have for children and families.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Not all families who need it have access to the centres' work. However, the centres have increased the number of children and families they are working with from target groups; this includes the majority of families living in areas of higher deprivation, the majority of children living in workless households and a minority of service families.
- The centre receives referrals from health professionals and schools in the area. Information about

families receiving social care involvement is not routinely shared, consequently the centres are unable to make contact with these families so that they too may benefit from the services they offer. However, leaders, staff and some partners use the information that is available combined with their local knowledge of the area to match the services they provide to the needs of these families as well as they can.

- Not enough adults benefit from family learning courses or training to improve their education. The centre has plans to deliver more courses and sessions for parents, such as parenting programmes following consultation with families.
- Some centres in the group work with more families than others. Only a minority of families in the Methwold area access services. Staff are working with health partners and the library service to increase the engagement of families from this centre, particularly those who live in the outlying villages and are at risk of social isolation. Parents say the new group in Feltwell means families who do not have access to transport have a welcoming and inclusive place to go with their children, which 'lifts their mood and enables them to make new friends'.
- The centres are good at keeping a record of the number of families who are regularly engaging with services. Staff use the 'family pathway' to identify those who no longer access services and make contact with families to remind them about the services on offer.
- Staff use the information from the Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores to help them to identify areas to focus on and plan relevant activities. They provide environments which help children to learn and focus well upon improving children's communication and language skills. The large majority of children across the centres' area are accessing their free entitlement to early years education.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Observations are not yet used to plan children's next steps and to ensure children make good progress. The achievements of adults are not routinely tracked so the impact or success of a course is not clear. However, staff are gaining confidence in the use of 4children's systems to assess, plan and evaluate the effectiveness of their work. This includes the use of 'memory books' to celebrate children's achievements.
- Adults are signposted to job vacancies and some courses, such as first aid, numeracy and literacy and there are examples of a few adults gaining qualifications that lead to employment. However, the centres do not yet receive information from adult learning providers in order to measure the success of the courses run or to modify services to be more appealing to a greater range of adults from target groups.
- Sessions such as, 'Play and Learn' and 'Sticky Fingers' are of high quality and popular with children and families. Staff have begun to implement 'progress wheels' with parents so they can track their child's progress and this provides staff with opportunities to identify where any additional support may be required.
- The number of children who achieve a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage varies across the area. For example, in 2012, around 54% of children in the Downham Market and Swaffham areas achieved this level of development, which is below the national and local authority averages. In the Methwold area it was 60% of children, which is above the local authority average but below the national average. Staff are implementing a clear action plan to reduce this inequality.
- Levels of obesity of children in reception year continue to be above local authority averages and remains a priority for the group. The centres run sports sessions and cookery classes and have begun to collect evidence to measure the success of these activities and to show how they help families to make changes to their lives. Breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks have increased and are now in line with local authority averages. This is as result of improved support to mothers who chose to breastfeed, such as the breastfeeding café and breast pump loan scheme.
- Staff are good role models, build trusting relationships with families and tailor one-to-one support to help them overcome difficult situations in their lives.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Centres do not receive information about all families in most need of support because an information sharing protocol has not been established with social care. However, the local authority has set clear targets and undertakes four visits a year to check how well the group of centres is doing. It is providing a range of workshops for commissioned providers and improving the level of data available to help centres' to plan its work more precisely and to measure whether services are making a difference to the lives of children and families.
- Leaders are aware that the impact of the centres' work is not always clear. They have put new, improved systems in place to monitor and assess whether targets are being met and to more precisely measure the impact of services for children and families. They are supporting staff with the implementation of these systems to ensure they are effective.
- Leaders know the centres' overall strengths and where improvement is needed. This is because they have undertaken a detailed needs analysis based information available to them to ensure the services they provide are more closely matched to the needs of children and families. They have set clear targets for each of the centres linked to relevant priorities, such as reducing obesity, providing services in rural areas and increasing the percentage of children who reach a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The advisory board members are aware of their role and responsibilities. They are keen to strengthen the role they play in providing support and challenge and are being provided with improved information to help them do this. Although parents are not routinely engaged in the advisory board, they have a range of opportunities to share their views and contribute to developing services.
- Safeguarding is given high status by the centre. The centres work with partners to maintain a focus on reducing the risk of harm to children. 4children has implemented a range of systems to monitor the effectiveness of this work, which includes group supervision for staff who undertake specific one-to-one work with the families in most need of support. Staff assess the needs of families using the Common Assessment Framework and have received training in the use of a system to help parents measure progression and the impact of the one to work they receive.
- Resources, including staff deployment, are used adequately to meet the needs of children and their families. The centres work well with some key partners to make sure that families can access services easily. Service families access sessions on the base, staff deliver play sessions at the Traveller site and together with agencies such as the library, staff are increasing the level of services they take to isolated communities such as Feltwell.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Children's Centre Group details

Unique reference number	80355
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	423600
Managed by	The charity 4children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3230
Centre leader	Ruth Blackledge
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01760-721101
Email address	ruth.blackledge@4children.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 23083 Swaffham Children's Centre
- 20977 Downham Market Children's Centre
- 21991 Methwold Children's Centre

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