

Ravenswood Children's Centre

Ravenswood Community Centre, 103 Hening Avenue, Ipswich, IP3 9QJ

Inspection date	25–26 March 2014		
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
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:

- Not enough families who live in the Ravenswood community are directly registered at the centre. Many attend services elsewhere.
- The numbers of families attending some groups and completing adult learning and personal development workshops from start to finish is relatively low.
- The centre has found it difficult to promote its services and encourage families to recognise the centre as an important part of the community. Staff have not been able to make the centre easily visible and make full use of all of its facilities to encourage a greater number of parents to engage in services. Not enough use is made of the outside area to promote services and children's learning.
- Staff have worked very hard since the last inspection to improve services and register more families. Many improvements have been made to help managers monitor the impact of the centre's work. However, these systems are too new and it is too early to see how well they work.
- Parents and carers value the centre and enjoy attending groups and activities. However, staff do not always help them develop their skills and understanding of how to support their children's learning and development.
- The advisory board has a clearer understanding of how to help the centre improve. It is now beginning to set targets and ensure services meet local families' needs. However, more challenge is needed to help the centre improve at a faster rate.

This children's centre has the following strengths:

- Families who use the centre are overwhelmingly positive about the difference it makes to their lives. One parent summarised the view of many by stating, 'If I hadn't had someone I could speak to, I wouldn't be where I am today.'
- Staff work extremely well with other agencies to ensure children are kept safe and swift action is taken to protect children when families experience difficulties in their lives.
- Staff from other agencies praise the work of the centre and say how well services link together to offer relevant support and help when it is needed.

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and the centre leadership team; senior representatives from the local authority and partner agencies; an early years consultant and a speech and language therapist; the headteacher of the local primary school and the manager of the nursery; the centre staff team; a parent support adviser; a focus groups of parents and centre users; health professionals and members of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited the 'Walking Tall' group and observed the 'Shake, Rattle and Roll' session and the Healthy Child Clinic.

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

Inspection team

Jo Caswell	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Rachael Flesher	Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Ravenswood Children's Centre is one of six children's centres located within the North/East Ipswich locality. It is a stand-alone centre located within the Ravenswood community centre and it is managed by the local authority. The centre has been designated since 2007, but only started delivering services in 2009. It serves a very mixed community with pockets of significant deprivation and disadvantage combined with relatively affluent areas. Some communities served by the centre are classified as being in the 30% most deprived areas of the country. Current data indicates 10.79% of children live in workless households. A relatively high proportion of homes are social housing, comprising of flats and privately-rented accommodation as well as privately-owned rental property. The majority of families are of White British heritage. In total, 16% of pupils in the Ravenswood reach area speak English as an additional language. The school census data from 2013 shows the most common languages in the Ravenswood area are English, Bengali, Polish and Portuguese. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are typically below the level expected for their age.

The centre delivers a range of services including health clinics, drop-in groups, parenting courses, breastfeeding support and infant massage. A registered early years provision, Spitfires Nursery (URN: EY443815), shares the same premises as the children's centre. This provision is not linked to the children's centre and is subject to separate inspection arrangements. The report can be accessed at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre considers its target groups to include families from the most deprived areas, teenage parents, babies aged under one year, fathers and male carers. Since the last inspection, a new centre leadership team has been appointed and the membership of the advisory board has increased.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Develop the systems in place to increase registration and regular engagement with the large majority of target families within the Ravenswood community by:
 - significantly enhancing the visible presence of the centre in the area
 - making better use of the outside area to promote services and enhance children’s well-being and learning opportunities
 - consulting with health partners to ensure Ravenswood families recognise the centre as their local centre.

- Develop the role of the advisory board to provide more challenge and help the centre make more rapid improvement.

- Create more opportunities to help parents understand how to support their children’s learning and development.

- Take relevant action to increase attendance at all groups and improve the retention and completion rates of all adult learning and personal development opportunities.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, the centre has worked hard to target its services at families who need them most. The registration and engagement levels have significantly improved for some groups. For example, the proportion of babies aged under one year has increased from 42% in December 2013 to 76% in February 2014. This is as a result of concerted action by staff and other partner agencies to target services during the ante-natal and post-natal stage. The development of a parentcraft workshop for expectant parents has been particularly significant in increasing the numbers of parents accessing services.
- Support is now in place to engage more successfully with teenage parents, although services are not delivered directly from the Ravenswood centre. However, staff monitor the attendance of teenage parents at other centres and continue to promote services within the area.
- Centre staff and partner agencies undertake relevant work to engage with the harder to reach families. Systems for the sharing of information and data are fully in place and this means the staff consistently understand where to target services.
- The placing of health clinics in other children's centres inhibits the numbers of parents and carers registering at the Ravenswood centre. As the centre is less than a mile away from the larger Treehouse Children's Centre, many health clinics are delivered at Treehouse. This means families from Ravenswood are registered at Treehouse because they have attended a clinic there. This distorts the registration and access data for the Ravenswood centre.
- In February 2014, 77.7% of families from the most deprived areas were regularly accessing services at one of the children's centres in the wider area. Of these, only 30.1% of these were registered at the Ravenswood centre. However, data confirms 51% of the Ravenswood families are engaged in children's centre services across the locality.
- The numbers of fathers and male carers accessing services is continuing to increase. Fathers and male carers are now fully involved in the parentcraft classes and attend regularly. A dads' group runs at another centre and a monthly weekend drop-in group has been created to encourage parents who work during the week to access services.
- The centre has taken concerted action since the last inspection to increase the numbers of children accessing free early education. In total, 80% of eligible two-year olds, and 90% of three and four-year olds access early years provision. This means children from the most vulnerable areas are better prepared for starting school.
- Due to severe limitations placed on the children's centre as part of the building's listed status, signage and visual indicators to promote services are extremely limited. This means some families who live in Ravenswood are unaware of its presence. Not enough action is taken to promote the use of the centre during opening hours, particularly with the use of the outside area.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Families who access services greatly appreciate the support it provides. They value the strong relationships they build with staff and recognise the centre as a place where they can seek help. One parent expressed this clearly by saying to inspectors, 'If it wasn't for the support of the centre, I wouldn't still have my child with me.'

- The range of services provided by the centre is adequate. A greater number of services are provided at the Treehouse centre, which means families tend to visit there more often. However, the new centre management team are now looking at ways in which to develop the range provided at Ravenswood to attract and retain a greater number of families.
- The 'Shake, Rattle and Roll' group for babies is particularly popular and is run in conjunction with a health visitor clinic. The group is viewed by parents as 'the best in the area', attracting over 30 parents and babies on the day of inspection. However, other groups have much lower attendance.
- Effective partnership arrangements with other agencies ensure parents are signposted to relevant services. Families who visit the centre benefit from financial advice and support with housing, debt management and benefits information. This has a positive impact on improving the economic stability of families.
- The range of health services provided through the children's centre has a positive impact. The numbers of mothers breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks is broadly in line with the local average. Strategies to reduce the numbers of children being classified as obese in the Reception year are generally effective, although the centre could make better use of the outside area to promote a greater range of physical activity.
- Relevant support is provided for parents to improve their confidence and emotional well-being. The centre provided a workshop and targeted this appropriately. Although mothers attended at the start of the course, the completion rate was low and this was disappointing given the complex needs of some local families.
- The quality of groups provided by the centre is variable. The centre management team set high expectations; however, sometimes practice delivered in groups does not match this. For example, not all parents attending the 'Walking Tall' group were sufficiently helped to understand how purposeful play supports children's learning. Staff do not always maximise opportunities to help parents become familiar with how to monitor children's development and extend this at home.
- The children's centre has established a strong link with the community primary school and adjoining nursery. A speech and language therapist has had some input in developing activities to support communication through play. However, it is too early to assess the quality and impact of this. Despite this, the headteacher of the primary school considers the children's centre services provide 'a solid start' to children's learning and their readiness for school.
- There are some opportunities for parents to develop their skills and undertake training. A small number of parents have completed courses to enhance their parenting skills. One parent has completed an accredited course to become a 'community parent' and now assists in the running of some groups. The centre currently has one volunteer and a small number of other parents are now showing an interest in this.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, the local authority has carried out a full review of the centre's management structure. A new leadership team is now in place and despite only being established since October 2013, considerable improvements are already being seen. Relevant actions have been taken to address all of the development points raised at the last inspection. However, in many cases, it is still too early to accurately assess the impact of some of the strategies.

- The effectiveness of the advisory board has been fully reviewed and now includes membership from a range of agencies and stakeholders. Targets are set to drive improvement and evidence indicates some level of challenge is provided. However, this needs to develop further, especially in helping the centre to engage a greater number of families.
- The local authority demonstrates a very strong commitment towards supporting the centre's continual improvement. Concerted action has been taken to remedy the slippages in service provision identified at the last inspection and the centre's new management team now has a secure foundation in which to improve. New systems have been put in place to monitor the impact of the centre's work. However, many of these systems are too new and it is too early to assess their effectiveness.
- The local authority, advisory board and centre management team demonstrate a very realistic and accurate view of the centre's strengths and priority areas for improvement. Within a short space of time, the new team has increased staff morale and developed a shared vision towards continuous improvement. However, managers are aware some aspects of practice do not match their high expectations and strategies are in place to address this.
- The centre's work in safeguarding vulnerable children and their families is particularly good and a strength of service delivery. Considerable work is done to assess the needs of the most vulnerable families and those identified to be at risk. Strong links with children's social care, health professionals and other agencies ensure a fully integrated approach towards early intervention and preventative services.
- The Common Assessment Framework is fully embedded and used extremely well to assess needs and coordinate early support for families. The close supervision of case workers and files ensures managers have a clear understanding of the complex needs of families. A clear audit is maintained to indicate how decisions have been made in order to protect children, including those who are subject to a child protection plan, those who are looked after by the local authority and those considered to be 'in need'.
- Resources are generally used effectively in order to avoid duplicating services. However, due to the close proximity of the Treehouse centre, this means some families do not readily access the Ravenswood centre. As the centre manager of Ravenswood also manages the Treehouse centre and staff work across both centres, managers have an accurate overview of the engagement levels of vulnerable families and continue to monitor this closely.
- Parents are now beginning to have more involvement in the planning of activities and services. The centre management team actively seek the views of parents and take relevant action to make changes to service delivery where possible. As a result, parents feel valued and listened to.

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	22471
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	430238
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	591
Centre leader	Tracey Baldry
Date of previous inspection	20 February 2013
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