

# The Phoenix Children's Centre

Tudor Road, Sudbury, CO10 1NP

<b>Inspection date</b>		19–20 September 2013	
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
The quality of practice and services		<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Although increasing, the proportion of families registered with the centre is lower than in many centres. Not enough families from the most deprived areas engage in the centre's activities.
- The information which the centre has about families living in the area and which families are accessing its services is often contradictory; this prevents the centre from carrying out an accurate analysis of needs and from ensuring it engages all families who are in need of support.
- The centre's self-evaluation processes are not rigorous enough and not focused sufficiently on the impact the centre is having on the groups it has identified as in most need of support.
- Targets for improvement set by the local authority are not defined clearly enough.
- The advisory board does not have a clear enough focus on holding the centre to account for its actions or effectiveness.

### This centre has the following strengths:

- The centre managers and staff work well together and are using some imaginative new strategies to engage more families in the centre's activities.
- Strong partnership with health visitors, who now hold their clinics at the centre, has had a positive impact on the number of families accessing the centre's services.
- The centre is instrumental in helping eligible families to access funding for their two-year-old children to access nursery education.
- For many families who access the centre's services, the centre has had a profound impact on improving their home circumstances and life chances.
- The centre staff provide particularly good care, guidance and support for individual families who are referred to the centre.
- The centre plays a pivotal role in working with other organisations to assess the needs of the most vulnerable children and to ensure appropriate support is provided.

## Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with: representatives from the local authority and the local advisory board; the centre managers; the staff of the children's centre; various groups of parents and other users of the centre; representatives of organisations who work in partnership with the centre.

The inspectors visited activities taking place at the centre during the two days of the inspection.

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

## Inspection team

Graham Sims, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Joan Lindsay	Additional Inspector
Peter Towner	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

The Phoenix Children's Centre, which opened in 2008, is one of three children's centres which serve the town of Sudbury and neighbouring villages. The most outlying settlements are over 12 miles away from the centre. All three centres are led and managed by two part-time centre managers, who took up their current roles less than a year ago. The managers are answerable to the local authority and a local advisory board which serves all three centres, as does the team of full-time staff.

The centre occupies its own premises adjacent to the sites of Ormiston Sudbury Academy and Tudor Primary School, which are both subject to separate inspections. The centre does not have any formal links with either school or with any particular childcare providers.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a range of services for families living in the area, by sharing services with the two linked children's centres, by commissioning services from a range of partners, and by working in partnership with health visitors, midwives, and other professionals. The centre refers children to other providers for childcare or nursery education.

Of the 1345 children under the age of five living within the area, about 12% live in two of the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country where there is above-average unemployment. Socio-economic circumstances in the rest of the area vary, but are broadly average. Most families are White British, but there is a growing number from minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly from Eastern Europe. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are just below those expected nationally for their age.

The centre has identified its key target groups as: families living in the most deprived areas; teenage parents; lone parent families; those from minority ethnic backgrounds; and those experiencing housing difficulties.

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

- Increase the number of families who register with the centre and engage in its activities, particularly those from the most disadvantaged areas and those groups identified by the centre as in most need of support.
- Improve the way the centre evaluates its effectiveness by:
  - making sure that the information it holds about families and the records it keeps of families who use the centre are accurate
  - analysing the information carefully to identify any particular groups whose needs are not being met by the centre
  - ensuring that the centre's self-evaluation focuses on the impact it is having on families, rather than on the activities it has provided.
- Improve procedures for holding the centre to account for its actions and effectiveness by ensuring that:
  - the local authority works with the centre managers to define clearer, measurable targets for improvement
  - the local advisory board plays a greater role in helping the centre to determine how effective it is in meeting its targets.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

### Requires improvement

- At just over 50%, the proportion of families registered with the centre is low in comparison with many children's centres. Although the centre is working hard to increase the number of families who are registered, there are still many families in the area who do not access the centre's services. Records indicate that the lowest proportion of registered families is from the two areas of greatest deprivation.
- The centre has a wide range of data which show how many families access its services. Some of the data are collected by the centre itself; other data are provided by the local authority. However, the data present conflicting information about exactly how many families access the centre's services and what proportion of families most in need of intervention and support are being helped by the centre.
- The centre managers are working hard, and with some success, to raise awareness of the centre within the local and rural communities and to increase the numbers of families who are registered and who access its services. Each member of staff has been given responsibility for establishing relationships with families and organisations in a specific geographical area, and this has led to a much better understanding of the centre's reach area. Outreach activities, such as the Easter Fun day, have been successful in attracting families to the centre.
- The centre now receives live birth data from the health authorities and is using this information to make contact with every family with a new child. The information is also helping the centre to have a much clearer overall picture of the families living in the area.
- The forging of a strong partnership with health visitors has had a big impact on the number of families, particularly those with children under the age of one, accessing the centre's services. Health visitors now hold regular clinics at the centre, and many parents stay on to attend the 'Stay and Play' or similar activities organised by the centre staff at the same time as the clinics.
- The centre is instrumental in reducing inequalities in pre-school provision and for families identified as in particular need. Almost all parents who are eligible to receive funding for their two-year-old children take up the free early education. The centre prioritises outreach support and attendance at specific activities for families who have been referred to the centre by other professionals.

### The quality of practice and services

### Requires improvement

- The centre is not yet having sufficient impact on improving life chances and reducing inequalities within its reach area because it is not engaging a large enough proportion of families. It does not have a clear enough picture of the needs of those families who are not registered or who are not referred to the centre by other professionals. As a result, some families who would undoubtedly benefit from the centre's services are missing out.
- For those families who do access services, the impact of the centre is often quite profound. Many parents spoke to inspectors about how the centre had helped them deal with crises in their lives, such as domestic abuse, housing and financial difficulties, and postnatal depression. Comments such as, 'The centre has been a lifeline,' and 'The staff are always there to support me,' typify the views of parents who have been helped by the centre. Parents are full of praise for the professionalism of the staff and the support they provide.

- The centre provides a wide range of effective activities which can be accessed by any parent with a young child. These activities help parents to learn about their children's development and how to interact with their children. Other specific activities include breastfeeding support, postnatal exercise and antenatal workshops. However, given the size of the reach area, the number of families taking advantage of the good-quality services is relatively small.
- The quality of the centre's activities and courses, such as 'Time for Baby and Me', is good. Activities are well resourced and staff provide timely and sensitive support for parents. Parents appreciate the opportunity to learn from each other and receive good advice about caring for their children.
- The centre had established a good partnership with Jobcentre Plus which was resulting in increasing numbers of adults receiving advice and guidance on employment opportunities. A recent change of policy within Jobcentre Plus has put a halt to this partnership. Opportunities for adults to gain additional qualifications which might help them back into employment are under-developed. However, there are good opportunities for parents to gain a further qualification and make a good contribution to the centre's activities through volunteering.

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

### **Requires improvement**

- Although the centre managers have made great strides in raising the profile of the centre, much work remains to be done to secure accurate information about all of the families living in the area and to ensure that a greater proportion of families, particularly from the most disadvantaged areas, engage in the centre's activities. Participation rates of those most in need of intervention and support have not been monitored carefully enough, to ensure that the centre is having the greatest possible impact.
- The centre receives good support from the local authority and the local advisory board, on which there is good representation from parents. However, targets for improvement are not defined clearly enough and the advisory board does not play a pivotal role in holding the centre to account for its actions or its effectiveness in reaching and supporting those families most in need. The centre's self-evaluation is not analytical enough, and the improvement plan is not focused strongly enough on the impact actions are intended to have for different groups of families.
- The centre managers have been conspicuously successful in generating a good team spirit among the staff, in involving staff in discussions about new ways in which they might engage more families, and in ensuring that there is a welcoming, supportive and caring atmosphere within the centre.
- They have also established some good partnerships with other organisations, especially with health visitors, which avoid duplication of resources and are helping the centre to provide a much wider range of services for families. Activities are well resourced and staff are deployed efficiently, so that they can maximise the use of their time to help those families who are in most need of assistance. Volunteers are playing an increasingly important role in a number of activities, some of which take place at other venues.
- The centre plays a pivotal role in collaborating with other organisations in the use of the Common Assessment Framework to identify the needs of the most vulnerable children and for taking action to ensure that children in need and those subject to child protection plans are kept safe. All staff have received appropriate training in how to keep families safe. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements and all necessary safety checks are carried out before staff have contact with children.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	23235
<b>Local authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	427489
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	1680
<b>Centre manager</b>	Hannah Seymour and Clare Frewin (Joint managers)
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01787 888666
<b>Email address</b>	hannah.seymour@suffolk.gov.uk; clare.frewin@suffolk.gov.uk

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