

Lincolnshire - South Kesteven (South)

Stamford Children's Centre School House, Green Lane, Stamford, PE9 1HE

Inspection date 24–26 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	Select
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group is good.

- The excellent quality assurance processes put in place by the local authority, for example for monitoring case files and staff performance, ensures assessment of the needs of families is accurate. Families receive timely and appropriate support from a range of professionals.
- The highly committed team of staff and key professionals have embraced a culture of partnership working and reflective practice. Information and expertise is shared well to ensure services for children and their families are of high quality.
- Leaders and staff actively seek out and create opportunities for feedback from families using the centre, professionals and the wider community. Their views are used extremely well to improve and shape services to meet the changing needs of the large majority local families.
- The volunteer programme has successfully raised aspirations for a good number of adults. Many have accessed further education and employment opportunities.
- A very high number of three and four-year-old children access their free entitlement to good quality early education. In addition, the centre ensures almost all two-year-olds in most need of early intervention access services, including early education places. As a result, children make good progress in their learning and development overall.

It is not outstanding because:

- The centre staff and partners have successfully engaged a high number of families, including those in most need of support, in children's centre services and activities. However, a small minority of these families remain difficult to engage and are not benefiting from the services offered by the group.
- The improvement plan and self-evaluation do not always clearly demonstrate how leaders, staff and partners are identifying and making improvements towards their ambitious targets. This means that they cannot always be held fully accountable by families, the partnership board and the local authority.

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 Stamford and Market Deeping Children’s Centre and South Witham and Bourne Children’s Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with staff, partners, the senior leadership team and representatives of the advisory board and the local authority.

The inspectors visited each of the centres. They observed the centre’s work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Rachael Flesher	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Bob Busby	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Kathryn Gethin	Her Majesty’s Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

South Kesteven (South) Children's Centre group consists of two children's centres that share one overall centre leader. The centres meet their core purpose by offering a range of services which include health services, family play sessions, parenting courses, adult learning and family support. The centres provide services from four sites across a large, predominantly affluent, rural community. The children's centre group is managed and governed by the local authority alongside an advisory board for each of the two centres. Families access services across all four sites.

Stamford and Market Deeping Children's Centre community includes the market town of Stamford and the rural area of towns and villages of Market Deeping, Deeping St James, Baston and Langtoft. Stamford is the main site and is based in the grounds of Bluecoat Primary School close to a housing estate in one of the most deprived communities in the area. Services are also provided from accommodation within Market Deeping Community Primary School.

South Witham and Bourne Children's Centre community includes the market town of Bourne and a surrounding rural community of 44 villages, including South Witham. South Witham is the main site and is based in the grounds of South Witham Primary School. Bourne is served by children's centre services delivered from Bourne Children's Centre adjoining the Bourne Youth Centre.

The large majority of families living in the area served by the centres are predominantly White British. There are a small but increasing number of Eastern European families, many of whom speak English as an additional language. Unemployment rates are low overall but relatively high in the most deprived areas.

Early years provision is provided through a number of early years settings, school nursery classes and childminders located in the locality. Some children enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities that are below those expected for their age, especially in communication and language and personal, social and emotional development, the rest typically meet age related expectations. The primary schools and nearby early years settings were not part of this inspection and are subject to their own inspection. The reports are available on the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

What does the centre group need to do to improve further?

- Increase the engagement of even more children and families identified as in most need of support to an outstanding level through greater involvement in the good quality targeted and universal services and activities provided by or on behalf of the children's centres.
- Strengthen procedures to more clearly evidence the ambitious targets set for improvement and closely check the progress the centre makes towards achieving them so that the centre group is fully accountable to families, the local authority and the partnership board.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The centres really listen to families when planning services and activities to make sure they are providing what the community needs. As a result services are highly valued by a wide range of families who are overwhelmingly satisfied.
- Staff and partners share information well to ensure they know their families and where they are, including those expecting children. They have a good understanding of their needs and the services required to support them. Professionals from a range of services for example, health, social care, adult learning, schools and early years providers work extremely well together to understand and promote services that ensure good take up and a very positive impact on supporting the most vulnerable families.

- The centres use innovative approaches to encourage families, particularly those identified as most in need, to engage with services with great success. For example, through opening a 'pop up shop' in Stamford High Street and providing fun family activities on green spaces in the heart of the most deprived communities. The group also provides crèche facilities and transport in some cases to help some families living in rural isolation to access the services and activities.
- Centre staff work very effectively with other agencies to provide good quality family support and outreach work. Where necessary services are delivered in the home, alongside other professionals where appropriate. This enables families who cannot come into the centres to access the valuable services they need.
- Thorough systems are in place to monitor each family's participation and regular attendance in services and activities. This ensures support is available to individual families for as long as they need it. However, some families identified as being in most need of support, still do not use the centres. This means, currently a good, but not outstanding, number of families are accessing the services and activities provided to support their needs and improve their lives.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The good quality and well used parenting programmes have a positive impact on children and their families, including those in most need of support. Centre staff are particularly skilled at recognising and nurturing parents' skills and expertise. They are highly successful in developing parents' confidence by guiding them to help and support each other. As a result, parenting skills are improving, securing children's safety and well-being.
- Commercial programmes have a significant impact on supporting and improving the emotional well-being and mental health of some of the centre's most vulnerable families. This has resulted in them reporting that they feel empowered and have increased confidence. The sessions have reduced social isolation, created friendships and support networks and families are safer. One parent summarises the views of many by saying, 'On a good day it's a fun place to be, on a bad day it's a sanity-saver'.
- There is very good support for parents to access a range of advice, information, qualifications, training and volunteering opportunities to improve their employment prospects and financial stability. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses have achieved a particularly high success rate and adult learning providers report that the majority of adults who start, complete their courses. This has led to high levels of increased confidence in parents, raised aspirations and has secured employment for many. Volunteers now run sessions in the centre including the 'International Toddler group' and 'Twins' as well as making valuable contributions to the community.
- Very effective observations, assessment and planning of children's learning and development are reducing inequalities. Highly skilled adults support children to make good progress in their learning during good quality sessions. This ensures children are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.
- Services improve the health of families in the area, including those identified as in most need of support. For example, the breastfeeding support group contributes to the percentage of mothers sustaining breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks. At 58% this is well above the national rate of 47%. Parents are also aware of the risk to children's health in regard to smoking in the home. The vast majority of parents who smoke have signed up to live in smoke-free homes.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Leaders, staff and partners strive to provide the best services and activities to improve the lives of those families in most need of their support. They access relevant training and information to ensure they are well trained and consistently share their knowledge and expertise to support and enhance the quality of their work.

- The performance management and supervision of the work of staff is a significant strength and ensures that the support and services families receive is swift, appropriate and of high quality. Case files are closely monitored and staff are challenged if the progress of families slows or targets are not maintained.
- Strong links have been developed with a range of relevant partners. Key information about families and services is shared swiftly and enables those families who most need help to access the centre and services and reduce the risk of harm. This includes children subject to child protection plans, those supported through the Common Assessment Framework and looked after children. Close working with partners has resulted in resources that are used very well to ensure services meet the needs of young children and families.
- The advisory board and local authority provide effective governance and closely check the work of the group of centres through regular performance meetings. There are also very thorough systems to check the quality of commissioned services through rating their performance against clear and measurable targets and success criteria. This ensures effective service delivery that meets the needs of families. However, the centre's own self-evaluation procedures and target setting processes lack this level of detail and as such hinder otherwise effective monitoring.
- Safeguarding and the welfare of children are at the forefront of the work of the centres. Robust safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and are regularly reviewed. All staff and volunteers have training and relevant checks to ensure they are suitable to work with and safeguard children and vulnerable adults.
- Parents using the centre feel they are listened to, supported and welcomed. One parent stated, 'The centre is a very friendly place and staff are non-judgemental. No matter who you are you're always made welcome.' They are well represented on the partnership board and regular surveys and evaluations ensure the centres know the views of parents and use these well to improve access and to shape services.

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	80329
Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	423284
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	4,584
Centre leader	Donna Cartmell-Fry
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01780 764072
Email address	donna.cartmell@lincolnshire.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- URN: 22905 Stamford and Market Deeping Children's Centre
- URN: 22784 South Witham and Bourne Children's Centre

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