

# March and District Children's Centre

c/o Cavalry Primary School, Cavalry Drive, March, PE15 9EQ

|  |                         |                          |          |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| <b>Inspection date</b>                                     |                         | 8–9 October 2013         |          |
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                               | <b>This inspection:</b> | <b>Good</b>              | <b>2</b> |
|  | Previous inspection:    | Not previously inspected |          |
| 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 is a good centre.

- Three quarters of families are registered and actively access services, including the large majority living in the most disadvantaged area. Most young parents and families from minority ethnic backgrounds, and all children with disabilities, living in the area have regular contact with the centre.
- Highly effective support work ensures that families affected by domestic violence, mental health issues or drugs and alcohol misuse receive timely and expert help to overcome their problems. The large majority of visits to families in their home involve workless families with young children, who also benefit from specific help with managing debts and finances.
- Children are well prepared for school through activities such as 'Little Learners' which contribute very well to their learning and development. The volunteering programme very successfully builds parents' workplace skills; some go into paid employment following their experience.
- The good range of parenting courses helps priority families, including young parents who meet as a specific group, to build their confidence and skills.
- Leadership and management are effective in moving the centre forward, as reflected in the highly motivated staff team, the success with which access targets are being met, and the very high level of satisfaction families express about the impact of the services they receive.

### It is not outstanding because:

- The lack of reliable data about lone and workless families impedes the centre's ability to check specific engagement rates and plan confidently to meet all future needs.
- Too few opportunities are available for adults to enhance their education and employability.
- The advisory board is very supportive but is not sufficiently challenging about the centre's performance and the parents' voice in governance is not strong enough.

## 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 the senior leaders from Ormiston, family support workers, centre staff and officers from the local authority, health and education professionals, parents, volunteers and representatives of the advisory board. Home visits to families together with observations of activities were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at the centre's self-evaluation, development planning, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures, advisory board minutes and a range of other relevant documentation.

## Inspection team

|                                 |                      |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| Lead inspector, Christine Field | Additional inspector |
| Ann Taylor                      | Additional inspector |
| Peter Towner                    | Additional inspector |

## Full report

### Information about the centre

This phase 2 centre is run by Ormiston Children's and Families' Trust on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council. The manager, who was absent during the inspection, oversees the work of this stand alone centre and another centre which is subject to a separate inspection. An advisory board is shared and staff work across the reach areas of both centres. The centre opened in 2008 and works with a range of partners to deliver services from the centre itself and from various outreach locations such as schools and village halls to meet its core purpose.

There are 1,306 children under five years of age living in the area, which covers rural Fenland and serves the nearby town of March, Christchurch village and a number of sparsely populated hamlets. The area comprises eight Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) that are some of the most deprived in Cambridgeshire. Seven LSOAs are in the 20% most deprived nationally. There is no data held about the number of workless families with young children, but around 17% are eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Most families are of White British heritage with a small percentage from other ethnic groups, predominantly Eastern European. Most children in the area start early years provision with skills broadly in line with what is typical for their age.

The main priority groups have been identified by the centre as families affected by domestic abuse, families with a disabled child or parents, families living in poverty, families living in temporary accommodation, lone parent families, families from minority ethnic backgrounds, families with parents with a drug/alcohol or mental health problems, and young parents.

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

- Working with the local authority, press ahead to provide accurate, reliable and timely data so that the centre knows precisely how many lone and workless families live in the area, what proportion is actively engaging in services and use the information to promote their access to services.
- Develop a strategy with Jobcentre Plus and other relevant partners to engage more parents in relevant education, further learning and skills training; and establish a system for measuring the take up and impact of these experiences on their economic well-being.
- Enhance the role of the advisory board by ensuring it is challenging as well as supportive when holding the centre to account and that parent representation increases in line with its agreed terms of reference.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families Good

- At 74% the large majority of families, including those from priority groups, are registered and actively access services. Most families are visited within 14 days of the birth of a new baby, informed about what services are available, and register with the centre. 'Bumps to babes' sessions for expectant and new mothers and well-baby and toddler clinics run from the centre three times a week ensure on-going contact with families.
- Parents always feel welcome at the centre and at the outreach venues they attend. They identify the high quality of services and friendly staff team as key reasons why they attend sessions regularly. As a result, parents and their disabled children, young parents, families from minority ethnic groups, and fathers all attend in good numbers.
- The rate at which individual families referred to the centre for one-to-one support because of domestic violence, drugs and alcohol abuse is increasing rapidly. These families who most need support engage well with the centre. Close partnership working ensures that families with mental health problems are helped to access specialist services. Centre staff keep in close contact with all families whose problems make them particularly vulnerable or at risk.
- Effective use of all available information helps the centre pinpoint where to locate its services to break down any barriers, for example those caused by rural isolation, and to encourage potentially reluctant families to take up services. However, data provided by the local authority about workless and lone parent families is not detailed enough, and so the centre has no way of knowing how many of these families live in the area or what percentage is engaging with services. This limits the centre's ability to check if needs are fully being met, and whether its otherwise good work to reduce child poverty and enhance life chances is fully effective.
- 'Little Learner' sessions for children are held in four specific areas where fewer children reach a good level of development by the end of the Early years Foundation Stage than elsewhere. Most eligible two, three and four year olds are taking up their entitlement to free early education. At 23% the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is closing more rapidly than seen locally or nationally, and this reflects positively on the centre's and its partners' work to reduce inequalities.

### The quality of practice and services Good

- A good balance of relevant services available to everyone and those aimed at families most in need of early help is achieved because of careful planning and thorough checks on the centre's programme's. All cases referred by social care are managed as priority case loads by centre staff. Staff attend all meetings which discuss the needs of children and families at most risk, including those experiencing domestic abuse, drugs or alcohol misuse, and result in well coordinated services being quickly established.
- The good range of parenting programmes help families from priority groups to build their confidence and skills. Fathers, uncles and grandads are very well provided for by courses such as 'Bringing up Boys' which help to strengthen family bonds and promote parents' positive behaviour management.
- The 'Young Parents' Group' meets regularly to share ideas, undertake a range of craft activities and receive any help and support required. 'Let's get cooking' has been a recent focus with low cost tasty meals prepared such as curries and soups which are helping families keep healthy.
- Outstanding provision is made for children with additional needs through the 'Stepping Stones' programme and weekly 'Bubbly Bugs' group. Parents identify strongly how important the network of support they receive from the centre is and how much reassurance they get from having expert help at hand.
- High quality experiences for young children, including cooperative games, messy play, rhyme times and physical activities such as obstacle courses, help them move forward to successfully build their

personal, social, physical and communication skills. The use of the 'Little learners' log' established 10 months ago helps staff and parents to see the progress children are making. Staff pass this information to early years settings and this assists the children's smooth transition.

- Workless families known to the centre benefit from specific help to overcome the challenges they face. In partnership with a major retailer and charitable organisation, the centre helped over 20 families to enjoy a happy Christmas with food and presents provided for everyone. Taxi fares are paid to help families living in rural areas access relevant services; other families are given assistance with driving lesson costs, and some benefit from expert help to manage their debts and finances.
- The volunteering programme is a particular success; 12 parents are currently building their skills as breastfeeding peer supporters, providing administrative support, helping run the crèche or as members of the newly formed 'Community Group'. However, weak links with Jobcentre Plus mean that additional opportunities to extend employability are limited and the courses available for adults' further learning are not well enough promoted or taken up.

### The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Leadership and management are effective in moving the centre forward, and everyone is aspirational about the centre's future. There is a clear view of strengths and shortcomings, effective monitoring is on-going and appropriate plans are in place to bring improvement. Resources are allocated efficiently and targets are used sensibly to assist the centre's reach into the community. If the next two months go as well as previous ones the 80% registration target will be met.
- The advisory board has built its membership over recent months; most key partners are now on board and have shown firm commitment to developing their governance role by taking up training and meeting regularly. Members have a good knowledge of the area, and pool their expertise to help identify any gaps in services. However, they are not checking the centre's performance, for example about the impact of services on families' economic well being, especially those who are workless, closely enough.
- Staff are a happy and well bonded team who say they are well led and managed, with their supervision and performance kept under positive review and linked strongly to any training needs. Parents and carers speak highly of the staff, and value their open and friendly approach which engenders trusting relationships. Parents' feedback responses show high satisfaction rates.
- Safeguarding is given top priority, and arrangements ensure that families are well looked after when they attend activities. Staff are sensitive to signs which may indicate possible safeguarding concerns; these are explored thoroughly by all relevant agencies through the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework procedures.
- The local authority provides a 'toolkit' of relevant information about the area and is developing a 'dashboard' that includes information about some - but not all - hard to reach groups registering with the centre. There is well documented frustration about the length of time it is taking to provide a database that covers all required groups, for example workless and lone parents, and to ensure that reports about the engagement of families from all priority groups are accurate. The centre draws well on local knowledge, locality data and a range of information from other sources to help it check that services are having the desired impact on improving families' well-being.
- There are promising signs of parents becoming more directly involved in centre decision-making and governance through the new, flourishing 'Community Group', but currently no parents serve on the advisory board.

**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**

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|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 21925   |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Cambridgeshire  |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 427467  |
| <b>Managed by</b>              | The Ormiston Children's and Families Trust on behalf of the local authority |

|  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| <b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b> | 1,306                      |
| <b>Centre leader</b>   | Amanda Newman              |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                                 | Not previously inspected   |
| <b>Telephone number</b>  | 01354 656581               |
| <b>Email address</b>   | amanda.newman@ormiston.org |

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