

Knavesmire and St Lawrence's Children's Centre Group

St Lawrence's Children's Centre, Heslington Road, York, North Yorkshire, YO10 5BW

Inspection date

15–17 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

The children's centre group is good.

- Good partnership working, strong leadership, management and governance along with effective strategies ensure that a good balance of open-access and targeted services meet the needs of most local families well. As a result, a large majority of families from almost all target groups is registered with the centre and makes use of the good quality provision on offer.
- Take-up of the entitlement to free early education across the locality is very high. Children who attend the centre are prepared well for school.
- Safeguarding is prioritised well and centre staff work closely with key partners to safeguard vulnerable children and adults. Timely, robust assessment leads to good early intervention and support.
- Well-qualified and experienced practitioners have high aspirations and ambitions for the families they serve.
- Parents are engaged well in the shaping, delivery and evaluation of centre services.
- Resources are used extremely well. A healthy number of volunteers deliver an increasing number of usually effective open-access activities enabling centre staff to focus their attention on delivering targeted provision and supporting those families with greatest need.

It is not outstanding because:

- The centre is not able to demonstrate the impact of all aspects of its work because it is not yet provided with all the data and information needed from health and adult learning partners.
- The engagement of a small number of target groups, such as fathers, is low.
- Much of the planning, documentation and performance data developed over the past year requires reviewing and refining. New systems need time to embed.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

The centres that form this children's centre group and share leadership and management are the Knavesmire Children's Centre and St Lawrence's Children's Centre. One team of five inspectors carried out the inspection of the Knavesmire and St Lawrence's and the inspection of The Avenues Children's Centre (URN 23152) at the same time. This is because these centres work together collaboratively to develop and deliver services for children and families who live in the City of York - South East locality.

This inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre managers, centre staff, officers from the local authority, health and education professionals, parents, volunteers and representatives of the advisory boards for the Knavesmire and St Lawrence's and The Avenues. The inspectors undertook two observations of centre activities jointly with centre managers and visited a temporary housing hostel where some activities are delivered off site.

Inspectors observed the centres' work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including self-evaluation forms, development planning and data, a sample of case studies and case files, parental satisfaction surveys and consultations, programme evaluations and a range of policies and procedures including those related to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Wendy Ripley, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mike White	Her Majesty's Inspector
Linda Mclarty	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sue Pepper	Additional inspector
Jackie Phillips	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Knavesmire Children's Centre and St Lawrence's Children's Centre were brought together under shared leadership and management to form the Knavesmire and St Lawrence's Children's Centre Group in April 2013 as a result of York's city-wide reorganisation of children's centres. The centre is managed directly by the local authority. It has a Parents' Forum and its own Advisory Board to oversee the running of the centre group.

The Knavesmire and St Lawrence's Children's Centre Group serves around 2,500 children under five years of age, living in communities including Scarcroft, Clementhorpe, Knavesmire, Dringhouses, Walmgate, Heslington, Hull Road and the villages of Bishopthorpe, Copmanthorpe, Wheldrake and Elvington. An army barracks, homeless hostel, Traveller settlement and a university are located in the area the centre serves. Most families are of White British heritage. Very few children under five years of age live in the 30% most deprived areas. Unemployment is lower than the national average. The main priority groups have been identified by the centre as children living in families that have low incomes, children from the Traveller community, children classified as in need or with a child protection plan, families who are homeless or move frequently, and teenage parents.

The Knavesmire and St Lawrence's children's centres are located in the City of York – South East locality and deliver services for families who live in this locality collaboratively with The Avenues Children's Centre. The centres work with partners to deliver a mixture of open-access 'universal' provision and targeted services. The full core offer is provided through parenting programmes, child development and education sessions, children's social care, the Traveller service, , adult education and health services such as speech and language therapists, midwives and health visitors. Outreach work takes place with families in their own homes, those housed in temporary accommodation and on the Traveller sites.

The Knavesmire Children's Centre is co-located with the Knavesmire Primary School (URN 121279) and St Lawrence's Children's Centre is co-located with St Lawrence's Church of England Primary School (URN 121607). Early years provision is provided through a number of early education settings, school nursery classes and childminders within the locality. Children generally enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities that are broadly in line with what is typical for their age. The primary schools and early years settings were not part of this inspection as they are inspected separately. Their inspection reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- The local authority should work strategically with health and adult education partners to ensure that the full range of data is available to the centre so that the impact of all the services provided can be monitored and measured.
- Increase the registration and participation of the small number of target groups such as fathers where current engagement is low.
- Review and refine systems, documentation and performance data in order to sharpen decision-making and performance monitoring further and provide more user-friendly analyses of outcomes showing trends over time and the impact of the provision.
- Build on the good work already being done to help parents understand how their children learn and develop, for example, by providing more training and development for volunteers so that they can provide peer support confidently and ensuring that parents get the most out of their child's learning journal - the 'big red book'.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- A wide range of strategies including social media, texts and newsletters keep families aware of the services on offer and provide a good range of information on all aspects of safety, care and education.
- Registration and participation rates have increased over the last three years with the large majority of families now making use of the services provided by the centre and its partners. This is because skilled and knowledgeable staff and effective sharing of information with other professionals results in a secure understanding of the needs of local families, especially those who are most vulnerable. Good quality advice and guidance about early childhood services are readily available and support is effectively targeted to meet individual family needs. Centre staff work hard to increase further the participation of those groups where engagement is lower, such as fathers, for example through activities such as 'fathers reading every day' (FRED).
- Strong partnerships with midwives and health visitors, early contact with parents through home visits and antenatal and health clinics delivered on site, ensure that families get to know about the centre at the earliest opportunity. Adult learning is planned well to provide opportunities in various locations across the locality. Good links with the family learning service, Jobcentre Plus and the lone-parent advisor are used effectively to raise awareness about the activities that are available and to recruit to them.
- Comprehensive case files and case studies provide compelling evidence of the centre's effective work with target groups and successful integrated partnership working. Referrals, observations and assessments are thorough and used sensitively, families' views are listened to and activities are provided according to identified need.
- The take-up of funded early education places by eligible two-year-olds across the locality is very high as a result of effective joint working with health visitors to check children's progress at two years of age. All eligible funded two-year-old children are placed in settings judged to be at least good. The take-up of funded three-and-four-year-old places is also very high. Not all funded three-and-four-year-olds are placed in settings which have been judged by Ofsted to be 'good' or better, but use of such settings is carefully evaluated on a case-by-case basis with careful tracking and support for those children.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Information champions provide a very warm welcome for centre users and signpost them to relevant services well. Parents appreciate the help and support they receive as comments such as 'the centre was the start of everything getting better for me – it's completely changed my life', 'staff have been my rock' and 'every aspect of my parenting has improved because I come here' attest.
- Children and families are at the heart of decision-making and service delivery. Children are encouraged to be active participants from the minute they walk into the centres. For example, they self-register by posting flags in a post box, and indicate how much they have enjoyed an activity by using different coloured stars. Parents want to contribute and help others as typified by the very popular breastfeeding peer support sessions and 'Friendly Fridays', a well-attended, drop-in session started and run by a small group of fathers.
- Children are prepared very well for their entry into school through play and learning sessions that are well-resourced and generally of high quality. In a minority of sessions, there is very little formal planning and this leads to poor time management or lack of clear objectives on some occasions. The 'big red books' that have been introduced for parents to record their children's learning and play activities are proving popular. However, staff are not making the most of the opportunities the 'big red book' provides to help parents understand how children's learning can be reinforced, extended and continued at home and to find out about the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Strong links with the co-located primary schools and work with the qualified early years link teacher – the Early Learning Leader – ensure that the attainment and progress of children using the centre are being tracked carefully. Consequently, reliable data show that overall, a greater proportion of children from families using children's centre services enter school-based provision with the skills and knowledge typical of children their age than the children of families who are not engaged with the centres. These data also show that the achievement gap between the lowest performing 20% of children and their peers is narrower than it is nationally.
- The culture of safeguarding and health is well-embedded. Centre staff work very closely with health and social care partners, share information appropriately, deliver sessions jointly and visit individual homes where necessary to ensure the well-being of children and families. High-quality displays provide good-quality health and safety information. However, a lack of health data at locality level limits the centre manager's ability to measure the impact of these good activities on children and families.
- Family learning courses are planned well and successfully promote adults' learning through the use of practical and relevant content; for instance, how to help children learn, healthy eating and managing family finances. Most courses developing employability skills such as English and mathematics lead to nationally recognised qualifications. The systematic collection of data to measure and report the impact and success of adults on these courses has only recently begun and been shared with centre managers. However, the limited data available do indicate good success and progression for adult learners in autumn 2013.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre managers at The Knavesmire and St Lawrence's and The Avenues work extremely well together. They are well-qualified and pool their significant knowledge and expertise about early childhood to good effect to drive forward improvements and develop new initiatives. All of the staff are passionate about their work, have relevant qualifications at an appropriate level for the services being delivered, and undertake a significant number of training and development activities that are linked closely to their roles and responsibilities.
- Good partnership-working across the locality contributes to the efficient and effective utilisation of resources. There are numerous opportunities for an increasing band of volunteers and parent helpers to become involved in the life of the centre. This contributes well to their own personal

development and is increasingly helping to ensure that centre staff are deployed where they are most needed. More training for volunteers is planned in order to increase their impact on children's learning and development in some sessions. Consultation with parents is used very effectively to shape services and to provide challenge to the centre staff and to the dedicated and well-informed advisory board members.

- The welfare of children is at the forefront of the centre's purpose. Safeguarding arrangements across the locality are robust and underpinned by good policies, procedures and practices. City-wide safeguarding training contributes significantly to the consistent completion of the high-quality case files seen by inspectors.
- A high percentage of Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes are led by centre staff and the number of re-referrals has decreased. Centre staff use self-audit procedures and staff supervision well to maintain consistently high-quality records. The centre works collaboratively with partners to reduce the risk of harm to children successfully. Complaints are investigated thoroughly and centre leaders are clear on their responsibilities to inform the Independent Safeguarding Authority if they believe anyone is unsuitable to work with children.
- Many aspects of quality assurance activity and performance management have been revised over the last year. The local authority has commissioned an external consultant to undertake independent thematic reviews to provide support and challenge for all children's centres. Many of these developments do show clear intent to design and implement tools to monitor and measure the impact of services and outcomes for centre users but it is too early to judge the full impact. However, the centre recognises that it now needs to review these developments to ensure that all reports are user-friendly and show performance trends over time.
- The local authority provides a strong strategic steer for children's centres city-wide and is committed to delivering integrated services and early intervention through them in order to reduce inequalities. It has retained a multi-agency Children's Trust Board and formed a city-wide Children's Centre Project Board that reports regularly to the Children's Trust Board. Individual centre managers are held to account by senior local authority officers and key partners through the quarterly reports towards agreed targets and priority actions they present to the Children's Centre Project Board and regular performance management meetings with the city-wide Children's Centre Strategy Manager, for example.

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 Group details

Unique reference number	80188
Local authority	City of York
Inspection number	423325
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2500
Group manager	Helen Tuckett
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01904 555251
Email address	helen.tuckett@york.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- URN 21719 Knavesmire Children's Centre
- URN 22860 St Lawrence's Children's Centre

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