

# Salt Way Children's Centre

Pearl Road, Middleleaze, Swindon, SN5 5TD

**Inspection date** 27–28 November 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>4</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Inadequate	4
The quality of practice and services		Inadequate	4
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Inadequate	4

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a centre that is inadequate. It is not good because:

- Not enough families from the area served by the centre are either registered or attend on a regular basis. Many of the families who do attend come from outside the area. The centre has identified groups of families who may require additional support, but the centre does not have an accurate, in-depth view of the area it serves. This is because it does not always get enough reliable information, which is easy to understand and use, to reach new families and plan activities for them.
- How the centre intends to achieve the points for action on its development plan, and the way in which the centre intends to measure its success in achieving those goals, are not as clear or as measurable as they should be. Although those involved in delivering the services work hard and to best of their ability, they are not always clear about the big picture.
- The centre is only just beginning to check and track the impact of what it offers families and has not yet used that information to plan for the future.
- The advisory board does not check the work of the centre closely enough to confirm its progress towards reaching agreed targets. The advisory board is supportive of the work of the centre but does not always ask the challenging questions that will improve performance. Parents are not regularly involved in shaping the direction of the centre.
- Too few adults are encouraged to access further education, employment or training. As a result, not enough families are supported sufficiently well to improve their life chances.

### This centre has the following strengths:

- Families who do come to the centre are very clear that the quality of support they receive is good and that the centre's work makes a positive difference to their lives. Help to families in their homes and strong partnerships with health professionals ensure that families in most need receive effective early help.
- The warm welcome and the good role models that all staff provide ensure that new families settle quickly, gain in confidence and benefit from what the centre has to offer.

### 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, officers from the local authority, representatives from the Children's Society, health services and other key partners. They held discussions with parents, volunteers and members of the advisory group.

A Stay and Play activity was observed jointly with the centre leader, who also attended all team meetings. Inspectors looked at the centre's self-evaluation, action plan, a sample of case studies, safeguarding policies and procedures and a range of relevant documentation.

### Inspection team

Barbara Atcheson

Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector

Jameel Hassan

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

This phase two, stand-alone centre was designated in September 2007 and is managed by the Children's Society on behalf of Swindon Borough Council. It offers a mixture of universal provision and targeted services to meet its main aims, including Stay and Play, a young parents' group, a fathers' group and work with families in their own homes. There is no early years provision. There is a centre manager and a small team of part-time workers. The centre works closely with health and other providers to offer a baby clinic, development checks on two-year-olds, a speech and language drop-in, antenatal sessions, breastfeeding support and parenting craft. There is a service for disabled children on the site.

Reduced funding has meant that the centre is in the process of merging with three other centres, Eldene, Croft and Robert Le Kyng under one leader, on two sites, by January 2014. The newly-formed joint advisory board has had two meetings.

Recently available information shows that 952 children under five years of age live in the centre's reach. Local authority policy says that families can attend any centre, so many families come from other areas. Most families are from a White British background, the remainder come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Only a few children live in poverty (15%). Children enter early years provision at levels that are typical for their age.

The centre has identified children living in poverty, children of minority ethnic backgrounds, lone parents, vulnerable two-year-olds, disabled children and young parents as the key focus of their work.

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

- As a matter of urgency the advisory board, local authority and Children's Society should work with leaders and staff to ensure that the centre has enough secure information about the area and an effective knowledge and understanding of what that information means, so that it can:
  - establish an accurate view of its own performance by rigorous analysis
  - plan tailor-made provision to improve the lives of families
  - ensure that all those involved in delivering the services are clear about what the centre is seeking to achieve for its families
  - update and sharpen its development plan to show the means by which targets will be achieved, the success criteria and who will check on the outcomes check, track and review the impact of what the centre offers identified groups to ensure the quality and suitability of services offered.
- Strengthen the strategic role of the advisory board to ensure that:
  - there is a heightened level of challenge
  - there are closer checks on the work of the centre
  - the centre's performance is reviewed regularly against agreed milestones and targets
  - parents are represented and effectively involved in decisions that shape the centre's future.
- Increase the number of families registered and attending from the centre's reach area.
- Increase the proportion of adults supported to access training and further education to gain employment.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- Too few families from the area the centre serves access the children's centre. For some time the number of families attending the centre from other areas masked the fact that few were coming

from the centre's own area. This meant that not enough has been done to identify more families in need within the centre's own area. Only 28% of the 952 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach are registered at the centre.

- The centre does keep a record of the number of families who use its services, but does not always check how many come from its key focus groups or from the centre's particular area. It does not check the frequency of families' attendance to identify patterns and so it is not able to measure the impact its work is having on the lives of those families.
- The centre has been most successful in engaging teenage families and young parents who enjoy the companionship afforded by the centre, particularly when working on joint projects, such as the successful bid to fund an outing to Bristol Zoo.
- With a centre for disabled children on the site, numbers of disabled children reached are also good, but only a third of the families engaged are from the centre's own area. The families benefit from a member of staff who works with pre-school disabled children in their homes and some have successfully gained enough confidence to join in centre activities.
- Only a minority of lone parents attend the centre and only a few fathers and children in poverty are currently registered. Whilst the centre has targets to increase numbers, plans to show how this will be accomplished are not as clearly defined as they should be.
- The centre has good relationships with health professionals, such as the midwife and the speech and language service, and takes the opportunity to issue registration packs to those who attend clinics. Shorter registration cards have meant that registration is now quicker and more accessible.

### The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- The quality and impact of the centre's practice is inadequate because too few families, including some of those for the groups identified as in most need of support, are either registered or attending the centre.
- For those families who do attend the centre, the quality of practice is good. Parents of babies and young children learn how to listen and talk to their children and how to recognise and respond to certain behaviours. This is because staff are good role models, have a good knowledge of early years practice and work well with parents and children.
- The Stay and Play activity observed by inspectors was a hive of activity, with parents and children sharing the enjoyment of painting, playing in the sand or having tea in the role-play area. The centre's focus on staying safe ensured that children sat down to have their snack and that hot drinks were kept well away from little children. A record is kept of the different activities undertaken at these sessions; however, as different children attend different sessions, the centre does not record individuals' progress.
- Only four of the ten two-year-old children funded for early education in the area are registered. This is because, although the date of funding and the names of the children are known, the centre does not always know to which early years setting they belong..
- The gap between the lowest achieving children and the rest has widened. The centre is aware of this and has initiated some work around speech and language to help close the gap. However, the centre is unsure which specific areas of children's development need the most support. This means that activities may or may not address the problem.
- The few fathers who attend the Saturday Male Carers Group enjoy quality time with their children, particularly when the Swindon football team took a session. They find it useful to talk about work and share childcare issues over a bacon 'butty'. For those who have recently moved to the area it is a lifeline.
- Although the centre collects some evaluations and records of families who attend activities, it does not regularly review or track the impact of those activities. The purpose of activities is therefore sometimes unclear and the centre does not know the level of its success or how best to plan to improve families' life chances.
- Although some parents work as volunteers at the centre, opportunities for education and programmes related to employment and further training are not yet in place.

## The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- Leadership, governance and management are inadequate because, together, they have not planned a clear framework with specific measurable objectives to ensure that the centre meets the needs of the majority of families in the area.
- Budget reductions and the resulting merger of the four centres have meant that valuable time has been taken up with the organisation that this requires.
- Now that the centre leader and her Children's Society line manager are aware that registrations and attendance are not as healthy as they first thought, and they have the data to point them in the right direction, they are determined to plan a future that will cater for the needs of the area. In the past, lack of data and limited understanding of how to use it, together with the increased work load caused by a shrinking budget, a reduced workforce and the merger of the four centres, have slowed progress in meeting the needs of the families in the area.
- Staff are dedicated, morale is high, and staff work hard to improve the life chances for those who attend the centre. However, without a clear plan, the direction and pace of improvement have lost momentum. Roles and responsibilities are changing as the centres merge and this has, at times, caused a lack of continuity, which has again slowed the rate of improvement.
- The advisory board has supported the centre well in the past, but has not been used to look at the performance of the centre against agreed targets or to ask challenging questions to check the quality and suitability of what is on offer. There is now a new joint advisory board but there has not been enough time for this board to have any degree of impact on the work of the centre. As parents' views are not taken sufficiently into account in shaping the direction of the centre, the board is not truly representative of the centre as a whole.
- Although the centre leader's judgements about the quality of what the centre provides are accurate, the self-evaluation process is not as rigorous as it should be and does not drive improvements. This is because there has been too little emphasis on reviewing the work of the centre and its impact on improvement. It is also due to the fact that key stakeholders, such as parents, staff and other professionals, have a limited input into the process. Therefore, those involved in delivering the services are not always clear about what the centre is seeking to achieve for its families.
- Safeguarding meets requirements. Recruitment and selection processes for staff and volunteers are securely in place, ensuring that all the appropriate checks are made. Those children subject to child protection plans, and children and families in most need, are well supported by staff who work with them in their homes. The quality of this support is good because staff supervision is effective and staff are dedicated to making a difference.

## 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.

### Select details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	22624
<b>Local authority</b>	Swindon
<b>Inspection number</b>	427477
<b>Managed by</b>	Children's Society on behalf of Swindon Borough Council

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	952
<b>Centre leader</b>	Kay Kane
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01793 465364
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