

St Ives Children's Centre

Wheatfields Primary School, Wheatfields, St Ives, PE27 3WF

Inspection date 4–5 February 2014

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

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a good centre.

- Good-quality services, based on a thorough assessment of individual needs, are provided for the large majority of target groups, including children with additional needs, young parents and those wanting to access a wide range of further education courses, leading to employment.
- Parents improve their parenting skills, develop their self-confidence and emotional well-being. They are also well-supported to become volunteers and get involved in centre decision-making processes. Similarly a high proportion of children across the reach achieve a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and develop key skills for future success.
- Strong partnerships are in place with most professional partners. These have had a positive impact on the number of families accessing the centre's services and on the increase in the figures for registrations.
- There is highly effective support for all families, including parents with disabled children or children with special educational needs, and for parents recovering from domestic violence or postnatal depression. This greatly improves their outcomes, personal circumstances and helps to reduce inequalities.
- The centre is well-led and managed. Families are highly complimentary about the hardworking and highly skilled centre leader and her staff. Due to the robust monitoring, and effective support and guidance provided by the local authority the centre is improving strongly.

It is not outstanding because:

- Levels of registration and engagement of children and families continue to rise year on year but a relatively smaller proportion of minority ethnic families regularly engage.
- The systems for monitoring and tracking the progress of children including of those entitled to free early education and those adults accessing further education or employment, are not sufficiently well-developed.

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 senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with members of the governing body, advisory board, volunteers, local headteacher, representatives from the local authority and parents.

The inspectors visited five sessions held during the inspection: 'Stepping Stones' parenting course for children with additional needs, 'young parents group', 'all sorts', a 'childminder's group' and 'PND', a post-natal depression group. Four of these sessions were held at Broad Leas Youth and Community Centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Qaisra Shahraz, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Ann Taylor	Additional Inspector
Joan Lindsay	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

St Ives Children's Centre was designated in April 2008 as a phase two, stand-alone centre. One of forty children's centres in Cambridgeshire, it is managed by the local authority. Situated in St Ives, the centre serves St Ives Town and the surrounding villages of Hemingford, Houghton, Holywell and Needingworth. It meets its core purpose for families living in the area, by offering a range of services which include child health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes, adult education, family outreach services and crèche facilities.

Within the area served by the centre there are significant issues surrounding mental health and domestic abuse. The majority of families living in the area are of White British heritage, however, the number of families from minority ethnic backgrounds moving into the area is increasing rapidly. Of all the families registered and accessing the centre's services 6.7% have English as an additional language.

The centre has identified its key target groups as: families living in the most deprived areas; parents under 25 including teenage parents; children accessing Early Support; those from minority ethnic backgrounds and children on integrated plans and families who are victims of domestic abuse. There are 1359 children under five years of age living in the reach area. The communities the centre works with are ranked amongst the 70% least deprived nationally. Most children complete their early education with knowledge and skills that are above expectations for their age, particularly in communication, language and personal, social and emotional development.

The centre is located in Wheatfield Primary School (URN: 131197), The school is subject to separate inspection arrangements and was last inspected in November 2012. The report can be found on our website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Continue to increase the number of families using the centre overall, particularly those of minority ethnic backgrounds by:
 - increasing the work done in the local community
 - exploring innovative ways to reach more families
 - clarifying the needs of these groups and allocating the most appropriate services
 - ensuring the centre is as well-signposted and as easily accessible as possible.
- Demonstrate that outcomes are improving for the majority of families by:
 - monitoring more closely the progress that children make at the centre
 - identifying and monitoring families where two-year-olds are eligible for free early education and providing appropriate support where insufficient places are available
 - tracking adults to show qualifications achieved and employment gained and to demonstrate the impact of learning on their longer term economic well-being.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- St Ives Children Centre has rapidly increased registration and engagement rates, particularly with the key target groups, and families expecting children. Close cooperation between the centre and health partners helps to ensure families are known to the centre. It has been especially successful at reaching out to families with disabled children and those with special educational needs and at 100%, its contact with teenage parents is very positive. However, the participation rates from minority ethnic groups at 57% are relatively low.

- Families from different target groups, including those with children with additional needs benefit from a range of effective services. Unemployed adults have good access to advice, guidance, education, training and volunteering opportunities to help them get back to work.
- Good use of live birth data, through effective sharing of information with its partners, and home visits, helps to ensure that families' needs are quickly identified and met. This has enabled staff to ensure services are effectively tailored to meet users' individual needs.
- Effective partnership work with most schools and Early Years Foundation Stage settings in the area helps the children who use the centre to make good progress. Data show that these children are better prepared for school and achieve higher scores at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The very proactive family support workers know the community well, including its most vulnerable groups. They provide excellent support, advice and guidance and one-to-one support in the homes to meet individual families' needs, particularly those suffering from domestic violence, or post-natal depression. The 'Postnatal Depression Support Group' run in partnerships with health professionals is much appreciated by users and demonstrates the centre's success in reducing inequalities and isolation for families.
- Not enough families eligible for free funding for 2-year-old children have places, because of a shortage in good or better provision. The centre has only recently taken control of the management of this system. Consequently the centre cannot fully identify or monitor families or provide additional support until enough places are created.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The centre delivers a wide range of services which are accessible to all. These services are balanced with more specialist support and activities for families who require more targeted support.
- Parents speak enthusiastically about the centre, its staff and the high quality services they benefit from, often saying that the centre results in their 'life changing' experiences. They highly appreciate how they have been helped to develop their self-esteem, keep their families safe, improve their parenting skills and social and emotional well-being.
- The large majority of parents have engaged in adult learning, such as first aid, food hygiene and preparation for life and work courses, effectively improving their employability skills. Volunteering opportunities at the centre have enabled family members to build their confidence and progress into training and eventual employment. Some parents have become active members on the advisory board and have opportunity to successfully influence the centre decision-making and shape centre services.
- The highly committed family support workers provide excellent and multiple levels of support for families from different target groups. For example, women who have suffered from or witnessed domestic violence are benefiting from the 'freedom programme' and 100% of them successfully completed the popular 'phoenix' programme last year. Similarly an increasing number of families are taking advantage of the high-quality services, provided in partnerships with other professionals, for their children with additional needs, offered through the long-running 'friendly fishes' specialist group.

- The centre has begun to use 'learning journeys' to monitor children's progress. However, staff acknowledge that assessment and tracking of children's progress from their starting points and the progress they make whilst accessing centre services is currently underdeveloped. Similarly the centre does not have robust tracking systems in place to see whether all parents it signposts to courses and activities elsewhere successfully complete them or if they go on to further training or employment.
- The centre places a strong emphasis on adopting a healthy lifestyle. The proportion of mothers who continue breastfeeding at six to eight weeks is rising and levels of obesity for children entering Reception class at 6% are much lower than those seen nationally.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Leadership, governance and management are good. The strong, highly qualified and experienced leadership team and staff are extremely effective and efficient. They are well-supported and challenged to continually improve by the local authority and the advisory board.
- The local authority sets ambitious targets for the centre. Data and information available to the centre are sufficiently analysed to show that services are having an impact for families and are consistently used in action planning. The regular monitoring of the quality of services through meetings, observations of activities and appraisals is very robust and accurate. Self-evaluation processes are effective and involve users and partners. As a result, centre leaders accurately identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- Centre staff are passionate about reducing inequalities and working with disadvantaged families or those that need specialist support. They use resources very well to help families improve their well-being.
- Safeguarding is a high priority in the centre and policies and procedures reflect this. Through full participation on relevant panels, staff work closely with social care and health partners to support children who are subject to child protection plans, looked after children and children in need. The Common Assessment Framework is used very effectively to assess need and coordinate support for families. Case studies demonstrate that the centre's involvement has helped to reduce the level of support needed for some highly vulnerable families.
- The centre is very warm and welcoming once families access the building, but the lack of better signage and the centre's location at the back of Wheatfield Primary School, are not helpful in encouraging those who may lack confidence to come to the centre. Users' evaluations of activities, surveys and testimonials demonstrate a very high level of satisfaction with the centre services and the positive impact it is having on their personal lives.
- There is a strong commitment to celebrating diversity and tackling discrimination, as reflected in the displays around the centre, the celebration of an international day, the choices of toys and bilingual books. The use of translated leaflets, notices and bilingual staff helps the centre to improve communication with and outcomes for families of speakers of other languages.

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/Children's Centre Group details

Unique reference number	22852
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	403185
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1359
Centre leader	Frances Macklin
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	07776 494100
Email address	Frances.macklin@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

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