

Penfold Children's Centre

Penfold Close, Kingsthorpe, Northampton, NN2 8AP

Inspection dates 2–3 July 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not previously inspected	
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 centre requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Despite a large majority of families registered with the centre, not enough lone parents and those from workless households and minority ethnic groups are using the centre's services.
- The centre's work to help families live healthily is not sufficient to help reduce child obesity.
- There are not enough opportunities for workless adults to volunteer, train or acquire skills that will improve their chances of gaining employment.
- Improvement targets are not sufficiently precise and measurable. As a result, the centre cannot measure and show clearly what impact its services are having on the lives of children and families.
- Parents are not involved in advisory board meetings or sufficiently involved in shaping the services offered by the centre.

It has the following strengths:

- The centre is a warm welcoming place where all families feel at ease.
- Staff know the local community well. They listen to families and provide good-quality support that meets their needs well.
- The centre's work to help children prepare for school is effective and assists their learning and development. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is above average.
- Parent workshops help to build their confidence, improve parenting skills and enable them to manage their children's behaviour positively.
- Leaders, managers and governors know the area well, are managing change effectively and are improving the centre. They are committed to meeting the needs of children and families, especially the most disadvantaged, to the very best of their abilities.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of families from workless households, lone parents and minority ethnic groups who use the centre's services so that the large majority benefit from them.
- Work more closely with health partners to reduce childhood obesity by providing more effective support and useful sessions that are well attended.
- Extend the opportunities for adults from workless households to improve their economic well-being by:
 - actively promoting volunteering so that a higher number of parents sign up
 - working more closely with training providers to extend further training and development chances.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - setting precise and measurable targets for improvement to monitor and evaluate the centre's effectiveness
 - extending parents' involvement in the governance of the centre and increasing their representation on the advisory board.

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 two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, the senior family worker and cluster manager; a representative of the local authority; members of the governing body and advisory board; parents and users of the centre; and representatives of organisations who work in partnership with the centre.

The inspectors visited activities taking place in the centre. They jointly observed one activity with the cluster manager.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a sample of case files and a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Steve Nelson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Peter Towner

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Penfold Children's Centre operates in the Kingsthorpe ward from one site. The centre provides services for families by commissioning them from a range of partners and by working in partnership with health visitors, midwives and speech therapists in the shared delivery of services. The range of activities offered by the centre includes support at the local community baby clinic, antenatal birth clinic, breastfeeding support and baby massage. It signposts families to a range of providers that offer adult education, volunteering opportunities, and activities designed to support parents and carers back into employment and training. Activities are planned with two other local children's centres to ensure a full range of services is available to families.

The centre is run by the local authority. It has a single advisory body consisting of representatives from partner organisations and key stakeholders that work with the children's centre and the local authority. There have been substantial changes to the way services are delivered by children's centres including recent changes in staffing. At present the senior family worker is responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre and reports to the cluster manager.

The children's centre has 698 children under the age of five in its area. The large majority of the families living in the area are from White British backgrounds. A growing number of families using the centre are from minority ethnic groups. The area is relatively affluent with pockets of deprivation. About 11% of children and adults who live in the area come from homes that are dependent on benefits and where no-one is in work.

When they start early years provision, the majority of children have skills, knowledge and abilities that are similar to those expected for their age. There is no on-site childcare provision.

The main priority groups assessed in need of the centre's services are workless families, lone parents, minority ethnic groups and young parents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Only half of young families with young children living in the area regularly engage with the centre and this requires improvement. Even though the numbers are increasing, a minority of families living in workless households, lone parents and minority ethnic groups are registered and do not access services enough.
- The large majority of children and their families in the area are registered at the centre. The effective working with midwives increases access to services for expectant mothers who are encouraged to register with the centre at an early stage.
- There are suitable arrangements in place to ensure that most eligible two-year-old children take up their entitlement to early education. Nearly all three-year-olds have taken up their free early years education. As a result, children start school well prepared for learning.
- Leaders know the area well and have used the information they receive to deliver good-quality services out in the community. For example, weekly 'Wiggles and Giggles' sessions provided at Sunnyside Academy are well attended by families from priority groups.
- Children and families access a range of services when they are in regular contact with the centre. Attendance is high at good-quality 'Baby Massage' sessions run by the centre's own staff. The weekly 'Family Matters' drop-in support sessions also have high take-up rates.

- The crèche facilities, which are often available during the parent programmes delivered at the Penfold Library, are highly valued by parents as they enable them to attend the sessions. The centre promotes information about its activities and other services of help and advice well to encourage those less likely to access services, particularly through the use of social media.
- Staff know the most vulnerable local families through working closely with health and social care colleagues. They share information, advice and planning to ensure these families receive sustained and regular support. This leads to productive and useful home visits and individual work that helps these families to live safer and improves their well-being.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The quality of practice and services of services requires improvement because not enough families who are most in need, such as minority ethnic groups and lone parents, attend sessions regularly. This reduces the centre's overall impact on improving outcomes for children and families.
- The impact of the centre's services on families' economic well-being is not well developed. Some individuals have volunteered in the centre or have been supported back into work. However, insufficient adults from workless households have been helped to take up training that enhances their skills, employability and life chances.
- Families develop generally healthy lifestyles through attending the centre's development health checks, 'Preparation for Birth and Beyond' and 'Little Cooks' sessions. Above-average numbers of mothers continue to breastfeed their children until they are six-to-eight weeks old, giving babies a healthy start to life. However, the work done with health staff to reduce the above-average obesity rates in young children has not made enough difference.
- There are good opportunities for parents and children to play and learn together in sessions such as 'Little Explorers' that offer new play ideas that develop children's confidence and independence. Children greatly enjoy the stimulating range of learning and play activities, such as play dough and painting. Consequently, children make good progress in developing their social, physical and communication skills.
- An increasing number of families experience significant challenges in their lives, and the centre's work to help them get back on track is effective. Case files are maintained to a good standard, are kept up to date, and include families' views and opinions. These files provide compelling examples of strong multi-agency work and the positive impact this has on reducing inequalities and improving families' lives.
- Families who attend the children's centre invariably receive good support and guidance. Staff work particularly well with vulnerable families who need specialist support and attention in areas such as behaviour management and parenting skills. The centre has been effective in assisting families, including young parents, to deal with housing and benefits issues, sort out debt problems and overcome feelings of isolation.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because the centre's impact on improving outcomes for local families is too variable. Strategies to engage with families have not ensured the large majority of families from some priority groups are using the centre's services. After a period of change, centre leaders are becoming increasingly effective and are now developing the centre's services well.

- The advisory board provides suitable oversight of the work of the centre. The board's monitoring systems hold staff to account and assure the work of the centre's partners. Parents are not represented on the advisory board and their contribution to shaping the centre's performance or helping shape delivery is limited.
- Self-evaluation appropriately identifies the centre's strengths and weaknesses. Key priorities are identified and the centre has a suitable improvement plan that includes clear intentions. However, there are insufficient quantifiable targets for improvement to enable the centre to measure its performance.
- The local authority constructively challenges the centre through the annual conversation processes, regular visits and analysis of the centre's performance data. It has an accurate picture of the centre's performance and provides appropriate support to assist in the centre's on-going development.
- Staff feel valued in their role, and well led and managed. They show a strong determination to do their very best to help local families improve their well-being and lead happy fulfilled lives. Staff supervision is regular and supportive and links well to appraisal and professional development training.
- Safeguarding is a high priority, and policies and procedures, including staff vetting checks, reflect this. The centre works well with social care staff to ensure families remain safe, and there is effective intervention for children in need, those subject to child protection plans and for children being helped through the Common Assessment Framework procedures, including looked after children.
- Resources are adequate to meet the needs of families. The shared use of services and activities with neighbouring centres reduces costs and ensures there is an appropriate balance of universal and targeted services to meet the needs of children and families in the area.

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	22356
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	444636
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	698
Senior family worker	Sue Newby
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01604 820909
Email address	ssuenewby@northamptonshire.gov.uk

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