

Thrapston Children's Centre

Thrapston Library, High Street, Thrapston, Northamptonshire, NN14 4JJ

Inspection date

14–16 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
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 and managers have focussed on improving the availability and quality of services in the last year so that there has been an increase, to an acceptable level, in the number of children being registered and families attending.
- The centre has a clear knowledge of where families and children who are not registered or using the centre live but does not have enough knowledge about all families' needs to know whether any of these are from the groups it has identified as needing most support.
- Practitioners do not record in detail information about children's progress to measure whether groups and activities help them develop the skills they need for school.
- Procedures for checking the quality of the centre's work and how big a difference the centre is making to families' lives are not yet fully effective.
- Some partners are slow to share information about families to enable the centre to provide good continuity of services.
- Parents give their views about the activities that are provided for them but have not received enough information about changes due to be made to children's centre services in time for their views to be taken well into account.

It has the following strengths:

- The cluster manager and senior family workers have built strong partnerships within the area especially with schools and preschools to set up groups in local venues and so enable families with no transport to enjoy and benefit from a range of activities.
- Positive relationships with staff and partners encourage parents to ask for advice. Parents feel listened to and are confident that the advice they are given will help them and their children.
- Staff understand and are committed to doing what needs to be done in order to provide good quality services to children and families and to make a difference to their lives.
- All eligible two year olds and the very large majority of three year olds take up their free entitlement to early education.
- Children and their parents who attend groups receive good quality support, care and guidance from the centre and health visitors and make good progress in their learning, development safety and wellbeing.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of children and adults registered and regularly taking advantage of what the centre provides, especially those from all those groups that the centre identifies as having a specific need.
- Record in more detail the learning of children and use the information to:
 - focus planning, resources and evaluations on the particular needs of those attending the groups and activities
 - track progress more closely to measure how well the centre has met individuals' particular needs.
- Working with other centres in the locality, the centre should enhance how it checks the quality of its work by bringing together procedures for monitoring the quality of staff performance against and progress towards meeting the centre's improvement targets.
- The centre and local authority should consult parents in good time and sufficient detail about plans for the future of centre for parents' voices to be influential.

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. It was carried out at the same time as other children's centres which were Oundle and Newton Road Children's Centres.

This inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector who worked with two of Her Majesty's Inspectors leading on each of the other two simultaneous inspections.

The inspector held meetings with the cluster manager, senior family worker and representatives of the local authority. She spoke to staff, parents and children, and partners from schools, preschools and health services, four childminders and chair of the advisory board.

The inspector visited 'Baby Talk' at Green Lane clinic, 'Stay and Play' at Brigstock Primary School and observed 'Story Sack' sessions and 'Little Explorers' at Thrapston library.

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

Inspection team

Georgina Beasley, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Christine Davies, Coordinating lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Joy Law, Team inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

From designation in 2010 until July 2013 the centre's services were provided by Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (NHFT). Since July 2013, under arrangements due to end in July 2014, the centre has been managed by the local authority service, Northamptonshire Libraries Plus. A cluster manager leads 11 centres, including four in the East Northamptonshire locality. A senior family worker manages the day-to-day running of the centre with the support of three other staff. During the period of transfer of management there were staffing vacancies and the centre has been fully staffed since December 2013. To meet its core purpose, Thrapston works collaboratively with three other Libraries Plus centres and in close partnership with centres in the locality that are managed by other providers. Higham Ferrers, Newton Road and Oundle have each received their own inspection and the reports can be seen on our website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The area served consists of Thrapston town and surrounding villages and rural communities. Transport links from some parts of the area to the town are poor. There are isolated pockets of deprivation within a generally affluent area. Worklessness is low. Children's skills and abilities on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are below those expected for their age. The majority of families are White British; about nine percent are from minority ethnic groups including a growing number from Eastern European backgrounds. The centre covers a large area and includes a number of outlying and isolated villages and rural enclaves with limited public transport.

The centre has identified its target groups as: lone parents; fathers; children living in workless households; families from minority ethnic backgrounds; disabled children or children living with a disabled parent; and families living in rural locations.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Work with partners to advertise the centre's services and groups across the area has resulted in a good increase in the number of children and adults registering with the centre in the last year. The centre has been particularly successful in contacting expectant and new parents and families who move into the area so that a large majority of families are now registered.
- The centre has carefully looked at the information it has about the needs of families who live in different parts of the area and variations in the numbers of families registered and attending groups. The recent setting up of activities in different community venues across the area has resulted in a large majority of families living in rural locations being registered. The newly reformed group for dads and their children is valued by those who attend and has led to an increase in the number of fathers registering. Attendance at the monthly father's activity is good.
- The centre is not yet clear whether they are reaching enough families from all the groups identified by the centre as requiring the most support. A large majority of families from minority ethnic backgrounds are registered and regularly attend activities. Although centre's information indicates the numbers of children living in workless houses and those with lone parents registered recently is rising, the numbers attending regularly appear low. The centre is not certain that families who have been attending over a period of time have let them know about all of these needs; consequently the centre continues its focus on raising registrations and attendance in these groups.
- Good and timely information is shared by health visitors to enable the centre to identify new parents and children most in need of early help so that specific support can be given if necessary. Nearly all children have their two-year-old development checks on time so that children's development needs are identified early and services are provided promptly by the centre. Assessments under the Common Assessment Framework ensure coordinated help is provided. Work with children's social care ensures that all children subject to a children in need plan or who are looked after attend groups regularly.
- Partnerships with schools and early years settings ensure that all eligible two-year-olds and 93% of three-year-olds take up their free entitlement to early education.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre has a range of evidence to show that it is making a difference to children and adults who use its services. It is at an early stage of capturing all of the information that it needs about the difference its work is making to the learning of adults and children to be fully confident that the services offered are making the planned difference over time.
- Children who attend preschool receive good quality provision. However, a below average proportion reach the levels that they should for their age in speaking and listening, personal, social and emotional development, and in reading and writing by the end of the Reception year. The centre has not analysed the information in detail to find out whether this is due to the slower progress of children in some target groups and so determine whether these children are closing any gaps in their learning with other children of the same age.
- The centre does know which skills are weaker. Groups and activities such as in 'Stay and Play', 'Little Explorers' and 'Story Sack' sessions focus on helping children improve and develop these skills and some comments about their progress are made on planning sheets. However, there is no clear system for checking that children make enough progress over time for the centre to be fully confident that they all start preschool and/or nursery with higher levels of skill.

- The range of universal and targeted services and groups that have been and are being delivered cover all requirements of the offer and successfully engages a majority of families. The centre works closely with schools, childminders, and health and community law partners to identify and give good outreach support to families and children who are most in need until they have more or regained their confidence.
- Children and their parents and carers who attend groups receive good quality support, care and guidance about their children's learning and development. Parents who attend have a good understanding of how to support their children's learning and development and ensure their safety and wellbeing. Mothers who attend 'Baby Talk' value being able to share experiences with others and to ask health professionals and centre staff about any aspect of their babies' development.
- Adults who have attended the small number of family learning sessions have completed the course. Only a few parents have attended a relevant parenting course. A small number of parents have attended first aid training, raised their awareness of e-safety and attended a course to find out how to start their own business. There have been good outcomes for families who have accessed advice about employment and benefits from the community law partnership.
- The centre meets its health targets. The proportion of mothers sustaining breast feeding at 6–8 weeks is above the local average and levels of obesity in Reception children are below average. Immunisation rates are high.
- Volunteers are beginning to be recruited to help set up and increase the range of activities that are offered for breast feeding support and in stay-and-play and 'Rhyme Time' activities. The small number of parents volunteering at present gain valuable work experience to help improve their employability.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- During the period change of commissioning and management arrangements from March to July 2013, information was not shared in enough detail to enable priority needs for the area to be fully understood. Uptake of services was at an unacceptably low level. Through the focussed efforts of the cluster manager, senior family worker and staff, the centre has rebuilt services so that registrations and uptake are now at an acceptable level.
- Procedures to check that services and activities are making the difference that they should are still developing. Improvement targets in all monitoring reports are not focused enough on the difference the centre is expected to make or is making to children's and adults' learning and wellbeing.
- Performance management conversations take place every month but the focus on how successful staff are being in delivering groups and services for all families is not recorded in enough detail. Cases under the Common Assessment Framework are discussed fully and reasons given for both opening and closing cases. This ensures clear oversight by managers. However, discussions are not always recorded in detail nor linked closely to staff performance.
- Partnerships with health, community law, childminders, schools and preschools are strong. Information has not always been shared by partners in a timely manner to enable the centre to plan support for families and to monitor its success in meeting their needs fully. Information from social care partners regarding children in need or on child protection or care plans has been slow in the past, requiring the centre staff to constantly chase up assessments and outcomes from meetings to work effectively with families.

- Parents' views are gathered at the end of most activities and the centre acts upon these when it can. A parent on the advisory board represents the views of parents across the reach area. Parents have not yet been consulted about the proposed changes at the end of July.
- The local authority now knows the centre's area in sufficient detail to check performance and agree relevant targets for improvement. Regular meetings with the cluster manager and the senior family worker ensures everyone is clear about improvement requirements, how success will be measured and by when.
- The membership of the advisory board represents the centre's partners and community well. Two meetings so far since it was formed have focused on ensuring all safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and followed consistently. Members are clear about the centre's targets and ask searching questions for evidence to show that it is on track to reach them.
- Staff apply consistently the local authority policies and procedures arrangements for safeguarding. Diligent checks are made of all staff and of visitors to the centre. Recruitment checks meet requirements. Rigorous procedures for signing in and out of the venues is followed for all groups and activities so that centre staff know who is on the premises at any time. Induction for all staff and volunteers ensure clear understanding of all safeguarding requirements.

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.

Centre details

Unique reference number	23305
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	444634
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	634
Cluster Manager and Centre leader	Louise Moseley and Rachel Spence
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