

Northend Children's Centre

4a Lincoln Close, Slade Green, DA8 2EB

Inspection date 27–28 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	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:

- Leaders do not make enough use of data to identify and reach key target groups and to strengthen the impact of the centre's work on improving outcomes for children and parents.
- The centre and its advisory board do not have a clear understanding of the centre's overall progress and effectiveness. As a result, the board's role in providing support and challenge to drive improvement is weakened.
- While most children in the area are registered with the centre, the take up of services has declined. Too few adults attend learning programmes or are helped into training and employment; there is limited tracking of their progress.
- The centre's support for vulnerable children is impeded by poor record keeping and inconsistent management oversight in some cases. Some records seen were untidy, incomplete and not up to date.

This centre has the following strengths:

- It makes good use of local networks to identify families and promote its work.
- Robust vetting and recruitment processes ensure that paid staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children and families. This helps to keep children and adults safe.
- The centre leader and advisory board chair are committed and enthusiastic, and they are determined to address quickly the areas where improvement is required.
- Parents' views are gathered effectively and used to influence services. Parents report high levels of satisfaction with the services they and their children receive.
- Strong links with health services help to sustain improvements in breast feeding and immunisation rates.

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings and telephone interviews with the centre leader, the local authority's children's centre lead officer and data officer, centre staff and volunteers, professionals in other local services, the chair of the advisory board, parents and centre users.

The inspectors visited Northend Children's Centre and observed activities the centre provides in other local venues, including Peareswod School, Orchard House and the Europa Centre in Crayford.

They observed the centre's work, including joint observations of practice with the centre leader, analysed a sample of case records, child protection case files and case studies, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation, action plan and safeguarding policy and procedures.

Inspection team

John Mitchell, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Libby Dickson	Additional inspector
Joan Lindsay	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Northend Children's Centre is currently a stand-alone centre which is managed by the London Borough of Bexley. Services are provided at the centre itself and at various other venues in Barnehurst, Crayford and North End wards. Leaders across a wide range of public services and community groups support the centre through a multi-agency advisory board. Staffing is provided jointly by the local authority and health services. The community the centre serves is ethnically diverse and it is affected by a significant level of deprivation, located within this relatively prosperous borough. Social and health inequalities affect North End ward in particular, including a higher than average prevalence of low weight births, child and adult obesity, and child poverty.

The centre plays an important role in identifying and targeting families most in need, providing family and children's services, and promoting access to free child care places in order to prevent the escalation of need and reduce demands on specialist services. It is expected to work with families using the Common Assessment Framework and in the context of child in need and child protection plans.

Take up of early years provision is high, with most eligible two-, three- and four-year-olds receiving their free entitlement to early education and child care in a range of local settings. These include a nursery run on site at the children's centre by a private provider.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Identify specific target groups in the area, based on data and other evidence, and focus on increasing their engagement with services.
- Make the best use of data to monitor impact on outcomes for target groups.
- Work with settings and schools to track the progress children make through to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, in order to monitor the lasting impact of its work on children's learning and development.
- Quickly strengthen oversight and quality of case files, particularly for children subject to a child protection plan. These should include key information about assessments and plans, record any concerns for children and provide an audit trail for decisions.
- Review the range of targets and priorities which have been identified for the centre to ensure these are precise and measurable.
- Ensure the advisory board has a clear understanding of the centre's overall progress and effectiveness to strengthen its role in helping to drive improvement.
- The local authority should strengthen strategic links between the children's centre and children's social care to improve information sharing and joint working to help and safeguard vulnerable children.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre makes good use of partnerships and networks to identify families. As a result, registrations are high, including within the most deprived parts of the area.
- New parents and those expecting children enjoy easy access to centre services as a result of midwifery clinics run within the centre and strong links with local health visitors.
- Close work with housing, health and a range of other community services enables the centre to identify and engage families who may be less likely to take up services.
- Despite this, overall numbers of parents and children attending the centre have reduced. The local authority counts attendance only in relation to children already registered with the centre, rather than the overall population of children in the local area. As a result, the centre has an overly positive

picture of the extent to which local families are engaged with its services.

- The centre has not clearly identified target groups so is unable to monitor and sustain their access to services. This is limiting the extent to which it improves children's life chances.
- Most children aged three and four access their entitlement to free early education. A large majority of eligible two-year-olds also take up funded early education places.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre provides, commissions and hosts a wide range of relevant activities in easy reach of local communities. Children are helped to make progress in their learning and development by taking part in activities which are generally well planned and which are clearly valued by parents.
- However, while the centre's work has a positive impact for some individual families, it does not have a clear overview of the impact of its work on the health, development and readiness for school of the overall population of children in the area.
- The local authority has very recently introduced a new set of performance data for the centre to address this gap, although leaders do not make full use of available data to evaluate and improve the impact of services on children's progress.
- The effectiveness of the centre's support for vulnerable children is undermined by poor record keeping. There are significant weaknesses in some case files, with key information missing and a lack of overall assessments, plans and reviews.
- In some cases, the centre's intervention lacks focus, work is adult-centred with limited emphasis on children's progress and there is a lack of coherent information about the impact of intervention on the child and family's well-being.
- Families known to outreach workers and the centre leader enjoy good relationships, and the families are made aware of appropriate services. Inspectors found evidence of good support to individual families, resulting in parents coping better and enjoying closer relationships with their children. However, the centre does not focus its work sufficiently well on assessing and meeting the needs of target groups.
- The centre works well with health services to meet the needs of families. Antenatal clinics held at the centre are well attended and effective initiatives ensure high levels of breastfeeding and immunisations. However, efforts to reduce high levels of childhood obesity have not yet delivered sustained improvement.
- Practical work experience opportunities, encouragement and coaching provided by the centre have helped parent volunteers go on to higher-level training and secure good jobs.
- However, partners involved in delivering adult education, training and support are only able to evidence impact on small numbers of families at present. There is a lack of systematic tracking of target groups.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Close cooperation and creative sharing of resources between leaders of local services have enabled the centre and its partners to provide a wide range of services which are accessible to local families. This has contributed to the high number of children registered with the centre, including those from the most deprived parts of the local area.
- However, joint working with children's social care services is poorly developed. The centre leader acknowledges the need to improve information sharing between centre staff and social workers and to ensure better record keeping and management oversight in cases involving vulnerable children.
- A lack of clarity about specific target groups and an ad-hoc approach to evaluation mean there is not a clear understanding of the centre's overall progress and effectiveness. This weakens the centre's self-evaluation and the effectiveness of the advisory board in providing challenge to drive improvement. The newly appointed chair of the advisory board acknowledges the need to improve

the board's focus.

- Robust vetting and recruitment processes ensure that paid staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children and families.
- Parents' views are sought and they influence services; however, the views of children are not consistently sought and acted upon.
- The centre leader, local authority lead and advisory board chair have expressed determination to quickly address areas for improvement.

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	22200
Local authority	London Borough of Bexley
Inspection number	161474
Managed by	London Borough of Bexley

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,720
Centre leader	Beverly Mills
Telephone number	020 3045 4720
Email address	Beverly.mills@bexley.gov.uk

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