

# Rural Wisbech West (Murrow) Children's Centre

Murrow Bank, Murrow, Wisbech, PE13 4HD

**Inspection date** 5–6 November 2013

| Overall effectiveness                                      | This inspection:     | Requires improvement | 3 |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|---|
|  | Previous inspection: |                      |   |
| 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 is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Some of the information the centre has on the families in the area is out of date and not easily understood. Consequently the centre is not sure it is reaching all priority families.
- The centre is providing a wide range of activities and services, but many have only begun in recent months. It is too early to know whether they are making a positive difference to the lives of the families involved.
- Staff and early years partners work with parents to help support children's learning and development. Despite this, children in receipt of centre services often do not do as well as they should for their age when they start school.
- Together with health partners staff work with children and families to improve their health and well-being, however, breastfeeding rates remain low and obesity levels for reception-age children are above average.
- The priority families the centre has identified as in most need of support are not sufficiently well-defined for staff to keep check on how effectively they are meeting their needs.
- A handful of parents volunteer at the centre and are members of the parent's forum. They are not formally involved in governance, including keeping a close watch on the centre's performance.

### This centre has the following strengths:

- The large majority of families living in the reach area are registered with the centre.
- Highly effective parenting courses and individualised support help parents improve their parenting skills and family life.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good and safety is actively promoted with those accessing services. The centre works well with a wide range of partners to reduce the risk of harm to families.
- Resources and staff are managed well, so that, together with the other children's centres in the locality, a comprehensive timetable of activities is provided across Wisbech.
- Managers are committed to improving centre services and outcomes for the families they are supporting; the impact of their work is starting to have a positive effect on families' lives.

## **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 two Additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with parents, centre staff, members of the advisory board, volunteers, representatives from professional partnerships including health, early years and education, as well as officers from the local authority.

Inspectors observed the centre's work including two activities, one of which was observed jointly with the centre manager. The inspectors visited activities at Parson Drove village hall and Gorefield Pavillion.

Inspectors took into account parents 'and carers' views as expressed directly to them during the inspection, as well as through their recorded evaluations about the centre's work.

Inspectors looked at a range of relevant documentation such as the centre's checks on its performance, development plans and data, information relating to safeguarding and a selection of case files.

## **Inspection team**

Mary Dudley Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Ann Taylor

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Rural Wisbech West (Murrow) Children's Centre was designated as a phase two, standalone centre in 2010. It is located on a shared site alongside Murrow Primary Academy, which gained academy status in July 2013, and Murrow Pre-school (URN 221874). They are both subject to separate inspection arrangements.

The centre covers an area of Fenland, west of Wisbech in Cambridgeshire. There are nine small village communities within this rural area. It has significant levels of social and economic disadvantage, with poor access to services, above county levels of unemployment, and low income levels. The majority of families are of White British heritage with an increasing number of Roma and Traveller families.

There are approximately 727 children under five years of age living in the community. When they start in early years provision, the majority of children have skills, knowledge and abilities that are lower than those expected for their age. Families face a varied range of challenges; the centre has identified its main priority groups as children and families living in poverty and workless households, children and adults with low education attainment levels, lone parents, Roma and Traveller families and families who have poor health and well-being.

The centre is part of the Wisbech locality; it works in partnership with Oasis and Wisbech South Children's Centres. It has been managed by the assistant locality manager during a period of significant change since April 2013. Governance of the centre sits with the local authority and there is a recently reviewed advisory board which provides support for the three children's centres. The centre provides family support and outreach work, early education, health services and adult learning courses in partnership with other providers and through commissioned services.

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

- Improve the way the centre's leadership and management plans to meet local needs, evaluates its effectiveness and quickens the pace of improvement by:
  - working with the local authority to ensure that data on all priority groups is accurate, easily understood, sufficiently detailed and up-to-date
  - ensuring action planning has sharply defined targets that accurately reflect the centre's priorities and can be measured for success
  - ensuring that service and activity evaluations demonstrate impact and track the outcomes for children and families.
- Improve the quality and impact of services by working closely with:
  - health partners to increase the rate of breastfeeding at six to eight weeks and reduce obesity rates among children in Reception year to meet or better that seen nationally
  - early years practitioners and partners to ensure there is a clear focus on reducing the gap in attainment of different groups of children so all children are well prepared to move on to school.
- Engage more parents in the work of the centre so that they contribute to the development of activities and increase their involvement in the centre's governance.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

### Requires improvement

- The number of families registered with the centre has increased significantly in recent months so that now the large majority living in the area are known to staff. However, the centre has not focussed on the different priority groups it has identified to work with closely including children and families living in poverty, workless households, children and adults with low education attainment levels, lone parents, Roma and Traveller families and families who have poor health and well-being. Additionally, the information gathered on some of these groups is not detailed enough or easily understood. Staff cannot measure how many families in these groups they are reaching.
- The centre is keen to offer activities for all families with young children, so 'Stay, Play and Learn' sessions are put on at three villages in addition to activities on the main site. This helps reduce the isolation faced by some families without transport and gives them easier access to information and advice about other services.
- Most teenage parents, disabled children and looked after children in the area are being well supported through activities and services. The centre has also been successful in engaging Roma and Traveller families and works closely with families who have previously refused to have anything to do with other services.
- There are insufficient places available in the area for two year old children with an entitlement to free early education. The centre has sought to address this by introducing home learning boxes for those children unable to access early years provision. This is a recent development and it is not yet clear how effective it will be in improving children's learning and development.

### The quality of practice and services

### Requires improvement

- The quality of practice and services are improving but are not yet accessed by enough local families, particularly priority groups.
- The centre has recently begun working more closely with early years providers to support children's educational progress and reduce inequalities. However, although closing, the gap between the achievements of different groups of children is still too wide and the levels of development on entry to Reception year are below average. Work begun in 'Stay, Play and Learn' sessions to encourage parents to support their child's learning and in courses to help parents keep up with their children's learning in literacy and numeracy, are too recent to have had a measurable impact on children's progress.
- Practical sessions, such as 'Prepare for Parenthood' and the breastfeeding support group are in place to give encouragement to new and expectant mothers, while 'Physical Fun' sessions support families to be more active. Nevertheless, the proportion of mothers that breastfeed their babies at six weeks old is below average and obesity levels across the area are high.
- A large majority of families most in need of support improve their parenting skills and gain in self-confidence, they complete courses and long term tracking shows a positive impact on their family life. For example parents improve their child's behaviour by using the skills they have learnt and are confident they know how to keep their children and families safe.
- Opportunities for adults to gain additional qualifications which might help them back into employment are in the early stages of development. Some parents are beginning to improve their language and literacy skills and others have completed accredited courses in catering and first aid. Learning journals and post-activity evaluations chart adults' progress clearly and next steps into further qualifications and volunteering.
- The centre has a strong and effective referral system that enables the accurate and early identification of need. Actions are precise and show clearly who is going to do what and by when. Where families require a particular service, the team ensures that they receive the correct specialist support, for example, speech and language therapists, housing officers and 'Women's Aid' staff, to make the appropriate changes to their lives.

**The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management****Requires improvement**

- The manager has taken the centre through a significant period of change. She has managed this process well, supporting staff and building bridges with partners. There is a clear vision for the development of centre services which staff understand well. They have re-focused their efforts on better meeting the needs of families and begun to target provision by using outreach and partnership work more effectively.
- The local authority undertakes regular monitoring visits and provides appropriate support to help the centre improve. County-wide targets are set and the centre's performance is measured using a traffic light system that flags improvement as green and concerns in red. However, some of the data provided by the local authority on families in the area is insufficiently accurate to enable the centre to check how well it is doing in meeting targets.
- Self-evaluation is not sufficiently well-embedded. The centre has identified key groups of families it wants to work with, but the data it holds on them is not accurate enough to know whether their services are meeting their needs. Evaluations in the past have focussed too much on the services offered and not enough on the impact they are having on the lives of children and families although more recent evaluations have begun to address this.
- Governance arrangements are adequate and improving. Members of the advisory board are fully committed to improving its effectiveness. Membership is under review and following training members are much clearer on their roles and responsibilities as board members.
- Parents' formal contribution to the work of the centre is under-developed. The parents' forum has been set up only recently and has a handful of members. Parents from the centre are not represented on the advisory board and are not involved in making decisions about the centre's work. However, there have been positive recent examples of the centre responding to parents' suggestions, such as the changing of the wording in publicity leaflets to make them more 'parent-friendly'.
- Safeguarding policies, procedures and practices ensure children and families are well protected. This includes the most vulnerable children such as those subject to a child protection plan, are looked after or who receive multi-agency support using the Common Assessment Framework procedures. The centre has responded well to families who are victims of domestic abuse by offering discreet information, individual support and through commissioned programmes to build self-esteem.
- Resources are managed and used efficiently to meet priorities. The small staff team work with partners and staff from other children's centres in the locality to offer a comprehensive timetable of activities tailored to meet needs. The centre's main family room is small but is supplemented by using other venues in the community to help those who are isolated access services and meet the needs of larger groups.

**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**

|                                |                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 22073               |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Cambridgeshire      |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 427469              |
| <b>Managed by</b>              | The local authority |

|  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b> | 727                               |
| <b>Centre leader</b>   | Sara Turton                       |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                                 | Not previously inspected          |
| <b>Telephone number</b>  | 01945 701237                      |
| <b>Email address</b>   | sara.turton@cambridgeshire.gov.uk |

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