

Cygnets Children's Centre

Wood Lane, Appleton, Warrington, Cheshire, WA4 3DB

Inspection date 21–22 November 2013

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

- Not enough families from the most disadvantaged target areas remain engaged in early childhood services.
- The centre needs to do more work to identify the specific nature of these families' needs and sustain engagement from these target areas to further improve their life chances.
- The senior leadership team and local authority have not effectively prioritised the work of the centre over time to maximise its impact on those families in greatest need.
- The centre is not consistently making best use of available data to analyse the needs of those families from the identified target areas or using the impact measurement tools in place to help focus and extend the work of the centre.
- Families using the centre do not have enough opportunities to participate in decision making and the governance of the centre.
- There are not enough targeted sessions on offer to encourage those who may be less likely to participate in relevant services, in particular, to capture those who may need low-level, early intervention and support.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Strong partnership with social care results in good family support for those families already identified of needing targeted intervention and prevention work. The quality of case files concerning these families to whom staff provide individual support is good.
- Strong partnerships with health visitors and midwives engage expectant mothers early during pregnancy and until their child turns one-year-old. This results in improved health outcomes and increased parenting skills.
- A strong training scheme for volunteers is used well and supports volunteers to deliver sessions and improve their confidence and employability skills.
- The sessions on offer are of good quality including the care, guidance and support and this is having a positive impact on the well-being of those families attending.

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

The inspectors visited the satellite centre at Lymm Children's Centre and Westy Children's Centre, which forms part of the collaboration and offers services for users of Cygnet Children's Centre. Westy Children's Centre was inspected separately in March 2011 and the report can be viewed on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. Inspectors took into account parents' views as expressed during the inspection, as well as through recorded evaluations of the centre's work and a review of the centre's most recent parent satisfaction surveys.

Inspection team

Parm Sansoyer	Additional inspector
Emily Wheeldon	Additional inspector
Philip Ellwand	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Cygnets Children's Centre is a phase three centre and opened in 2010. It is part of a collaborative with one other centre and was inspected as a single centre. It provides a range of services including health services, social care, family play sessions, parenting programmes, adult education and outreach services. Services are provided from Cygnets Children's Centre and from the Lymm Children's Centre, which is a satellite centre and from Westy Children's Centre, which forms part of the collaboration.

The vast majority of the centre's reach are affluent areas and are in the 70% least disadvantaged areas of the country with some small pockets of significant deprivation. The latest data show that 7.1% of children are living in households dependent upon workless benefits. Most of the homes are privately owned with some pockets of a mix of private rental and social housing. The very large majority of the population is of White British heritage, with a very small percentage of Traveller, Roma and Gypsy heritage.

There are 2197 children under five years in the reach area. Most children who live in the targeted areas within the reach of the centre enter early education with knowledge and skills generally in line with, or above those expected for their age.

Governance of the centre is provided by Warrington local authority in conjunction with an advisory board that includes a range of partners and some users of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of available data to analyse the needs of those from the identified target areas and make better use of the impact measurement tools in place, to increase engagement and to help refocus and extend the centre's work.
- Together with the local authority review the priorities for the centre's work and explore more innovative ways of maximising impact on those in greatest need.
- Offer a more-targeted range of sessions and services to increase participation from the target areas and increase sustained levels of engagement, in particular, to capture those who may need early intervention and to help reduce inequalities.
- Improve further the extent to which families using the centre contribute their views and participate in decision making and the governance of the centre.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The large majority of families from the target areas are registered with the centre and a majority are in contact and have access to information, advice and guidance about early childhood services. However, only a minority sustain engagement with the centre and its services.
- The centre has clearly identified the target reach areas, such as Statham, Cobbs and Appleton and target groups, including families of Traveller, Gypsy and Roma heritage. However, not enough has been done to identify the specific nature of their needs to attract more of these families and increase sustained engagement to help further reduce inequalities.
- Staff place a clear focus on working effectively with health partners, to encourage early contact with expectant mothers and until the child turns one-year-old. During this period engagement is high and mothers and their families benefit from a full range of early childhood services. However, engagement beyond this period decreases.
- The centre offers a broad range of universal activities, such as Chatterbox, Minnie Movers and Baby First Steps, which are popular and well used. However, too few targeted sessions are offered to engage further those families who may be reluctant to attend and who are identified as most in need.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The quality of planning and delivery of sessions for children and their families attending is good. However, too few families from the most disadvantaged areas benefit from these sessions and not enough targeted sessions are on offer for these families to have an even greater impact on improving children's well-being and the lives of families.
- Of the families that access sessions almost all families increase their parenting skills. This helps families to keep their children safe and support their learning and development. In addition, staff identify children's learning needs early and referrals are made to external and partner agencies swiftly to meet their needs.
- Staff are warm, friendly and approachable and therefore families report a strong sense of belonging, feel relaxed and enjoy their time at the centre. Families with disabled children and those with special educational needs are fully included and valued.
- Staff place a clear emphasis on promoting children's learning and development and give parents useful strategies about how to continue their child's learning at home, especially in supporting their communication and language skills. A high proportion of children achieve a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Therefore, children are well prepared for their next stage in learning when they start school.
- Strong partnerships with health services result in all of the centre's health specific targets being met, such as increased numbers of mothers breastfeeding, reduced number of mothers smoking during pregnancy and reducing obesity in children at Reception Year.
- The centre offers good care, guidance and support, in particular, for those subject to domestic abuse, post-natal depression, families experiencing financial difficulties, for example due to redundancy, and support for those who are isolated.
- Good support for volunteering opportunities which are tailored to users' needs and aspirations leads to improved confidence, engagement with the community and increased employability skills. However, insufficient analysis is carried out to identify the adult learning needs for target groups and there are too few adult-learning courses available to help raise aspirations.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The local authority and the centre agree and implement appropriate and challenging outcome

and performance measures, but do not consistently place sufficient emphasis on ensuring resources are aimed at the most disadvantaged areas and target groups. For example, too few targeted services are tailored to engage those who find it difficult or are unwilling to do so.

- The advisory board members, such as the Chair, have a clear overview of the centre's work and contribute well to the centre's self-evaluation systems. They understand fully the challenges for the centre and what needs to be done to improve the centre's performance in increasing engagement from families from the target areas. However, the board has not been instrumental in directing and driving the centre's work in ensuring that there are sufficient resources aimed at those most in need.
- The centre manager has been in post for 12 months and shows enthusiasm and a keen commitment to improvement, and the senior leadership team offers effective supervision and support overall. The local authority provides a detailed range of data to the centre. However, the centre does not consistently make effective use of available data to analyse in sufficient detail the needs of those from the identified target areas. In addition, the centre does not make best use of the impact measurement tools in place to help focus the work of the centre and maximise impact.
- Staff make effective use of the Common Assessment Framework process and high priority is given to children subject to a child protection plan and looked after children. Safeguarding practice, sharing of relevant information with partners and robust recording systems ensure good quality intervention for families in times of crisis.
- There are appropriate policies, procedures and practices in place to secure the families' safety when using the centre. Suitable supervision, induction and vetting arrangements are in place and good support offered to staff when they need it. This results in a happy and well-motivated team.
- The centre provides appropriate opportunities for families to evaluate and influence the sessions they and their children attend. However, currently there are two parents on the advisory board and a parents' forum has not been established. This means that not enough of the families' views are heard at governance level to influence the direction of 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	23177
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	427485
Managed by	Warrington local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2150
Centre leader	Chris Atkins
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