

# Suffolk - Thurston & Stanton

c/o Jigsaw Children's Centre, Thurston Community College, Norton Road, Thurston, IP31 3PB

**Inspection date** 2–3 October 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b> Previous inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
		Not previously inspected	
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:

- A rising number of families, including those most in need, are participating regularly in centre activities, but the engagement of lone parents, fathers, service and workless families is not yet high enough.
- The planning of some activities does not take sufficient account of the learning needs of target children, and there is limited follow up of the longer term impact of the group's services on children's achievement.
- Take up of the services available to improve adults' education and training has been low, and initiatives set up as part of the group's priorities for improvement are in the early stages of development.
- The advisory board are extremely supportive but recognise they have yet to be sufficiently challenging in their decision-making.

### This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Seven in ten children living in the area reach a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is reducing much more rapidly than seen nationally.
- Family support work is a strength and the centre's sustained focus on helping families most in need, including those with very vulnerable children, results in good outcomes. The specific support for the rising number of families with mental health issues is a particularly positive feature.
- The group's partnerships with different organisations working in the area are successful in extending the expertise available to families who most need support. Parents identify that 'the centre goes above and beyond the call of duty' to ensure families' well-being improves.
- Despite not having a specific forum, the parents' voice is captured effectively during sessions, through the work of community volunteers and by being a regular item on the advisory board's agenda. Families who use the centre rate it very highly.
- The group is managed very well on a day-to-day basis and has continued to run smoothly during a prolonged period of staff turnover and shortages.

## 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. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Bluebells and Jigsaw.

This inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, local authority officers, advisory board members, family support practitioners, other staff, partners, parents, carers and childminders.

The inspectors visited RAF Honington to observe 'Time for you', undertook shared observations of 'stay and play' sessions with staff both at the centre and at outreach venues. They looked at the group's view of its own performance, the development plan, annual conversation reports, a sample of the group's policies and procedures, a selection of case studies and a range of other relevant documentation.

## Inspection team

Lead inspector, Christine Field	Additional inspector
Christine Blowman	Additional inspector
Peter Towner	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

Suffolk - Thurston & Stanton Children's Centre Group has two centres: Jigsaw, a phase two children's centre, and Bluebells, a phase three children's centre. Both centres are situated in the central locality of Suffolk, close to Bury St Edmunds, which is the nearest large town. The group, which has been established for three years, is run by the local authority, and shares an advisory board. The centre manager oversees both centres together with another stand-alone centre which is subject to a separate inspection. The group works with a range of partners to deliver services that meet its core purpose. The centres each have their own small team of staff comprising full and part time family support practitioners and support and information officers. Bluebells is currently without a full complement of family support staff. Jigsaw was without a family support practitioner for eighteen months during the local authority's recruitment restriction, but appointed a replacement in January.

There are 1,959 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach area, which comprises small urban and rural communities around Edmundsbury, Thurston and Stanton, and an RAF base at Honington which has military houses at Stanton and Branham. Jigsaw children's centre is on the same site as Thurston Community College in the village of Thurston, and is housed in an extension to its library. Bluebells Children's Centre shares a site with Stanton Community Primary School (URN: 124547), located in the village of Stanton. The area is served by 11 early years providers, 16 primary schools, three middle schools and an upper school.

Generally the area is affluent but there are pockets of deprivation and some isolated communities with poor transport services. Around 8% of families are in receipt of out of work benefits and 14% are eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Most families (92%) are of White British heritage. Children enter early years provision at levels typically expected for their age.

The centre has identified its main priority groups as vulnerable families, teenage mothers, disabled children, lone parents and workless and service families with young children.

Schools and registered early years providers are subject to separate inspection arrangements. Reports can be found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>

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

- Increase the engagement of lone parents, fathers, service and workless families so that a large majority regularly access centre services.
- Press ahead with increasing the take up of adult learning services, particularly by lone and workless adults, and keep a close check on how well they get on when they undertake courses.
- Sharpen the planning of activities so that they take full account of target children's learning and development needs, and ensure that evaluations capture precisely how much progress they make from their starting points.
- Enhance the work of the advisory board in looking critically at how well the group is performing, by injecting challenge into decision-making, holding the group to account for meeting challenging development targets and recording its evaluations clearly in the minutes of meetings.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- At 65% the large majority of families are registered with the group. There is good engagement of children with disabilities, families suffering mental health problems and teenage mothers. However, fewer lone parents, workless and service families than other groups regularly access centre services. The dad's group held monthly involves fun, play and 'bacon butties' but has very low attendance.
- Health visitor appointments and checks held at the centre, the breastfeeding cafe, the 'Bump, Birth and Beyond' group for mothers to be and 'Time for You' group for service families to undertake physical and craft-based activities, ensures there is a good balance of sessions open to all and to specific groups. This is improving the numbers from some of the key groups who access the centre but not yet to the level required. The centre has recently extended its marketing activities, by sending out questionnaires to find out how its adult learning offer can be improved.
- Some three quarters of eligible two year olds take up their entitlement to early education, as do most three and four year olds. The centres undertake specific work with early years partners, such as putting on the 'Fun with Phonics' workshops for parents, that assists children's readiness for school.
- The number of individual families referred to the centre for one-to-one support is increasing significantly and this identified key group of the most vulnerable families engages well with the centre.

### The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- When compared to the national picture, the attainment of children living in the reach area is very positive at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, the centre's role in assisting this is not always demonstrable because activities, for example 'Stay and Play' sessions, are not well enough planned to promote the learning and development of specific children and the checks made on their progress lack precision. A useful start has been made in setting up a system that enables the tracking of achievement but this has yet to be fully implemented.
- For some time the centre has prioritised the need to enhance the provision made for adult learning and skills development, but improvement had stalled until very recently. Partnerships with Jobcentre Plus and Realising Futures have been re-kindled and meetings are in hand to establish a shared strategy for engaging more adults, particularly lone and workless parents, in appropriate services.
- A high number of families experience personal challenges in their lives and the centres' work to help them move on is highly valued and effective. Case files provide compelling examples about how significant the centres' actions are in empowering families to sort out their problems and look forward to a better future with confidence; these are confirmed by parents' discussions with inspectors.
- Parenting skills, first aid courses and the home visits undertaken by Homestart volunteers have a positive impact on parents' ability to support their children and keep them safe. Sessions such as 'Bouncing Bambinos' enable parents to enjoy time with their babies, as they experience high quality multi-sensory activities, messy play, or singing together, whilst help is on hand to respond to any questions or concerns. Health outcomes such as the number of mothers breastfeeding at six to eight weeks are improving, while obesity levels in young children are low and reducing and reflect the centre's strong links with health services and the focus on encouraging a healthy

lifestyle.

- The Community Volunteer programme has been very successful in enabling participants to undergo work-related experiences with all of them now in paid employment. Close links with the Christians Against Poverty group have helped some families reduce their debts and manage family finances more efficiently. The centre funds transport costs for some families who would not otherwise be able to access services, and this is clearly reducing the inequalities that some families face through living in isolated rural communities.

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

Requires improvement

- The advisory board members have a good knowledge of the reach area, and use their collective expertise to help shape services and deploy resources that are attracting an increasing number of families. However, they have not kept a close enough check on the centres' performance and some priorities have drifted. Board members say they do challenge in their discussions but this is not apparent in minutes of meetings; for example evaluations of the impact of the centres services or practice on their identified priority groups has only limited mention.
- There is very good day-to-day management of the group and it runs smoothly even during a period of prolonged staffing difficulties. Staff feel valued in their roles, well led and managed, and say that supervision is a very positive process in helping them rise to the challenges they face. A wealth of information is available for parents in both centres which are identified as being 'warm, welcoming and friendly'.
- Partnerships with health and social care are particularly strong and ensure that families who most need support get timely and effective help. Parents value highly the support they receive and comments such as 'the centre goes above and beyond the call of duty' to ensure families' well-being improves, are typical.
- Safeguarding is a high priority across the group and policies and procedures reflect this. Staff are quick to spot any concerns such as any mental health or domestic violence issues. All children who are subject to a child protection plan in the local area are known about, and staff work closely with social care and health partners to give full support through their active use of the Common Assessment Framework procedures and full participation at relevant meetings.
- Parents' views are regularly sought after sessions and courses; the 'You said- we did' board keeps everyone abreast of what changes are being made. Parents have chaired the advisory board and the role is currently being undertaken by a young parent. The views of parents are a standing item on everyboard's agenda and this means their voice is heard clearly in decision-making.

**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**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	80633
<b>Local authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	429926
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	1,959
<b>Centre leader</b>	Debbie Frost
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01359 232967
<b>Email address</b>	debbie.frost@suffolk.gov.uk

**This group consists of the following children's centres:**

- 20350: Bluebells
- 21624: Jigsaw

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