

Abington Children's Centre

Abington Library, Lindsay Avenue, Northampton, NN3 2SJ

Inspection dates	8–9 July 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:		
		Not applicable	
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 is not improving rapidly enough. Although, leaders had identified that this centre was inadequate actions to improve it have not been sharply focused or rigorously monitored by leaders, managers or those responsible for governance.
- The centre does not routinely seek, receive, or analyse all the information it needs from the local authority or health partners to help it target services precisely. Whilst registration has improved in recent months, services are not sufficiently targeted on those families most in need of support. As a result, only a minority of the families living in the most deprived areas regularly access the centre's services.
- Systems to monitor, track and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the centres' services are in the early stages of development. Consequently, the centre is unable to show the difference it is making to all of the children and families it engages with.
- Although centre staff give safeguarding the highest priority, health and social care partners do not always share information about vulnerable families in a timely way. As a result, although families receive support, often this is delayed, which limits early intervention and compromises the protection of children.
- Case files and recorded assessments of need are not of good enough quality and the monitoring of case files is not sufficiently rigorous to ensure support is of a high standard.
- The centre has not established links with local early years providers or schools to help improve children's readiness for school. In addition, it has not been effective in identifying and ensuring all eligible two year-old children access their free entitlement to early education. As a result, education achievement gaps between the most deprived children and the rest are not narrowing sufficiently.

It has the following strengths:

- Families who access the centre value the support they receive from the dedicated staff team and enjoy some good quality activities such as 'Forest School' and 'Chatter Natter'.
- Centre staff are working hard to increase registration, including engaging with the large majority of families from minority ethnic groups, through partnerships with the library and community groups, and by providing services in a range of outreach venues.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Leaders, managers and those responsible for governance should:
 - increase the rigour and frequency of evaluation and monitoring of the quality of the centre's services and set challenging outcome and performance improvement measures
 - ensure that systems for recording the assessment of families' needs, particularly those most in need, the planning of services and checks on the impact of the centres' work are implemented and fully effective.
- The local authority, social care staff and health partners should ensure the centre receives detailed and timely data and information so that it can improve the targeting of its services and take action to quickly contact, engage, support and help safeguard all children and families.
- Improve the quality of case files and support for children and families by ensuring:
 - detailed and thorough assessment of needs
 - clear and time bound action plans involving relevant partners and parents
 - rigorous monitoring, supervision and guidance for staff on the quality standard expected.
- Improve the support for children's learning and development and help narrow the gaps in children's educational attainment by:
 - ensuring activities are well planned to take account of the learning requirements of those children most in need =
 - establishing strong links with early years settings including schools to help identify and support children to get ready for the next stage of education
 - identifying all two year-olds who are eligible for free early years places and encouraging their families to take up this offer.

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 the staff at the centre and senior staff from Libraries Plus and leaders and managers from the local authority. They also met with representatives from partner agencies and another centre, parents, volunteers and representatives from the advisory board.

The inspectors visited an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class and a crèche held at a United Reform Church, a 'Forest School' session held in Abington Park, and 'Chatter Natter' and 'Top Tips' held in a Methodist Church.

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

Inspection team

Jean-Marie Blakeley, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Ann Taylor

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

From designation in 2010 until July 2013 the Abington Children's Centre was managed by Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (NHFT). Since July 2013, under temporary arrangements due to end in July 2014, the centre has been managed by the local authority service, Northamptonshire Libraries Plus. A cluster manager leads this and two other children's centres. A part-time senior family worker manages the day-to-day running of the centre with the support of three other part-time staff.

During the period of transfer of management there were staffing vacancies but the centre has been fully staffed since January 2014. The centre works collaboratively with other neighbouring Libraries Plus children's centres to provide family support and learning, stay-and-play activities and access to health and adult training. Many of the families served by Abington live close to two other children's centres and use services in a variety of centres according to their preferences.

The centre serves a residential area to the east of the town centre of Northampton. There are 853 children under five-years living in the reach area. There are pockets of deprivation in this mixed area with some more affluent parts and one community among the 20% most deprived in the country. Around 7% of children live in workless households. Children's skills and abilities on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are well below those expected for their age. The majority of families in the area are White British; about 27% are from minority ethnic groups, including a growing number from Eastern European backgrounds.

The centre has not clearly identified its key target groups but recognises that minority ethnic families and children and families living in the areas of most deprivation are amongst those most needing its support.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- Not enough families living in the areas of most deprivation are accessing the centre's services. The centre does not receive all the information it needs, in a timely manner, so that it can contact all families and those expecting children and make sure they know about the services and support it has to offer. As a result, leaders and managers do not know if children and families are accessing the services they need.
- Leaders and managers do not routinely use data and other information available to them to identify all of their key target groups and to monitor how well they engage in relevant services and activities. Whilst the registration rate is increasing, the centre is not active enough in seeking out and engaging with the families who are in most need of support.
- Information supplied by health visitors on new births does not include sufficient information for the centre to be able to follow up new parents quickly, including those who may have pressing needs. As a result, not all new born babies are known to the centre. Information packs are posted out but not in community languages and this restricts their usefulness in marketing services to the growing number of minority ethnic families.
- Data, observations and outreach work are not used well enough to accurately identify families' needs. Assessments undertaken on individual families who require specific help lack sufficient detail. As a result, it is not clear how well the needs of families have been identified and whether or not support is timely, and relevant, or has helped improve families' lives.
- In the last few months, centre staff have worked hard to provide an increasing range of activities in community venues and increase registration. However, not enough of the activities are targeted at the families or children most in need of support. The 'Welcome Group' and the 'ESOL' course have helped increase the participation of minority ethnic families. Nevertheless, although the very large majority of minority ethnic families are now registered, not enough regularly access the centre's services.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- The centre fails to track and monitor the quality and impact of the services it delivers. It is not sufficiently clear about who its key target groups are or the outcomes it intends to meet. The centre is unable to show the difference it is making to all children and families it engages with.
- The centre has not developed effective relationships with local pre-schools and schools to help identify and prioritise children in most need of support and to help improve children's readiness for school. It has not been sufficiently involved or successful in ensuring all eligible two-year-old children access their entitlement to early years education. The overall take up of free early years education by three and four-year-olds is high. However, the centre cannot demonstrate its involvement in that success or its actions to improve access by families in the areas of most deprivation where the take up is low.
- The centre is not doing enough to reduce inequalities and ensure good outcomes for every child. Gaps in the attainment of different groups of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are not narrowing sufficiently. The centre is unaware that the percentage of boys and children in receipt of free school meals achieving a good level of development is particularly low. As a result, activities and sessions are not focused on the learning needs of targeted children or planned precisely to help narrow specific gaps in these children's learning and development. Children start school with skills well below those expected for their age.
- Social care and health partners do not always share information or refer vulnerable families to

the centre in a timely way. As a result, intervention and prevention to ensure the safeguarding of children is not fully effective. Support for families is often delayed by several months. This limits the centre's ability to provide early intervention, help adults improve their parenting skills or encourage them to access other services which may benefit their children.

- Case files and recorded assessments of need are not of good enough quality and lack sufficient detail or specific and time bound action plans. Referral forms are often incomplete. The intended outcomes, details of specific support and the agreement of parents are not clear. The monitoring of case files is not sufficiently rigorous or detailed to ensure support provided is of the highest standard and to demonstrate that staff are adequately supervised and guided.
- The centre consults with parents and is beginning to use this information to inform the development of the centre's services. As a consequence, parents that access the centre feel that their views are valued. Some adult learning opportunities such as mathematics and English courses have recently been provided as a direct response to parental requests.
- Sessions such as 'Chatter Natter' and 'Forest School' are fun and enjoyed by families that attend. However, not enough of the families most in need of support access these and the other sessions the centre provides.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- Leadership, governance and management of the centre are inadequate. There is a lack of rigour and scrutiny in the monitoring of the centre's effectiveness at all levels. Leaders and managers are aware of most of the issues concerning the centre's performance. However, they have not taken sufficiently focused and robust actions or used resources sufficiently well to support and drive priority improvement.
- Data are not used effectively to identify, target, monitor and track the engagement of key priority groups. Consequently, and despite performance monitoring, quarterly meetings and the annual conversation visit by the local authority, the centre is not improving rapidly.
- The development plan lacks rigour and has no precise short term targets and key priorities to bring about the rapid improvement that is needed. Performance targets and success measures are not used well enough to enable managers, the local authority, or the advisory board to effectively monitor and help increase the impact of the centre's services. As a result, outcomes are not improving fast enough.
- The recently established advisory board is supportive of the centre. However, it does not have a clear enough understanding of the centre's performance because of a lack of complete data and information about the centre's effectiveness. This prevents the board from effectively challenging the centre in order to secure further improvements.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures meet statutory requirements. The new service provider has ensured all staff have appropriate training in safeguarding. The centre has regular access to the names of children living in the area who may be subject to a child protection plan, looked after children or those identified as in need. However, social workers and health visitors are often too slow in referring families to the centre for any additional support. As a result, the centre is unable to demonstrate sufficient impact of its early help and prevention work.

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	20028
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	444642
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	853
Centre leader	Shanaz Zaman
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01604 367360
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