

North Reading Children's Centre Cluster

Caversham Children's Centre, Amersham Road, RG4 5NA

Inspection dates	22–23 July 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		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This group of centres requires improvement.

- This is a rapidly improving group of children's centres. Access to services has strengthened very quickly as a result of strong leadership, significantly improved information sharing, and strategic governance.
- As a result of very effective shared day-to-day management, strong partnerships and effective work in the community, most families are now known. The large majority of children living in the least advantaged area, near to the Caversham Centre, have accessed services. Other priority groups are well engaged. Information shows that improvement has been impressive over the past six months.
- Partnerships with health services, including midwives and health visitors, are strong. As a result, families expecting children and new parents are known to the centre and receive timely support and guidance when they need it.
- Opportunities for adults to learn and develop their parenting skills are a strength. The number of adults starting courses is good and retention and success rates are very good. Many parents go on to higher-level courses. Families of minority ethnic backgrounds, especially those for whom English as an additional language, are very well engaged in these services.

It is not good because:

- Systems to track the achievement of children and adults, and to demonstrate the impact of family support, are fit for purpose. However, these systems are too new and have not yet had time to be embedded or to demonstrate the impact of the centre's work.
- The centre has correctly identified, through its own monitoring processes, that the quality of services is not consistently good. Also, development plans are not sufficiently focused on outcomes.
- At 41%, the proportion of eligible two-year-olds taking up their free entitlement to early education is too low.
- Children who are eligible for free school meals do not achieve as well as their peers. The most recent information suggests that a minority of these children will achieve a good level development in 2014 compared to their peers who achieve much better than national levels.

What does the centre/group need to do to improve further?

- Improve access to services by working with the local authority and health partners to ensure that:
 - almost all families are registered and that a rising proportion continue to attend services until their needs are met
 - most two-year-olds who are eligible for free early education are supported to access high-quality activities
 - services have access to live birth data.
- Strengthen the quality and impact of services by:
 - embedding new systems to track the progress that children and adults make, in order to demonstrate the impact of family support
 - ensuring that most of the activities and services delivered or commissioned by the centre are of high quality
 - working with local early years settings and schools to ensure that disadvantaged children achieve as well as their peers.
- Strengthen leadership, governance and management by:
 - sharpening improvement plans so that targets are even more specific, time defined and focused on outcomes
 - supporting the advisory board so that it can confidently challenge centre leaders.

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: leaders and managers; front line staff; parents; representatives from the local authority; a social worker; a health visitor; a midwife; and the Chair of the Advisory Board.

The inspectors visited the two children’s centre sites and observed or jointly observed the following activities: the ‘family group’; ‘fun to play’; ‘stay and play’; ‘active music and rhyme’ and two-year-old health checks.

The inspection covered the following centres: Caversham Children’s Centre and North Reading Children’s Centre.

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

Inspection team

Michael Blakey, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Megan Dauksta	Additional Inspector
Rabbi Dr Chanan Tomlin	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

North Reading Cluster is designated as a group and consists of North Reading and Caversham Children's Centres. The centres deliver a range of services including midwife and health visitor clinics, early learning activities, family support and adult learning. The centres serve an area to the north of the River Thames, which is relatively affluent with some pockets of deprivation. There are approximately 2,349 children aged under five years of age living in the area and 220 of these live in the area immediately surrounding Caversham Children's Centre, which is one of the top 5% least advantaged areas in England.

Caversham Children's Centre shares a building with Kingfisher Daycare (URN EY391360) and Caversham Nursery School (URN 109750). Emmer Green Pre-School (URN 109794) shares the site at North Reading Children's Centre. The reports of these settings are available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The group has a shared cluster manager, who is employed and line managed by the local authority, who started in October 2013. Over the past six months there have been significant changes to leadership and management. The centre now has a staff team comprising: a senior family development worker; a family development worker; and four part-time activity workers. The local authority provides governance and an advisory board is in place. There is no parents' forum.

Overall, unemployment rates are well below those seen nationally and the proportion of children living in poverty is low. The large majority of children living in the reach area are from White British backgrounds, with approximately a third from a wide range of other minority ethnic groups, many of these living in the Caversham area.

Overall, children enter early years education with skills, knowledge and understanding that are in line with the expectations for their age.

The centre has identified certain families as its key priority groups, including those with children living in the least advantaged area and those with children in greatest need, including those subject to child protection plans and those identified by social care. The centre has also identified families through Early Help services or maternity pathways and two-year-old children who are eligible for free early education.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Leaders, managers, staff and partners have rightly focused on improving access to services. As a result, the large majority of families living in the area, including those expecting children, are registered.
- Leaders recognise the need to continue to drive improvements in this area. As a result, the local authority is now providing birth registrar information to support all centres in identifying and registering families. However, live birth information is not yet available to the group because local health managers incorrectly state that this cannot be shared.
- Access to health services for everyone is a strength across the centres, partly because these are delivered from the children's centres. For example, in the first quarter of 2014/15 alone, 235 children attended a health visitor clinic at the centre. Also, 78 accessed a jointly delivered nine-month or two-year-old check, and 42 accessed speech or language support.
- Access to services for those families correctly identified as priority groups is good. The large majority of children living in the least advantaged area are registered and accessing services. Most of the children known to social services are engaged. Three quarters of those identified locally through the 'early help' services are receiving support or accessing groups. The centres' work in

the community, including home visits, has contributed well to increasing engagement of these families.

- Although the proportion of three- and four-year-olds accessing free early education is high, the number of two-year-olds taking up their entitlement is low, at 40%. The centres are already working on this, and recognise that these children will require additional support to be ready for school.
- Access to work-related learning is good. Half of those parents undertaking a level 3 qualification in childcare are from the least advantaged area that the centre serves. All of these parents have undertaken level 1 and level 2 qualifications at the centre and all are volunteering for 10 hours or more a week.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The group delivers an appropriate range of services which are open to all, and some which are specifically designed for families in most need.
- Appropriate systems and procedures to track the progress that children and adults make, when they attend the centre's services, are new. As a result, leaders and managers are not yet able to demonstrate the contribution that the centre makes to improving outcomes for children and families. Nevertheless, parents state clearly that the centre makes a discernible difference to their lives.
- The centre's own records, confirmed by inspection observation, correctly identify that the quality of sessions and activities is not consistently good. Leaders have appropriately taken decisions to halt or change services that have not been good enough. They have also effectively supported staff and partners to strengthen the quality of what they deliver. Planning of sessions is supported by a qualified teacher and there is now a more consistent approach across the group of centres.
- In 2013, the large majority of children achieved a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year. Although overall this is higher than that seen locally and nationally, some children are not yet well supported to be ready for school. Those children who live in the least advantaged area and those eligible for free school meals do not achieve as well as their peers. The centres' own unvalidated information for 2014 suggests that this trend is likely to continue. Centre leaders have rightly identified this as an area for even greater focus and priority.
- Working in partnership with Caversham and New Bridge nursery schools, leaders have planned a course for parents who have English as an additional language. This has been designed to help reduce inequalities by helping parents to understand the English education system and the importance of learning through play.
- As a result of good partnership working, health outcomes are generally positive. Obesity rates of children at the end of Reception Year are better than national levels. The proportion of mothers breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks is similar to that seen nationally. However, there is some variation in rates between the two centres.
- One-to-one support for those families in most need is good and often highly effective. Case files are well kept and parents clearly describe the impact of the centre's work on improving their lives. As one parent said: 'I had post-natal depression and I wanted to give up. Without them [centre staff] I wouldn't be here.'
- The centre has very recently introduced a system to capture information and track the progress families have made. However, leaders have not yet used this information to review how well families are doing.
- Parents access a good range of evidence-based parenting programmes and evaluations show that success rates are good and that they effectively improve parenting skills.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The recently appointed leadership team has an accurate view of the centre's current performance and what needs to be improved. They are highly reflective and self-critical and do not always recognise the significant improvements that have already been made.

- Resources are used well to target services where they are needed and to those families in most need of support.
- Improvement plans have been focused and very effective so far, as shown by the significant improvements in access to services. However, the current development plan is not sufficiently focused on what outcomes the group is seeking to improve. Also, it does not detail exactly who will do what, and by when, to contribute to these improvements. Despite this, everyone is clear about their roles and responsibilities and what they are seeking to do.
- Supervision arrangements are effective. The cluster manager is managed directly by the local authority and receives regular one-to-one support. All staff receive both personal supervision and these records are well kept. Casework supervision is also undertaken to ensure families are effectively safeguarded and these records are held, appropriately, on family case files.
- Partnerships, particularly with health services and adult learning, are very strong and partnership working with children's social care has improved. The centre now knows all of the children known to social care and is working with most families identified as requiring early help. Early help checks are undertaken to assess families' needs.
- All statutory safeguarding checks, including the safe recruitment of staff, are undertaken and meet current requirements.
- The advisory board has recently become more aware of its role and function and embraced this fully. A group of new parents have been invited and leaders are confident that they will attend. The board, although very supportive, is not yet challenging the centre fully or holding leaders to account, and this is an aspect for further development. The cluster manager is supporting this by selecting key themes for each meeting and considering focused sub-groups.
- Following the inspection of East Reading Children's Centre cluster as inadequate, the local authority has made significant changes to the way it manages children's centres. As a result, the leadership team at this centre now has access to almost all of the information it needs to undertake its role effectively.

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 well-being 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.

Group details

Unique reference number	80645
Local authority	Reading
Inspection number	432805
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2349
Centre leader	Rebecca Bateman
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	01189 375046
Email address	rebecca.bateman@reading.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20597 Caversham Children's Centre
- 21095 North Reading Children's Centre

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