

Robins Children's Centre

Bosmere Primary School, Quinton Road, Needham Market, IP6 8BP

Inspection dates 18–19 June 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:

- Although the number of local families accessing the centre has increased, not enough families, particularly from priority groups, currently access services.
- Not enough is done to check the progress of the children who attend sessions. This means that it is not easy for staff to see which children are falling behind the stage of development expected for their age.
- Centre leaders and governors make insufficient use of data to precisely identify target groups, to shape services and to evaluate the impact of services, particularly with regard to the needs of local families in the outlying villages.
- There are too few opportunities for adults to participate in adult education courses, so that adults can improve their skills and knowledge for employability and to support their children's learning.

It has the following strengths:

- The centre helps families who are eligible to take up their free entitlement to good-quality early years places.
- Most partnerships are strong. Staff work well with health, services and social care colleagues to give good individual support to those families most in need and make sure vulnerable children are well protected.
- Parents really value the emotional support and practical help staff provide to them. They greatly appreciate the accessibility and approachability of staff.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Develop the way that children's progress is checked so that assessments are linked to the expected level of development and any development delay can be easily identified by staff.
- Work with partners in adult education to make certain that more adults access courses that will improve their employability and skills to support their children's learning in their home.
- Increase the engagement of families in target groups so that a large majority are regularly involved in the centre's activities, placing a particular focus on lone parents, workless families and disabled children.
- Use data and local intelligence in order to identify target groups more precisely and to make services more responsive to the needs of local families, particularly in the outlying villages.

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 one Additional Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff; representatives of the local authority; the Chair of the Advisory Board and a wide range of partners from education, social care, health and the wider community. They also spoke to parents and users of the centre.

The inspectors visited Wattisham Airfield community centre. They also observed the 'Bumps, Babes and Tots' session and 'Baby Café'. The centre manager and the integrated service manager attended all team meetings.

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

Inspection team

Susan Smith Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jackie Cousins

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Robins Children's Centre is a stand –alone centre. It shares a site with Bosmere Community Primary School located in the market town of Needham Market. The school is subject to separate inspection arrangements. Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority, along with an advisory board.

The centre manager also oversees Thurston and Stanton Children's Centre Group which is subject to a separate inspection. In partnership with other professionals, the centre offers a range of services including health care and information, sessions to help parents support their children's learning and development, adult learning and individual advice and guidance. The centre has a small team of staff comprising two family support practitioners and a support and information officer.

There are 746 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach area, which comprises small urban and rural communities and a military base at Wattisham.

The area is served by four early years' providers, five primary schools, one middle school and an upper school. Generally, the area is affluent but there are pockets of deprivation and some isolated communities with poor transport services. Around 7.4% of families are in receipt of out-of-work benefits and 13.1% are eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Most families (92%) are of White British heritage. Children enter early years provision at levels typically expected for their age.

The centre has identified its main priority groups as vulnerable families, teenage mothers, disabled children, lone parents and workless and service families with young children.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The quality of services provided by the centre is generally good, but the numbers of children and families benefiting from them are too low. While the centre has successfully registered all the teenage parents known in the area, it is only in regular contact with half of them. Contact with workless lone parents, workless families and disabled children is also too low at 50%.
- Although numbers are relatively low, all eligible two-year-olds take up their entitlement to early education, as do most three- and four-year-olds. The centres undertake specific work with early years' partners. For instance, the 'Chatterbox' project ensured that children have access to effective support in developing their communication and language skills.
- Running services in the Wattisham area has been very effective in ensuring that service families can access activities easily. Activities such as 'Tuesday for Women' provide good opportunities for mothers to make friendships while their children are cared for. However, the centre does not provide any services anywhere else in its reach area to ensure that families in other isolated areas can easily access services.
- The centre works successfully with health and social care professionals to identify families and children who are most in need to make sure they receive prompt support. Children, who are subject to child protection, children in need and those looked after are known to, and supported by, the centre. The provision of crèche places and, in some circumstances, funding for transport costs are supporting those in most need of access to services.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- A range of services are available that provide an appropriate balance between those open to everyone and those needing targeted support. Services are highly valued by those who attend. However, the centre does not engage enough local families that could benefit from these facilities to improve their well-being and life chances. As a result, outcomes are not improving for enough families in the area.
- The quality of care, guidance and support families receive is a strength of the centre. Families' needs are picked up and acted on swiftly. Tailored support is provided through early help assessments. Parents who access the centre's services speak highly of the emotional support and practical help staff provide in times of need. They particularly value that the staff are always available and listen to them. Staff are motivated and passionate about the work they carry out with individuals in most need.
- The effectiveness of some early years sessions is limited. While groups are running, centre staff provide good levels of support and guidance to individuals, but opportunities to share information, for example about how parents can support their children's learning at home are not regularly planned. In addition, staff do not always link their evaluation of what the children have learnt to do to what stage of development they are working at. This means that it is not easy for staff to see which children are falling behind the stage of development expected for their age.
- Mothers who choose to breastfeed have access to good support from staff at the centre who have all received appropriate training. Services such as the 'Baby Café' and 'Tiny Feet' provide an opportunity for mothers who may be isolated to meet, build friendships and support each other. Despite this, the proportion of mothers breastfeeding and sustaining breastfeeding from six to eight weeks remains stubbornly below the national average.

- There are too few learning opportunities for adults offered by the centre. Taster courses, such as flower arranging, have encouraged some adults to return to education who were initially reluctant to engage. Parents and other carers learn life-saving skills by attending first aid courses. However, only two courses have been run at the centre in recent years.
- Too few formal courses are offered by the centre to support parenting skills. Some parents receive individual parenting support which makes a difference to their families' lives and parents say they have happier home lives as a result.
- Too few adults are completing courses to improve their basic skills and using them to progress to further education or employment or to support their children's learning. The centre's tracking of adults is relatively new and, therefore, not showing the longer-term impact of its work for the large majority of families from workless households.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The leadership and management requires improvement because the analysis of the needs of the community has not been completed well enough. The manager is aware that she has yet to 'drill down' into the data and neighbourhood intelligence to establish where families are who are not accessing services and to plan services that are closely matched with local needs. For example, the needs of families in some of the outlying villages are not fully taken into account.
- Regular monitoring takes place by the local authority which has a realistic view about the centre's performance and has resulted in the drive for improvement includes setting targets for rates of registration and engagement that have motivated the centre's staff to reach out to more parents.
- Although the advisory board is well established and meets regularly it has insufficient representation from the local community, this limits its ability to have a clear vision of the direction in which the centre needs to travel and to take fully into account local needs.
- The small staff team is very able at operating services on a day-to-day basis and provides good-quality services. Staff feel valued in their roles, well led and managed, and say that supervision is a very positive process.
- A good range of information is available for parents at the centre. Users value the warm and welcoming environment at the centre and the good range of good quality resources.
- The centre works well with some key partners and supports a few new initiatives. Responsibilities relating to safeguarding are taken seriously and staff are carefully vetted and trained. Policies and procedures are suitable for the needs of the setting and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process is used appropriately to identify which professional can best support a family. Children who are subject to child protection plans, children in need and children in care are well supported by the centre.
- Parents' views are regularly sought after sessions and courses, and they are adequately involved in decision making through attending the advisory board. Parents and children show a high level of satisfaction with the centre, with many recommending it to others and keen to show their appreciation of the work done to improve their lives.

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	22533
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	442888
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	746
Centre leader	Debbie Frost
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