

# Vernon Terrace Primary School & Children's Centre

Vernon Terrace, Northampton, NN1 5HE

<b>Inspection dates</b>	17–18 June 2014
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:		
Access to services by young children and families		Inadequate	4
The quality of practice and services		Inadequate	4
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Inadequate	4

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a centre that is inadequate.

- The centre has successfully increased the number of children and families registered over the last twelve months so that the majority are now known to the centre. However, only a minority of families use the centre's services, including very few families living in workless households.
- Leaders and those responsible for governance have not undertaken a full assessment of the needs of families in the area. As a result, they are not sufficiently clear about which priority families they should be working with and do not therefore adequately track the attendance of these families or the impact that the centre's work has on improving their lives.
- Only one in five two-year-olds eligible for free early education are currently accessing a place at a nursery or with a child-minder.
- Too few parents access parenting support, as suitable parenting programmes are not available.
- The achievement of children living in the reach area is well below local and national levels and tracking does not clearly demonstrate the difference that the centre makes to children or adults or check whether it is effectively reducing inequalities.
- The centre does not have access to the health data it needs to set targets, plan and provide appropriate services, or measure the progress made towards improving health outcomes.
- Leadership and governance are not driving improvements quickly enough because planning lacks focus and is without specific measurable and achievable targets.
- The advisory board is not attended by community partners or parents.
- The mobile phone usage policy is not consistently enforced.

### It has the following strengths:

- One-to-one support makes a discernible difference to the lives of some vulnerable families who access family support, including those known to children's social care.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the access to services for young children and families by:
  - ensuring that all key target groups are correctly identified through a comprehensive needs analysis which identifies which specific groups require support
  - ensuring that most families are registered and the large majority of priority groups are engaged and their needs are met
  - robustly monitoring the engagement of these target groups to drive further improvements
  - working with the local authority to ensure that most two-year-old children eligible for free early education have access to places and seek to provide other support in the interim period
- Improve the quality and impact of services so that they are at least good by:
  - setting specific measurable targets for improvement based on a thorough needs analysis, and tracking the impact of services
  - ensuring that breastfeeding rates at six-to-eight weeks and obesity rates of children in Reception are at least in line with national levels
  - increasing the proportion of children, particularly from key target groups, achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years' Foundation Stage by carefully assessing, planning and tracking and evaluating how well children progress when attending activities, such as crèches
  - parents having access to high quality programmes which support them to develop their parenting skills and contribute to their children's development
- Strengthen leadership, governance and management by:
  - ensuring that the advisory board is attended by a wider range of partners and parents so that it is representative of the community and local services and helps to drive improvements at a faster pace and keeps a watchful eye on the centre's allocation of funding
  - developing an improvement plan which clearly includes specific achievable and realistic targets that are measurable and understood by all
  - ensuring that mobile phones are not used in sessions as per the centre's safeguarding policy
  - monitoring the quality of case files and offering feedback to staff on how these can be improved further; ensuring staff receive timely supervision to support them with the important work they undertake with vulnerable families

## 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 three Additional inspectors

The inspectors held meetings with: the headteacher/centre manager and assistant centre manager; several parents; a child in need; a social worker; the chair of the advisory board; two representatives from the local authority; family support workers and representatives from the local women's refuge.

The inspectors observed an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course and spoke to the literacy and numeracy course teacher on the telephone. Inspectors jointly observed the centre's work including a 'Baby Stay and Play' and 'Active Tots' with the centre manager. Two of the activities/services on the centre programme did not take place: 'Music and Movement' and the Post-natal Clinic.

Inspectors looked at a wide range of relevant documentation.

## Inspection team

Michael Blakey, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Karen Cooper

Additional inspector

Deborah Sanders

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

The centre is governed by Vernon Terrace Primary School and the headteacher and assistant manager are responsible for the centre on a day-to-day basis. The centre has an advisory board which is a sub-group of the school's governing body. The school was subject to a separate inspection in 2011. The report is available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The centre serves Northampton town centre. Most of the area falls into the top 30% most deprived in England, with one area in the top 20% most deprived. There are around 1,200 children under four years of age living in the area. The majority of families are from minority ethnic backgrounds, including from Asian and Eastern European backgrounds. Around 22% of children under the age of 15 live in poverty.

Children's skills, knowledge and ability on entry to school are below the levels expected for their age.

The centre has identified three key priority groups: children living in workless households; minority ethnic families; and fathers.

The centre was recently subject to a re-commissioning process by the local authority and, as a result, Action for Children will become responsible for the centre in August 2014. The headteacher was not present on the second day of the inspection.

### Inspection judgements

#### Access to services by young children and families Inadequate

- As a result of the lengthy re-commissioning process and uncertainty about future services, the programme of activities has been reduced over the last few months and the proportion of families accessing services has begun to decline.
- At 60%, the majority of families living in the reach area, including those expecting children, are registered with the centre. This is a significant improvement from the 41% seen a year ago and is a result of focussed outreach work and marketing by the staff team, including the use of social media. However, four out of every ten children are not yet registered, and only a minority of families, including those who are out of work, access services.
- Centre staff have not evaluated the needs of families in the reach area effectively to identify the key priority groups with which the centre should work. Of those groups that staff have identified, including families from different ethnic backgrounds and fathers, no more than the minority access services.
- The centre did have access to live birth data but this now well out of date. This information was used effectively by staff to encourage families with babies to attend 'Welcome to the World' so that they become familiar with what the centre does and how it may support them.
- Most three- and four-year-old children access early education. However, there are not enough nursery or child-minder places for all eligible two-year-olds in the area and the centre and local authority have not provided alternative arrangements to ensure these children are accessing good quality early learning.
- Some universal activities, such as 'Active Tots', are well attended and parents say that they value the opportunity to play with their children at well resourced sessions such as this.

**The quality of practice and services**

Inadequate

- The day-to-day management and delivery of services has been challenging during the period of re-commissioning and this process has caused a dip in staff morale which is continuing during this uncertain time about the future of the centre and staff roles. Despite this, resources have been used effectively used to begin to increase registration and reach to families.
- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development in the reach area, at 39%, is well below levels seen locally and nationally. Although, achievement of children at the end of the Early Years' Foundation Stage improved between 2010 and 2012, leaders and managers are not able to confidently show that they are narrowing inequalities for children who regularly attend the children's centre.
- The quality of formal adult learning is a strength. Good quality literacy and numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages courses, which are delivered at the centre, are well attended and help to build confidence and prepare adults for work.
- One-to-one parenting support from family support workers is effective but the wider range of provision to improve parenting is too limited to make a discernible difference. The first and last Solihull parenting programme, which the centre delivered in 2014, was very poorly attended and only one parent completed the course. This was partly because the programme was not appropriate for some of those parents referred by children's social care.
- The centre works effectively with health visitors and midwives to enable families to have access to the full range of universal health services. However, information on breastfeeding rates at six-to-eight weeks and obesity rates at the end of Reception are not available to the centre and, in the absence of any other tracking, the centre does not know how effective these services have been. A newly commissioned breastfeeding support specialist has, so far, only provided advice and guidance to four mothers.

**The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

Inadequate

- Leaders and managers have not fully established processes to track the difference that services make to children or adults. However, they have recently introduced a tool to assess the needs of families and then re-evaluate the difference their support has made. So far, this has only been completed with one parent but clearly in this case it demonstrated the positive impact of the centre. Case files also show very good support for these targeted individual families.
- The impact of governance, particularly from the local authority, has been limited. In February 2013, the local authority correctly identified that the centre was underperforming and issued a formal 'notice to improve'. As a result of this, the centre received intensive support, challenge and regular monitoring. However, five months later the notice was removed at a time when the improvement targets set had not been met. At the time of the annual review in September 2013, some of the key improvement tasks had still not been completed, including the full identification and tracking of target groups. At the time of the inspection some of these tasks were still not completed.
- Improvement planning lacks sufficient focus to drive improvements and ensure that the centre's effectiveness is at least good. The centre's 'Challenge and Improve' plan currently has 22 'measures' on by which it is performance managed by the local authority. However, some of the targets associated with these measures are not based on an accurate current profile of the centre. As a result, the targets set are not always realistic or achievable; neither can they be measured

accurately.

- The advisory board, which is currently made up of school governors and a local authority officer, is not representative of the wide range of other local services or parents in the reach area. Although the board has increasingly challenged the performance of the centre it has not received the support or training that it needs to fully undertake its role in the more rapid improvement of the centre or oversight of the centre's finances and use of funding.
- All staff and volunteers are safely recruited as part of child protection procedures. Safeguarding policies are in place, including a No Mobile Phone Use in Sessions policy. Despite this, inspectors observed parents using phones in two sessions with children who were unchallenged by staff.
- Case files clearly record interactions with families in a consistent and effective way. However, leaders and managers do not adequately quality assure the case-work. The supervision of staff is often too infrequent to support them in undertaking their important work with particularly vulnerable families.
- Partnership working with the recently appointed Children in Need social worker is good. As a result, some children in need and families of children subject to child protection plans have been supported so that they no longer require interventions or this level of social care. The effective use of the Common Assessment Framework procedures ensures that some families receive the early help that they need.

## 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/Group details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	23411
<b>Local authority</b>	Northamptonshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	444632
<b>Managed by</b>	The governing body of Vernon Terrace Primary School on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	1,200
<b>Centre leader</b>	Jackie Lapsa
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not Previously Inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01604 633894
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