

Treehouse and Sunshine Children's Centres

Treehouse CC, Coronation Road, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ12 1TX
Sunshine CC, Sandringham Road, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ12 4HD

Inspection date July 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Inadequate	4
The quality of practice and services		Inadequate	4
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group is inadequate.

- Governance arrangements are weak. The children's centre group's advisory board does not include necessary key partners. Some have withdrawn their services as a result of poor working relationships with the centre. Services do not sufficiently meet the needs of the range of families within the local area.
- Leaders do not make sufficient use of all available information to plan and review services or to check which families access them. They do not have a good enough understanding of how effectively the children's centre group works and they do not know if they are improving the lives of families who most need help.
- The group is not improving rapidly enough: it does not have clear priorities or measurable targets for development.
- Leaders and staff are not doing enough to inform families in their area about their services, particularly those who may be reluctant to participate. As a result, only a minority of families use the centres.
- Activities designed to help children to learn and develop are not planned well enough to ensure that children make good progress. The majority of parents are not being given sufficient guidance on how their children learn.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- The staff team are committed to improving the lives of the families with whom they work. Some effective one-to-one support led to families, including those subject to domestic violence, making significant improvements in their lives.
- Services for young parents are having a positive impact. The young parents' group at Treehouse Children's Centre successfully helps parents to be effective and learn how to support their children's development at home.

- The centres enable adults to volunteer their services and develop confidence and skills for employment. They value being able to contribute to their community.

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 Treehouse Children's Centre and Sunshine Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and managers in the local authority, centre leaders, the commissioned provider, partner agencies, parents, family support workers, play leaders, a business support officer, volunteers and representatives of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited the centre's two sites and their allotment.

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

Inspection team

Jane Burchall	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Jonathan Palk	Her Majesty's Inspector
Nigel Evans	Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Treehouse and Sunshine are two centres that form a group in Teignbridge run by Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. The group is made up of: Treehouse, a phase two children's centre, and Sunshine, a phase three children's centre. Action for Children has been responsible for running both centres since April 2011. There is one advisory board which governs both centres. The current centre leader has been in post for only two weeks. The centres serve Newton Abbot and surrounding villages. Although the area is not identified as being deprived overall, there are pockets of deprivation where many families are either on workless benefits or low incomes. Most of the population is White British, with smaller percentages of families from minority ethnic groups, some of whom speak English as an additional language. Many children in the area start early years provision with skills which are well below those typical for their age. Communication and language and, personal, social and emotional skills are the weakest areas. The centres meet their core purpose by offering a range of services which includes health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes, adult learning and family support. Services are offered from the main children's centre buildings, a local allotment and some community venues within outlying villages.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Together with the local authority, develop and implement action plans for improvement that include clear, challenging and measurable targets focused upon the priorities for the centre.
- Improve governance of the group of children's centres by:
 - increasing the range of partners and parents who are members of the advisory board so that there is a coordinated approach to the planning of services, particularly in relation to health, preparing children for school and in tackling worklessness
 - providing a clear direction to the work of the advisory board by ensuring all members have a good understanding of the terms of reference which guide their work.
- Improve access to services for young children and their families by ensuring families in the reach area know what services are on offer at the children's centres, particularly those who would most benefit.
- Improve provision to support children's learning and development by ensuring:
 - early years activities are well planned to take account of the learning needs of children by introducing systems for staff to observe and assess what children know and can do
 - staff model good practice to increase parents' understanding of how to support their children's learning and development, particularly in relation to their communication and language skills.
- Monitor the extent to which services improve the lives of families, particularly those most in need, so that the leaders and the advisory board can evaluate accurately the improvements made by the centres.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- Leaders do not know if families are accessing the services they need. Leaders do not use data and information available to them to check if those who need most help in their area engage in relevant groups and activities.
- Staff do not do enough to ensure that families in their area know about the services they offer. Too many families in the area do not benefit from services especially those families in most need of support, including those expecting children.

- Some partners, such as health and social care, work with the centre to help identify specific families who may benefit from targeted services. Staff are improving their use of assessment processes to help identify how they can help families known to them. Staff engage well with the families known to them.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- Monitoring of the quality of services is ineffective. Although staff gather feedback from parents, the information is not used well enough to ascertain if activities improve the lives of families. Leaders fail to gather relevant information from partners to measure the difference the services they deliver make.
- Learning and development opportunities are poorly planned so do not meet the needs and interests of the individual children. Staff do not assess what children know and can do, so they are unable to provide activities to develop each child's next stage of learning. Staff do not help parents to understand how they can assist their children's progress, for example by demonstrating how to encourage children to speak and listen to each other. As a consequence, too many children are not prepared well enough for school.
- Parents in the volunteer programme are well trained and can gain vocational qualifications. The skills and interests of volunteers are matched well to the needs of the centres. The support and guidance provided by the volunteer coordinator are very good.
- A few parents have progressed into employment as a result of their volunteering experience. All have improved confidence and developed new skills. However, there are gaps in services to support children and parents living in workless homes.
- Provision for families who may be subject to domestic violence is particularly effective and many have been supported to make positive changes in their lives. 'Stronger as a mum and starting to believe in myself;' 'Thank you for giving me my life back;' 'I'm now in a place I never thought I'd be;' are typical examples of parents' feedback who have attended special courses for adults who may have been affected by domestic violence.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- There are not enough partners or parents involved in the advisory board. As a result, planning to meet the needs of families is not coordinated as members do not fully understand how to meet the range of issues faced in the community. This has resulted in gaps in services and practice, particularly in relation to health, preparing children for school and in tackling worklessness.
- The board lacks direction as members are not fully clear about what is expected of them. Group leaders have not provided necessary data and information so members are unable to challenge leaders or hold them to account to bring about necessary change.
- The local authority checks how well the centres are doing and has required the group to improve. However, the changes required have not ensured that the group provides good quality services to those who need them the most. There has been some progress, such as an increase in the numbers of families who are supported by the Common Assessment Framework.
- Action planning for improvement is weak. It does not identify clear enough priorities for development or provide sharp targets to bring about the improvement that is needed. The use of resources does not meet the needs of the families who live locally.
- The newly appointed centre leader has very quickly identified what the group does well and where improvements are needed. The centre lead is rightly initially focusing on building an effective team.
- The children's centre group works well to safeguard the welfare of children and families known to them, including those subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework. Staff and volunteers have a good understanding of safeguarding arrangements and are clear about what to do if they have concerns about a child.

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 details

Unique reference number	80242
Local authority	Devon County Council
Inspection number	423304
Managed by	Action for Children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,020
Centre leader	Pat Dunn
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
Telephone number	01626 337715
Email address	pat.dunn@actionforchildren.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 22133 Treehouse Children's Centre
- 22132 Sunshine Children's Centre

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