

Village Green Children's Centre

Moorlands CE Primary School, Moorland Way, Great Yarmouth, NR31 9PA

Inspection date 15–16 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	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		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that is inadequate.

- The sound policies that have been formally adopted by the centre to ensure safety and child protection are not always implemented fully by staff.
- The quality of the evaluation of the effect of the centre's work by senior staff has declined and currently pays too little attention to gathering information on services it commissions from other agencies. Additionally, it is over-generous in checking the impact of its work on improving the well-being of families most in need. Insufficient incisive measurement is undertaken of the effect of the centre's work as a whole, to come to meaningful conclusions about the value for money it provides. As a result, the centre is not improving quickly enough.
- Information gathered on what is successful and what is less so is not then used enough when planning improvement to services. Plans for improvement are not shared with all staff, and so they do not all know what the centre is working towards. Existing spending plans are not sufficiently focused on the areas of the highest priority, or linked to the priority groups that need access to the centre's help the most.
- Access to services and quality of provision requires improvement, because too little consideration is given by centre leaders to assisting adults to improve their families' circumstances through links with work-placement agencies and training providers. Evaluation is not systematically undertaken to find out how more families could be involved or how provision could be improved.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Good links with health visitors ensure that all families with new-born babies are made aware of the centre and its work. Because of this, the large majority of families with young children are registered with the centre.
- Conscientious and hardworking staff with middle management responsibilities ensure that effective support is provided for families and parents who attend the centre. The impact of this work is checked regularly and accurately.
- Good links with the nursery and other early year's providers have supported the improvement in standards attained by young children by the time they are five years old.
- The newly formed interim executive board, which is responsible for governance of the centre, has begun a rigorous review of the centre's policies and work.

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 discussions with the centre leader, representatives of the local authority, members of the advisory board and interim executive board, the interim headteacher of the school, parents attending courses, volunteers, key staff and partners, including representatives from education and health services.

The inspectors visited activities at the main building as well as the Mill Lane Community Centre and Bradwell Community Centre sites. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation and development planning, safeguarding policies and procedures and a sample of case studies and files. One observation was undertaken jointly with senior staff, and the centre manager and the interim headteacher of the primary school attended inspection team meetings.

Inspection team

Sheelagh Barnes, lead inspector

Additional inspector

Peter Towner

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

This is a phase two centre, designated in 2007. It works from three sites and delivers a range of services. The centre provides the full core offer of early education, childcare and health services, family support and adult learning courses. The main building is based on the site of Moorlands CofE Primary School (URN:134045), in the village of Belton. The school is inspected and reported upon separately. The other sites used are at Mill Lane Community Centre and Bradwell Community Centre. The centre is not part of the payment by results trial. There are two other children's centres in the locality.

Responsibility for the running of the centre has been delegated by the local authority to the governors of the primary school. Following the most recent inspection of the school, an interim executive board has been put in place, which has taken on the responsibility of governance of the school and the centre. The local authority has also recently deployed a senior county headteacher to work with the school and the children's centre to improve outcomes. There is an advisory board and also a parents' forum as part of the management structure of the centre.

The area the children's centre serves includes 820 children under five years of age, most of whom are from White British backgrounds. The area is very mixed socially and economically, with one third of families being economically advantaged and around an eighth of families in the 20% to 30% most disadvantaged areas nationally. There are a significant minority of lone parents and low income families in the area. Key groups the centre works with include lone parents, workless households, children and parents with disabilities, and expectant teenagers and teenage parents.

Most children enter early education with skills that are lower than those expected for their age, especially in communication and language development. The children's centre has not been inspected before, although the childcare it provides was inspected in July 2013. The nursery provides funded early education for two-, three- and four-year-old children during school term time. The provision was judged to be satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the sound policies that are in place for safeguarding and child protection are always fully implemented.
- Develop self-evaluation at a whole centre level that is robust, rigorous and includes input from staff and those involved in the children's centre, so that the centre can accurately measure its effectiveness in all areas and in particular in relation to increasing access for all groups in most need of help and support.
- Develop planning for centre improvement that focuses on the key priorities identified in self-assessment, with particular regard to improving provision, and thus outcomes for groups that have greatest need. Plans must be linked clearly to financial outlay, include precise targets and explicitly state what resources are needed, who will undertake evaluation of success, when this will be, and what criteria will be used to judge if targets have been met.
- Improve the monitoring and evaluation of the provision made for adult education, training and preparing for work delivered by partner agencies, so that value for money can be checked and any required improvements made speedily.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre knows which are the specific groups in the area which are in greatest need of support, but too many families are not making full use of the whole range of services the centre has to offer. This is particularly the case for some specific groups, such as fathers and families where no-one is in work.
- The local authority provides a wealth of statistics to the centre, based on returns the centre fills in. However, these are not all used by centre leaders to collate information, such as that on adult training and education provided by other partners. As a result, although the centre leaders know the general needs of families and know of individual cases where their work has had a good impact, they do not know, for example, what groups find access to further training easy and which do not.
- The centre does know how many families it regularly engages with, but does not have full information about how many people have used some services such as Jobcentre Plus, or other agencies to improve their life chances. Hardly anyone has made use of the computer available for parents in the reception area linked to Jobcentre Plus and the figures that the centre has for qualifications gained by attending linked provision are low.
- The centre has made progress in increasing the numbers of parents registering at the centre and has been able to significantly increase this from just under half in 2012, to the large majority of families currently. The majority of families have used the centre at least once. Expectant mothers have regular access to a good range of services through links with health workers and the family nurse.
- Some families live in relatively rural areas with limited public transport. Where the centre knows about these people, taxi tokens have been provided to enable them to access services which would be impossible for them otherwise.
- Good information is provided for families in relation to free early education entitlement for disadvantaged three-year-olds and the take-up is high. However, the take-up of places for two-year-old children who are entitled to them is just under a half of those eligible and half of the local authority's target.
- Any developmental issues are identified at the two-year health review and assessment, and referrals are made for any early intervention required. Parents are pleased about the speech and language support for addressing their children's early communication difficulties.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The quality and relevance of services require improvement because there is a lack of consistency in the support provided for adults to access education, training and opportunities to work with services that help improve their future employability. Although the centre is clear on the difference it wishes to achieve, the following up of information on outcomes of programmes leading to accredited qualifications, such as literacy and numeracy, provided by partner agencies is given too little attention by the centre.
- The quality of practice and services provided by the centre itself is variable. While it is sometimes good, such as in developing and extending parenting skills, at other times it requires improvement. Generally, however, it is effective in reducing inequality and improving life chances for the families it works with directly. For example, the centre provides some parenting and volunteer training

programmes itself, through family support. The effectiveness of these is evaluated regularly and the impact on the families involved is good.

- While effective work is done in partnership with some agencies such as health, work with others such as Jobcentre Plus is not monitored closely enough to ensure good provision. As a result, the quality of what is provided requires improvement in order to more closely match needs of all families, particularly those from specific groups such as workless and low income families.
- Some sessions such as music for babies and music for young children, are of good quality and are enjoyed by those who attend and lead to follow-up by parents. One father commented, 'The music sessions are really good. We sing the songs and do the actions at home too!' This has a positive impact on early speech and language development of the young children involved. Interventions engage families effectively in new behaviours and routines that promote child development.
- Partnerships with health services ensure that children who require extra support are provided for well. Developmental support programmes delivered in the home, including those for children with special needs, are beneficial to their well-being. The care, guidance and support of families known to the centre are good.
- Tracking systems and 'learning journeys' (files recording what children have learnt) are held for children who attend crèche. Planning for crèche takes each child's requirements into consideration, which has a positive impact on the progress they make.
- The improvement in the progress of those children in school who have attended the centre is encouraging. Information on levels of achievement of children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage shows a rise in results for schools the children's centre is working in collaboration with, although these are still significantly below national expectations. The gap in attainment between the children who attain the lowest scores and their peers is narrowing.
- The family support service has a good impact on those it works with. One parent said, 'I would not be where I am today if it wasn't for the work of the centre!' The centre's support for disabled parents and children, teenage parents or families and children in vulnerable domestic situations that it knows about is good.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- The very newly designated interim executive board has started to challenge the centre, but this has had little time to effect real change. The interim executive board has a sound appreciation of the overall work of the centre and has a good understanding of the requirements of children's centres generally. It is aware of the recent decline in the quality of self evaluation and planning for improvement and has requested more detailed information from the centre leader, in terms of figures about the effectiveness of each aspect of the centre's work.
- The centre has a good awareness of the success of its partnership work in closing the gap in the attainment between the lowest-achieving children and the rest. Information about the difference its work has on improving families' well-being requires improvement because this has not been evaluated with sufficient rigour to enable leaders to have an incisive view of the full impact of the work of the centre and that of partner agencies.
- The centre's advisory board meets regularly, but attendance is poor. It is difficult for the advisory board to challenge the work of the centre because reports brought to it are too descriptive and do not contain enough evaluative information of what effect the centre's work is having.

- Safeguarding practice is inadequate. Although there are clear safeguarding policies and sound written procedures, they are not always followed by staff. Training has been regularly provided and staff have been required to sign to say that they have read and understood all documentation. However, in day-to-day work, the systems to ensure the safety of all children and adults who attend outreach sites are not always adhered to.
- Policies for child protection contain all the relevant information and the centre's work with children subject to child protection plans, looked after children and those assessed using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) procedures is thorough and effective in ensuring their safety. Case files for children subject to a child protection plan, or identified as in need or looked after, are reviewed regularly and managed well with all stakeholders kept fully informed. As a result, these children are well monitored by the centre.
- Leaders and managers have failed to fully use the systems that are available to collate information of the impact of all services. This is particularly the case with activities related to adult education and getting back to work provided by other agencies. Because of this lack of regular evaluation, it is difficult for the centre to demonstrate that its resources are being used well.
- Although self-assessment in the past was conducted with rigour, currently it is over-generous and undertaken exclusively by a very small number of the senior leadership team. It does not justify many of the statements made with supporting information on the impact of the activities that have been undertaken. As a result, existing development plans are too broad and not adequately focused on the most important actions required to improve outcomes for families. Additionally, this recent planning lacks precise targets and specific measures by which success can be evaluated and is not shared with all centre staff or others who are involved in the children's centre..
- Present financial planning is not well enough linked to the main areas for improvement for the most needy families. Although a number of good new initiatives have been introduced, such as 'Baby Bloom', the centre is not adequately prioritising and focusing its resources on improving its services for families who need most help and are not well enough matched to meet the needs of young children and families living in the area.
- Monitoring by the local authority identified some concerns concerning evaluation and planning and a significant amount of support and training has been provided. However, this has not yet resulted in more strategic work. The local authority also provides the centre with a wealth of easily read information, based on the returns the centre sends in. This information is read and stored, but is not fully used by the centre to check on what it does well and what it needs to improve.
- The management of the work of staff at the centre lacks consistency. While rigorous monitoring is undertaken of some staff by some senior leaders, the supervision of others is not taking place often enough to ensure compliance with systems, policies and procedures.
- Involvement of parents in shaping the centre's direction is very limited. The parents' forum consists of a very small number of parents, and the existence or purpose of the forum is not known by all other parents. Responses by the centre to parents' comments in the book available for them to write their views have been few in the past year. Just over a tenth of parents replied to the very recent local authority questionnaire, giving their mainly positive views about the centre.

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

Unique reference number	23419
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	427491
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	820
Centre leader	Evelyn Treadwell
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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