

# Coningsby Children's Centre, Leominster

Coningsby Road, Leominster, HR6 8LL

## Inspection date

26–28 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires Improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
Access to services by young children and families		<b>Requires Improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
The quality of practice and services		<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>4</b>

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This children's centre requires improvement. It is not good because

- The local authority does not provide centre leaders with consistent strategic direction. It has not provided sufficiently challenging targets for improvement or effectively monitored the centre's performance.
- Governance arrangements are ineffective. Advisory board members cannot access the management information needed to challenge or hold the centre to account. Not all r advisory board members fully understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Too much data is not specific to the centre's reach area. This does not allow managers to routinely analyse data to identify families who are not engaging with the centre's services or to plan more targeted provision.
- Centre staff do not place sufficient emphasis on evaluating the impact the services are having on the lives and well-being of families.

### This centre has the following strengths:

- A committed, passionate staff team has continued to deliver a good service despite the weaknesses in strategic leadership.
- Staff effectively support those families who are referred to the centre and identified as in most need of help.
- Children make good progress in their learning and development which prepares them well for moving on to school.
- Strong, effective partnership working with health visitors, midwives and other agencies ensures help and support for children and their families are timely and effective.
- The centre has a good range of universal and targeted services that successfully attracts large numbers of families and makes a good contribution to their personal development.

## 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. It was carried out at the same time as other children's centres which were Widemarsh Children's Centre and Broadlands Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority lead officer for children's centres, the improvement adviser for Herefordshire, the local services coordinator, the children's centre manager, health and education professionals, partner agencies, outreach workers, early years practitioners, volunteers and representatives from the advisory board. They also spoke with parents, and looked at outcomes of satisfaction surveys. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation, development plan, data, the local authority quality assurance records, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures and children's development records.

The inspectors visited activities taking place at Coningsby, Widemarsh and Broadlands centres and community venues.

## Inspection team

Cliff Rose	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Joy Law	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Graham Sims	Additional Inspector
Aileen King	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Coningsby Children's Centre is a phase one centre, designated in March 2006. It is located in the market town of Leominster in North Herefordshire. The centre's reach includes a large rural area incorporating small and medium villages. Leominster has good transport links to Hereford, by both rail and bus, but less so to the other surrounding market towns.

Coningsby Children's Centre is one of the nine children's centres in Herefordshire that are all overseen by the service manager (families). A local service coordinator coordinates the services at Coningsby as well as another centre in Kington, which did not form part of this inspection and subject to separate inspection arrangements. The centre also works collaboratively with the other Herefordshire centres. A shared pool of centre workers supports the local service coordinator. Following budget cuts and a reorganisation in summer 2013, family support workers now form part of one of four early help teams. The early help team supporting this centre is managed by the service manager (young people).

The centre serves a community in which there are pockets of high levels of deprivation and disadvantage. The economy was originally based on farming, but this is no longer the case. Whilst farming still exists, the majority of employment is mainly within factory jobs both within the area and in Hereford.

The area is served by a number of local amenities, including a leisure centre, shops, three general practitioner surgeries, 12 primary schools, 16 early years' providers, 12 childminders and six parent and toddler groups. Children start early years' provision with skills that are typical for their age.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a range of services for families, working with other partner organisations and by referring parents and children to other specialist providers. The centre does not provide full-time early years provision but offers advice and guidance to parents on the daycare and childminding facilities available within the local community. There is an independent registered daycare provider on the site of the children's centre. This provider is subject to different inspection arrangements. The inspection report can be found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>.

There are 1,174 children under five years of age living in the area the centre serves. The total number of lone parents who are not in any employment living in Herefordshire who have at least one child is 1,415. The families living in the area are mostly of White British origin but the proportion of families from minority ethnic groups is increasing, particularly Eastern European families and Irish Travellers.

The centre is managed by the local authority. The centre has an advisory board made up of a cross-section of professionals, parents and carers which is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development. Over the last two years a combination of budget cuts and reorganisation within the council led to considerable turbulence in strategic leadership of the children's centres. This resulted in a lack of continuity of the oversight of the children's centres.

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

- Work with the local authority and key partners to improve the quality and range of data available to the centre that is specific to the reach area, and make effective use of this data in order to:
  - identify all target groups and
  - plan carefully targeted provision accordingly
  - enable the local authority to provide robust strategic direction to partnership working and the sharing of information
  - enable the local authority to provide effective challenge to the centre by sharpening targets, timelines and measures of impact and monitor the centre's work more rigorously.
- Improve the way the centre evaluates its effectiveness by:
  - making sure that the information it holds about families and the records it keeps of families who use the centre are accurate
  - analysing the information carefully to identify any particular groups whose needs are not being met by the centre
  - ensuring that the centre's self-evaluation focuses on the impact it is having on families, rather than on the activities it has provided.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of the advisory board by:
  - ensuring all members are clear about their roles and responsibilities
  - ensuring they have access to management information so that they are better equipped to look critically at how well the centre is performing, by injecting challenge into decision-making, holding the centre to account to meet challenging development targets
  - increasing parents' awareness and involvement of the centre's work.
- Increase the robustness of tracking and monitoring of services to show the full impact of the centres work and use this information to shape future services by:
  - embedding the new systems in place to track children's progress
  - checking on the progress made by those who have been referred to other services or who attend adult learning courses to assess the impact and effectiveness of these services and to gauge what other help they might require
  - finding out why some groups, such as those living in workless households or in the areas of greatest disadvantage, use the centre less frequently than others, and looking for innovative ways to encourage them to engage in the centre's activities.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

### Require improvement

- The children's centre does not identify families, including those expecting children, and young children in need of its services as effectively as it should. Its good relationships with a range of partners contribute to the successful identification of those who are in greatest need, but the approach is not robust enough to identify those with lower levels of need.
- The centre establishes initial contact with parents of new-born babies and is registering an increasing number of children. However, the centre does not know if it is meeting all of the needs of the most vulnerable families. The centre maintains good contact with those who have been referred by partners such as health professionals and with families who choose to attend the centre's activities. It uses this contact to provide good support, advice and guidance.
- The centre does not have robust strategies to analyse data to identify families who are not engaging with the centre's services or to maintain contact with these families. The centre does not have sufficiently effective strategies for encouraging more families to attend universal services. Information provided by the centre about its services is not always successful in reaching its intended audience.

- Through partnership with other organisations, the centre is identifying families most in need of intervention and support and providing good-quality universal and specialist services to meet their needs. However, the centre has not analysed attendance data to ascertain what proportion of families from target groups are attending the centre's activities.
- The centre organises some universal services in venues out in the community to widen access for families and to publicise what the centre has on offer. However, the centre no longer has sufficient personnel to engage in extensive outreach work to encourage more families to access the centre's services.
- The centre facilitates arrangements for targeted children to take up free entitlement to early education. All families who meet the criteria for two-year-old funded places are contacted and offered a place. The take-up rate for two, three- and four-year-old funded places in the centre's reach area is high.

### The quality of practice and services

**Good**

- Well qualified staff undertake in-depth assessments of the most vulnerable families and provide focused work which has a positive impact on families. Centre workers, use effective strategies to enable parents to focus on the needs of the child and measure any progress made to their parenting, the home environment and economic well-being. The portage workers ensure that learning and development sessions are accurately matched to each child's needs and provide focused work which results in smooth transitions for children moving on to school.
- Staff are committed to improving children's and families lives and place priority on working with children up to two years of age. The centre provides a varied range of universal and targeted services including a range of parenting programmes. Parents develop a good understanding of their own and their child's feelings, and develop skills and confidence in managing their children's behaviour.
- Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data show that children make good progress from their starting points. The gap between the most disadvantaged children and others is narrowing overall and reducing inequalities. Centre workers offer support to outreach groups giving priority to those in areas where schools have the lowest profile scores. Staff provide play experiences to children and their parents. Good quality planning documents are in place for all sessions. These are very informative and help staff and parents to promote children's learning and development. Consequently, children have increased self-esteem through engaging with the outdoors and developing confidence, independence and social skills.
- The centre has developed close relationships with a number of local early years providers to ensure children with special educational needs and those supported by government funding are helped to make a smooth transition into school. Children with communication and language delay and special educational needs are supported well by the centre. The centre provides support to voluntary-run outreach groups and childminders. Partnerships with schools are not as well established.
- Families experiencing domestic violence are well supported. Parents who have been victims of abuse are helped to regain their confidence and understand the impact of all forms of abuse on the development of their children. Parents talked positively about how they value the opportunities to come together during cooking sessions, and how they feel safe and know they are not alone.
- Access to accredited adult learning programmes to improve the skills, knowledge and employability of adults who are out of work, are based on need or request. Training in English, mathematics, information technology and first aid is commissioned through adult education and delivered at the local community centre. The excellent resources within the centre, such as the suite of computers and large family kitchen are not used as well as they could be to engage more parents in learning at the centre. The limited access to crèche facilities at the centre is also having a negative impact on parents' accessing the service.
- The centre provides good care, guidance and support. This is achieved through effective one-to-one support to families in their homes, health visitors and attendance at sessions. Parents have

good access to a wide range of parenting sessions. They spoke positively to inspectors about how they feel supported, not judged, and feel listened to and valued.

- The centre makes good use of volunteers within the centre. Parent-led groups and breastfeeding peer support workers are encouraged and supported well. The centre values the work of the volunteers and recognise the impact they have on sustainability of services. As a result, the centre is currently in the process of recruiting more volunteers and has introduced more robust systems to ensure suitability.

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

### **Inadequate**

- The local authority has not provided effective strategic direction. This is the result of a lack of consistent management at local authority level over recent years to provide a co-ordinated and challenging children's centre annual conversation. The most recent annual conversation to check on the centre's performance, which was undertaken as a result of the notification of the inspection, failed to provide an accurate evaluation of the centre's strengths, achievements and areas for development.
- The Local Services Co-ordinator has a good understanding of the centres strengths and areas for improvement, however this was not fully expressed in the latest self-evaluation, which was too descriptive and over optimistic in its grading of the access and leadership aspects of the provision.
- Governance is weak. In addition to the lack of strategic direction from the local authority, the advisory board has not been provided with enough information or guidance on the particular issues facing families in the centre's reach area to help the centre to prioritise the target groups most in need of support in their immediate area. The centre shares an advisory board with another centre in the North of the county. Attendance at board meetings is erratic. Partners often send different representatives to successive meetings or are not represented. Those who attend exchange valuable information, however not all board members are aware of their roles and responsibilities. The service manager and local service coordinator recognise the need for training and clearer terms of reference for the board.
- Children most at risk are safeguarded well because of close working between the centre's staff and health and social work partners. Staff have received appropriate training in case recording, including the use of the Common Assessment Framework process to ensure children, including those subject to a child protection plan or are looked after are protected. Families experiencing domestic violence and abuse are well supported.
- There are good supervision arrangements for the service manager, local service coordinator and front-line staff. Monthly supervision meetings are effective in providing support and close management of case files. Staff are supported effectively in accessing training and development that equip them well to deal with the many challenging situations they face each day, and to enable them to deliver accredited modular parenting programmes in the centre.
- Staff have worked hard to maintain effective practice and the good quality of services despite the constraints due to staffing reductions placed on them. Babies and children who attend 'Stay & Play' sessions regularly are observed and tracked in the three prime areas in accordance with the guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, the systems to monitor the impact of the centre's work on children through to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are planned but not implemented.
- Leaders and staff monitor and evaluate the centre's services but this information is not used effectively to inform future planning. Where parents have been referred to other services, monitoring and evaluation is inadequate. Consequently, the centre does not have a clear understanding of the impact of its work and why some groups, such as those living in workless households or in the areas of greatest disadvantage, are not using the centre's services.

### **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>	20808
<b>Local authority</b>	Herefordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	427547
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	1,174
<b>Centre leader</b>	Michele Allam
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01432-383340
<b>Email address</b>	mallam@herefordshire.gov.uk



Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

(Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)  
[Store St](#)  
[Manchester](#)  
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)