

Brett River Children's Centre

The Old Corn Exchange, Market Place, Hadleigh, IP7 5DN

Inspection date 19–20 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
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:

- Access to services requires improvement because not enough opportunities are available to parents and volunteers, especially those from targeted groups, to gain extra qualifications at the centre or through partnerships with other organisations that offer adult education.
- Children's skills in writing, particularly for those in targeted groups, are not as well developed as other areas of learning by the time children start school.
- The quality and practice of services require improvement because feedback given by staff does not explain clearly what children and parents are doing effectively and so they do not have a full understanding of their strengths or areas for development.
- Planning for sessions does not enable staff to celebrate and develop families' awareness of the differences between cultural groups found in society in the United Kingdom and in other parts of the world.
- Some sessions are not well attended and the levels of satisfaction of users is not collected from sufficient people to assist the centre in tailoring services to meet users' needs. This means that few families from minority ethnic groups use the centre regularly.
- Leadership and management require improvement because targets to improve the centre are not specific enough and so it is not easy for leaders and staff to see where they have been successful.
- Staff do not always collect effective evidence to show that they have met their personal targets.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Parents value the good levels of care and guidance offered to them by centre staff. This means that their personal well-being, as well as that of their families, is supported effectively.
- Children behave and concentrate well at the centre and they have a keen interest in learning new things. This is because parents learn about ways to support their children and encourage them to try new experiences.
- The manager and staff form a productive team which is working thoughtfully to improve the centre.
- Breast feeding rates are above average and obesity levels are lower than average. This is because partnerships with health specialists are growing stronger.

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 the centre manager, the chair and two other members of the advisory board, parents and carers, centre staff, health specialists, a representative from the local authority and spoke with children

The inspectors visited sessions and meetings held at the children’s centre and the local health centre.

They observed the centre’s work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. Evaluations of satisfaction from 26 families were taken into account.

Inspection team

Jackie Cousins, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Peter Towner	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Brett River Children's Centre is situated in a mixed neighbourhood which includes some areas with significant levels of disadvantage. There are 865 children in the area who are under five years of age. Most of the families who live in the surrounding area are from White British backgrounds. A few are from minority ethnic groups and most of these families are from Asian and African families or from Western and Eastern European groups. Very few families are at the early stages of learning to speak English. Some areas around the centre have considerable levels of unemployment, families in receipt of benefits and workless households and these are target groups for the centre. A considerable percentage of adults have few formal qualifications.

The centre was opened in November 2008. In partnership with other providers, it supports early education, childcare and health services to meet the core purpose. Most children enter early education with skills that are typical of those expected for their age. The children's centre was relocated 12 months ago and is based in one building in the centre of Hadleigh. There are two children's centres in the area.

The centre is managed by an advisory board on behalf of Suffolk local authority. The advisory board includes a local headteacher, parents, early years providers, health specialists, voluntary agencies and staff from the centre. A new manager joined the centre in February 2013.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve the ways that the centre works with local families, especially from targeted groups, so that:
 - the views of more parents and carers are gathered to determine how satisfied they are and to tailor services to better meet their needs
 - even greater numbers regularly use the centre especially from minority ethnic groups
 - more parents and volunteers gain qualifications which employers would recognise and value
 - a greater number of children, particularly those in target groups, work at expected levels of skill in writing when they start school
 - staff feedback for children and parents is always specific so they are well informed about how they are doing
 - planning and sessions celebrate a wider range of cultures from the United Kingdom and other parts of the world to help prepare families for our diverse society.
- Develop the leadership and management of the centre by ensuring that:
 - all targets to improve the centre are specific and measurable so that staff are clear how successfully they have been met
 - personal targets for staff are followed up more effectively and staff are involved fully in collecting the evidence to show they have met them.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Recently, numbers of families from target groups who are registered at the centre have increased and 70% make use of services although some sessions are not well attended. For example, a stay and play session observed during the inspection for grandparents and their grandchildren was attended by very small numbers and few were from the targeted groups.

- Too few courses are on offer to parents and volunteers which employers would value. For example, in recent years resources have not been used successfully to enable adult users, especially from the targeted groups, to gain literacy and numeracy qualifications.
- Planning for sessions does not always include ways to develop family's understanding of the various cultures found in the United Kingdom and abroad. For example, planning for this term did not incorporate stories and songs from other cultures or countries. Festivals from other faiths were not celebrated successfully.
- The centre sent out a survey to local people but a relatively small proportion gave their response. This means that leaders and staff are not totally clear about why some people and groups do not regularly use the centre's facilities. Few people from minority ethnic groups have used the centre in recent months.
- The very large majority of three- and four-year-old children go to pre-schools and nurseries because the centre provides parents with clear information about local providers. The large majority of two-year olds who are eligible, take up funded places for early education due to effective links with childminders and pre-schools.
- Some children with additional needs are well supported by a group. This is because the member of staff who runs this group checks what stage of development children are at and plans activities to improve their skills.
- Fathers attend a session on Saturdays which allows them to learn and have fun alongside their children. Rugby sessions are popular with children and parents because of good use of staff expertise.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Children in the local area, particularly those in targeted groups, do not learn to write and make marks effectively. This is because not enough sessions support these skills in a creative way.
- In the last few years, children living in the reach area have achieved broadly in line with levels seen nationally at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, they do not make good progress partly because the centre has not worked effectively to promote children's basic skills in all areas of learning.
- The gap in attainment between the lowest groups of children and the rest is reducing, and results for this year indicate that the gap has become even smaller in the local area. This is because the centre works appropriately with children and families on benefit and from workless households. As a result, growing numbers from these groups attend centre sessions but the proportion who attend regularly is not good.
- The impact of practice and use of services require improvement because parents and carers do not gain qualifications employers would recognise including in first aid and food hygiene. The centre does not offer courses to adults in these areas of learning. As a result, opportunities are missed to increase families' safety and equip them for the world of work or volunteering.
- Feedback from staff during sessions is positive but does not explain what children and parents do successfully or could do to improve. This means that they are not fully informed about their strengths and ways to develop their skills and knowledge.

- Children's attitudes to learning are positive and their behaviour at the centre is good. This is because the staff encourage children to try out new things, be independent and cooperate with others. For example, in a session observed children learnt to make furnishings for a dolls house because the staff used questioning well and so this encouraged children to make a wide range of furniture for themselves.
- Healthy lifestyles are promoted well at the centre and so obesity levels are below average and breast feeding rates after six to eight weeks are above the national level. This is because the partnership with health specialists is developing successfully.
- Many parents say that the centre staff have been really supportive. Staff form positive relationships with local families and care for them well, especially when they need extra help. One parent summed up his thoughts when he said, 'The centre has been really good for our family when we had no-one else to turn to.'

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because targets for improving the centre are rarely specific enough. This means that it is difficult for staff and leaders to fully understand how successful they have been in meeting them.
- Data is used adequately by leaders and so their evaluation of the effectiveness of the centre is accurate. They are beginning to use data to analyse work with different groups of families so that the centre can support them more productively. For example, a twins and multiple births group has been established because of rising numbers in the area.
- Staff are supervised appropriately and their performance is watched over carefully. Almost all staff who work with children have an early years qualification and training is used effectively to develop their skills. For example, all staff have undertaken training in the use of Makaton and sign language. This is helping children to learn to communicate more successfully.
- Families and children are kept safe at the centre. This is because all the appropriate checks are carried out on staff and they receive valuable training, including in child protection and first aid. Several staff in charge of safeguarding families have received training at a higher level.
- Children with a child protection plan, children in need, those subject to Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes and those who are looked after receive good support. Regular meetings are held with centre staff and health specialists which mean that ways to help them are established and used well.
- The local authority monitors the performance of the centre appropriately to ensure that it meets locally agreed priorities. These include reducing inequalities by increasing the proportion of families from the most deprived local areas who use the centre regularly.
- The advisory board monitors the work of the centre adequately. It considers how well the quality of practice and range of services meet users needs and how well staff are performing. The advisory board uses data effectively and knows that the gap is closing between children in the lowest group and the rest. It ensures that resources and services are used adequately.
- The centre manager is always looking for ways to make the centre better. In a short time, she has built a team of staff who are committed to improving the lives of local families and centre outcomes.

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

Unique reference number	20419
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	427441
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	865
Centre leader	Sarah Cottage
Date of previous inspection	05 September 2012
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