

Ely Children's Centre

Spring Meadow Infant & Nursery School, High Barns, Ely, CB7 4RB

Inspection date	12–13 March 2014		
Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement Not previously inspected	3
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 good because:

- The centre has been successful in registering a large proportion of families with young children in its reach area and it is improving. However, the engagement in centre services of families from minority ethnic groups, lone parents, families where no-one is in employment and families with disabled children or those with special educational needs is not yet high enough.
- The centre's planning identifies the intended outcomes of various activities to meet local families needs. While results are recorded on a one by one basis, there are insufficient checks to evaluate how well the centres' intentions are met overall, particularly with regard to provision to improve outcomes for families through adult education and preparation for work.
- There are too few parents involved in shaping the direction of development of the centre, through involvement with the advisory board and the parents' forum. A number of agencies that the centre works with do not regularly attend advisory board meetings, in particular representatives from some partner educational establishments, adult training providers and Job Centre Plus.
- Despite good quality learning experiences provided at the centre for those children who attend, the gap at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage, between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is wide and not being closed.

This centre has the following strengths:

- The sharing of best practice between centre staff, and the monitoring of the quality of activities the centre provides for children itself is good.
- Well planned and interesting activities are provided for families who attend, which engage parents and their children and improve their confidence and skills.
- A high proportion of families with eligible two year olds take up their entitlement to free places for early childcare.
- Strong links with health services have a positive effect; as a result, for example, breast feeding levels are high and obesity low.
- Courses to help improve parenting skills have positive outcomes for those who attend.
- Provision for the families with disabled children or those who have special educational needs who use the centre is good.
- The centre provides good care and support to individual families going through times of crisis.

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 staff from the local authority and staff from the centre. Inspectors also talked with a range of partners including those from health and education and representatives from the advisory board. They listened to the views of parents and observed sessions including 'Stay and Play' at St John's Scout Hut and 'Toddler Time' in the centre.

The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. They looked in detail at a number of case files of children subject to child protection plans, those deemed to be children in need and others in receipt of outreach support, including those subject to Common Assessment Framework processes.

Inspection team

Sheelagh Barnes	Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Pat Hornsby		Additional inspector
Steve Nelson		Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The centre opened in 2008 as a phase-two, stand-alone centre and serves an area that falls into the 70% least deprived nationally. It delivers or supports access to a range of services to meet its core purpose, mainly from the centre but also from a Scout Hut adjacent to St John's Primary School. It works in collaboration with two other local children's centres (Littleport and Sutton). Childcare is provided on the neighbouring school site (EY445816) and is the subject of separate inspection arrangements.

There are 1444 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach area. Children enter early years provision at levels broadly in line with those expected for their age. Most families are of White British heritage, with some from Black and other ethnic groups.

The centre is managed directly by the local authority. The advisory board, established when the centre opened has recently been 'relaunched' with a slightly smaller group. The local authority is in the process of rationalising its provision of children's centres.

The centre has identified its main priority groups as pregnant teenagers and young mothers, children from minority ethnic families, children and families in workless households, disabled children and lone parents.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of families, from groups identified by the centre as most in need, who are registered and sustain contact with the centre.
- Improve access to services to help families prepare for work through training and opportunities to acquire work related skills through volunteering.
- Ensure leaders have a clearer knowledge of the impact of provision delivered by;
 - collating and analysing information received from partner agencies, so that the overall progress of those from priority groups is more accurately known
 - using the information gathered when evaluating the effectiveness of what has been provided
 - putting this to use when planning future opportunities to ensure the needs of all priority groups, especially those adults who do not work, are provided for well.
- Involve more parents, representatives of partner educational establishments and of Job Centre Plus in shaping services and encouraging greater use of the centre through attendance at the advisory board and parent forum.
- Close the gap in achievement at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage between the lowest achieving 20% and their peers.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre has worked successfully to meet the target set for it by the local authority for the proportion of families in the area who are registered with the centre. A large majority of families in the area are now registered. However, a minority of families from priority groups regularly engage with the centre and take part in the activities it runs.
- Less than half of the lone parents with young children, minority ethnic families and those who are without work, use the services of the centre regularly. Despite a number of good quality, tailor-made sessions being provided, only a small minority of parents with disabled children or children with special educational needs attend the centre.
- There is no named person with overall responsibility for monitoring arrangements for further education for adults, their referral to other employment related services and the outcomes of their referrals. Information is available on an individual family basis and this information indicates that the numbers of parents gaining further education or work as a result of the centre's efforts is small.
- A very large majority of eligible two year olds take up their entitlement to free education as a result of the centre's good work in this area.
- Effective partnerships with health services results in the centre being made aware of new births in the area and so is able to make speedy contact with families. Access to health related services is good and enhanced by the sessions such as baby weighing which take place at the centre.
- A large majority of pregnant teenagers and young mothers use the available services and benefit from contact with the centre.
- The provision of some translator services enables some parents who would otherwise not be able, to benefit from the centre's services. One parent said that the centre has 'transformed my life'.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Provision for adult education and preparation for work requires improvement. The need to develop further links to adult learning providers has been accurately identified in the centre's self assessment, in its development plan and also by the local authority annual review.
- There are plans in place to develop volunteering and a number of parents have expressed an interest. Two parents run an outreach group in a rural part of the reach and another is awaiting checks before they can start at the centre.
- Taken overall, children achieve a very good level of development at the end of Reception in the three main primary schools that children attend. The proportion achieving a good level of development was above the national proportion, at very nearly two thirds. However, the gap in achievement between the lowest attaining children and the rest is big with only just over a third of these children achieving a good level of development. This gap is not yet closing.
- Provision in sessions the centre provides for young children and their parents is good. The centre has started to record the progress made by the children, using 'Learning Journals' to record their individual achievements. However, information from these is not yet used sufficiently to measure the progress of children from priority groups. The centre has started to track the progress of groups

of children over time as part of its evaluations.

- Case file analysis of early intervention work to protect and safeguard families, shows highly effective multi agency co-ordination that ensures they are protected. Families supported have improved well-being and comment positively on the help the centre has given them.
- Provision and outcomes for the health and welfare of families that the centre works with are good. Services are appreciated by families and well used. A crèche is often provided for parents to help them to access services and this benefits children and parents alike.
- Provision for the families of disabled children or those who have special educational needs who use the centre's services is good. However, too few attend.
- The centre provides good quality services for those who attend, both for priority groups and for all families. There is appropriate balance between services that are targeted for specific groups and that which is provided to all. There is regular monitoring of the balance of provision by the local authority and the advisory board, who are aware of the need to increase the involvement of families from priority groups.
- Provision for those families who use the centre's services for health, childcare and welfare is good. There are many examples of how the centre has improved the quality of daily life for individuals, through enabling them to share problems and by giving practical support such as distributing vouchers for the food bank.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The local authority retains overall governance of the centre. It provides centre leaders with a lot of information, from a range of sources, in the form of data. Centre leaders try to rationalise this with local information as there are sometimes differences between information from different sources.
- Centre leaders do not systematically collate the information on the outcomes of referrals for adults, although information is held on individual files. There is no-one with specific named responsibility for gathering and analysing information on adult services. As a result, although records of individual cases record some impact of the work the centre, leaders have no overview of all the information by which they might swiftly evaluate the effectiveness of provision in more than a general way, or use to accurately guide future planning.
- Parental involvement in altering the direction of development of the centre is relatively limited. The centre uses information from questionnaires and informal discussions, but there is little formal representation of priority families on the advisory board or through the parent forum. Some parents are unaware that there is a forum, as it meets infrequently.
- The county has links with Jobcentre Plus and a seconded person works closely with the strategic lead for children's centres in the authority. However, there are no current links with the centre directly, apart from posters and leaflets and a number for families to ring. Despite the centre attempting to make contact, the service level agreement for a member of Jobcentre Plus to attend advisory board meetings has not been met in the past year.
- The attendance at advisory board meetings by linked school representatives has been poor, with only one school regularly taking part. There are currently no representatives from providers of adult education.

- Safeguarding is given appropriately high priority and systems, including assessments of risk, fully meet requirements. Policies and procedures for ensuring the welfare and protection of young children and vulnerable adults are good. Staff regularly have discussions about safeguarding, which is an agenda item at every team meeting.
- There is good inter-agency working to support and safeguard vulnerable children and families in need. In the last 12 months the centre family workers have been involved in reviewing and improving the status of 30 cases, including children subject to child protection plans, Common Assessment Framework (CAF), looked after children and children identified as being in need. This has resulted in improved outcomes and timely safeguarding of families.
- The leadership and management of health related services for mothers and young children are effective.
- The centre is improving and has met the target of 70% registration which was set for it by the local authority. Resources are managed with appropriate effectiveness and efficiency to meet the needs of families and children from priority groups.

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	21094
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	430183
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,444
Centre leader	Claire Wilkins
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
Telephone number	01353 611594
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