

Newton Road Children's Centre

Hove Road, Rushden, Northamptonshire, NN10 0JB

Inspection dates	14–16 May 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not applicable	
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 is at an early stage of checking accurately how many families from groups it has identified as needing most support are attending regularly. However, leaders and managers have successfully focussed on increasing the number of children registered and stronger governance and partnerships have improved the range of services offered in the last six months to meet the needs of more families.
- 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.
- Systems for finding out how big a difference the centre is making to children's and families' lives, including gathering information from all partners and checking the quality of work, are yet fully effective.
- While families are regularly consulted about services that are provided for them, few parents and potential users are well enough informed about wider changes to the children's centre services for parents' views to be reliably represented in future plans.

It has the following strengths:

- Registrations are approaching good levels in the areas where staff have focussed their efforts to reach out to families who have not taken up children's centre services before.
- Families get well-coordinated individual family support and from the centre's staff and other services, for example through the use of the Common Assessment Framework.
- Staff are committed and provide effective support, care and guidance to those families who use the centre.
- Children and families attending regularly enjoy their learning, especially in practical activities they can do together. Parents turn with confidence to staff, tutors and health visitors for advice on a wide range of family matters to improve their personal development, safety and well-being.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Working with other centres in the locality, increase the number of children and adults registering with and regularly taking advantage of what the centre provides, especially those from all those groups that the centre identifies as most in need of support in the area.
- 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 children's progress more closely to measure how well the centre has met individuals' particular needs.
- The centre and local authority should consult parents in good time and provide sufficient detail about the centre's future 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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors who worked with one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector 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 and the advisory board. She spoke to staff, volunteers, parents and children, and partners from health services, adult education services and two childminders.

The inspector visited 'Family food' at Hope Methodist Church Hall outreach venue and met senior family workers and staff at Thrapston and Oundle children's centres.

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

Inspection team

Christine Davies, Coordinating lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Joy Law, Team inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Georgina Beasley, Team inspector

Additional 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 locality 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 but the centre has been fully staffed since December 2013. To meet its core purpose, the centre works collaboratively with three other Libraries Plus centres and in close partnership with centres in the locality that are managed by other providers to provide family support and learning, stay-and-play and access to health and adult training or employment support. Higham Ferrers, Thrapston and Oundle children's centres have each received their own inspection. Newton Road centre is located adjacent to Risdene Academy Primary School, which is inspected separately. Published reports for these other settings can be seen on our website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre serves a residential area to the south of Rushden town centre and the neighbouring rural area. There are pockets of deprivation in a generally affluent area, with two communities within the reach area among the 30% most deprived in the country. Many of the families served are within two miles of two other children's centres and use services in a variety of centres according to their preferences. Children move on to schools inside and outside the centre's immediate reach area. Children's skills and abilities on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage vary widely but are broadly below those expected for their age. The majority of families in the area are White British; about 9% are from minority ethnic groups, including a growing number from Eastern European backgrounds.

The centre has identified its priorities as: families in the two most deprived areas, children with lone parents, children in need, including those in need of protection, and those with disabilities.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The large majority of those in the areas recognised as most deprived are registered, although the number of families registered in the area as a whole has not yet reached a good level. Staff at the centre work closely with health visitors, midwives and Library Plus services to get to know young families in the area, including those expecting children, and encourage them to register. As a result of the focussed efforts of a new team of staff, registrations have risen from unacceptably low levels in the previous year to 66% in May 2014.
- The centre knows how many children and parents are coming to groups or being seen as individuals, but does not always know if families are from the groups identified by the centre as requiring support. The information that the centre holds about families attending is not yet collected in enough detail for the centre to know this accurately. The centre's data show that a minority of children and parents in workless households use services regularly, although this could be a low representation because the parents have not identified themselves in this group.
- Strong working relationships with health visitors ensures that those in need of intensive family support or early help with children's developmental difficulties are clearly identified and offered the services that are tailored to their needs. Assessments with other agencies under the Common Assessment Framework ensure children's needs are identified fully and services are offered. All children in need or subject to a child protection plan or care plan are contacted, and most families take up services until they no longer need that support.
- Collaboration with other centres ensures that the Newton Road offers access to a wide range of specialist advice and activities. Parents are signposted to midwifery services, fathers' groups and specialist benefits and housing advisors nearby and uptake of services is good.
- Families with complex family needs or in a crisis get effective family support through the centre or from a key worker from the local Targeted Prevention Team. Parenting advice is available from staff in all group activities and parents attending become confident in ensuring the safety and well-being of their families. The majority of lone parents known to Job Centre Plus are registered but the minority are taking up services regularly.
- Nearly all two-year-olds have their development checks on time so that needs are identified at as early an age as possible. Children with disabilities are referred promptly for specialist health and development support.
- Information and advice given by knowledgeable staff helps an increasing number of families to access childcare and take up their free entitlement to early education. Although the centre has not yet reached its own target, the very large majority of eligible three- and four-year-olds take up places, as do all two-year-olds referred for priority places.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre is at an early stage of developing fully effective ways of capturing all of the information that it needs about the difference its work is making. Staff have begun to implement a workable method of keeping track of all the types of contact they have with families but there is too little information collected yet to draw any conclusions.
- Although the centre gets to know families better over time, it does not always have much detail about families' needs initially. Individual needs are not always known well enough to be fully planned

for in group activities. The records kept by staff about children's and adults' learning are not always detailed enough for staff to be fully confident that the services offered are making the planned difference over time.

- Pre-school provision, including childminding, in the area is predominantly good quality. However, a below average proportion of children reach the levels that they should for their age in their all-round development, with the lowest areas of development being in reading and writing and mathematics 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 uses information about the weaker areas of children's development to plan the broad balance of activities. Groups and activities such as in 'Little Green fingers' and 'Story Sack' sessions focus on helping children improve their skills with ample opportunity to make marks in sand and mud, chalk and paint and always to consider maths ideas like bigger, smaller, more, and less. Staff make sensitive observations and record these consistently 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.
- Assessments under the Common Assessment Framework ensure children's needs are identified early. Help is provided and continues until families have more, or regain their confidence. One-to-one support for families and children who are most in need and for families whose child protection plans are ending is monitored effectively through local Targeted Prevention Team services.
- Health data indicate a higher than average level of obesity among families in the area and the centre works with all partners to encourage healthy lifestyles in all activities. High quality cookery courses are helping invited parents to improve their knowledge of healthy eating. However, there are no data to indicate that these fairly recent initiatives are having an effect on reducing obesity levels.
- The centre meets most of its health targets. The proportion of mothers sustaining breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks is below the local average and levels of obesity in Reception children are below average. Immunisation rates are high.
- The small number of adults who have attended adult learning courses, first aid and e-safety courses and all have completed their courses. A very few have gone on to further training and qualifications. Only a few parents have attended a relevant parenting course but all have made positive changes in their lives, 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. 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. However, 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 be 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 well-being.
- 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, adult education, Job Centre Plus, community law, childminders, schools and pre-schools have become much stronger under management and governance arrangements in place from September 2013. Information that was slow in coming through in the past, for example data on new births, is now routinely made available to enable the centre to plan support for families and to monitor its success in meeting their needs fully. Information from a wide range of partners helps the centre provide a relevant range of universal and targeted services to successfully engage a majority of most groups who are registered.
- The membership of the advisory board represents the centre's partners and community well and ensures that parents' views are represented about services that are already in place. Members are clear about the centre's targets and are beginning to ask questions that help the centre to understand if it is on track to reach them.
- 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. Cluster meetings help staff to share good practice.
- Parents' views are gathered at the end of most activities and the centre acts upon these when to shape the content, location and timing of most groups. Cookery courses with a food hygiene qualification have been introduced as a result of parents' requests. The advisory board and wider community of parents have received very basic information about the changes that the local authority proposes for children's centres later in 2014, but have not been consulted in enough depth or at an early stage of planning to influence the changes greatly.
- Staff consistently apply the local policies and procedures for safeguarding and are persistent in ensuring that their referrals to social care are followed up. Staff recruitment meets safeguarding requirements and diligent checks are made on all visitors to the centre and partners working with them. Signing in and out procedures and the checks that staff make on the premises and activities keep families safe and model good practice. 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	22137
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	444631
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	882
Cluster manager and Centre leader	Louise Moseley and Rose Griffiths
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