

Norfolk - AfC South East

(Lots 8 and 10)

Manor Field Infant & Nursery School, Manor Road, Long Stratton, Norwich, NR15 2XR

Inspection dates	12–13 August 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 group of centres is inadequate.

- Managers do not use data well enough to identify or prioritise the specific target groups in the area.
- Governors, leaders and managers do not know the proportion of local children and families, including those from target groups, who are engaged meaningfully with centre group services.
- Monitoring of the quality and impact of the group's work does not help leaders to know what difference they are making to children's readiness for school, to improved parenting skills or parents' further education or job prospects.
- The manager and staff are not held to account closely enough and self-evaluation is inaccurate.
- Development targets often lack clear milestones to help leaders evaluate improvements.
- The records of staff suitability are not checked regularly by the manager. Case files lack management oversight and do not help staff to measure the progress of the families with which they work. Too little attention is given to e-safety.
- The manager chairs the advisory board and this constitutes a conflict of interest. Not enough partners attend meetings regularly, or fully understand their roles and responsibilities. Too few adults, including from target groups, help to make decisions about the group's services.
- The tracking of children's progress, and joint working with settings and schools is poor. Some sessions do not help parents to support their children's learning.

It has the following strengths:

- The large majority of children and families are registered. Take-up of funded nursery education places, including by eligible two-year-olds, is high, with most children placed in good or better settings.

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

- Improve governance by ensuring that the local authority and Action for Children help the group manager to understand and use data to:
 - identify the correct target groups so that the group's resources are prioritised upon improving access, meaningful engagement and outcomes for the most disadvantaged children and families
 - evaluate the effectiveness of the group's services accurately, based on quantifiable evidence of impact, so that the right improvement priorities are identified
 - set challenging and measurable targets which include clear milestones, to enable the manager, advisory board, Action for Children and the local authority to assess the progress made toward these priorities
 - measure the meaningful engagement of the target groups and families in general, in order to gauge how well the centre group's services are meeting the needs of children and families in the reach area
 - measure the difference the centre group is making to children's readiness for school
 - measure the difference the centre group is making to improving parenting skills
 - ensure that there are sufficient adult learning opportunities provided to develop the employability and long-term economic well-being of adults.
- Improve the local authority's oversight of the centre group's effectiveness and make sure that the manager has accurate feedback about the authority's view of the centre group's effectiveness.
- Improve Action for Children's governance by:
 - holding the centre manager more closely to account for the quality and impact of provision
 - strengthening the performance management of staff by improving monitoring of practice and ensuring that all staff are held to account for their contribution to improving the outcomes for children and families and meeting the group's targets.
- Improve governance by ensuring that the advisory board appoints an independent chair; broadens its membership and improves the attendance of partner agencies. Provide training to the board to enable them to understand their challenge and support roles fully and to hold the centre group to account.
- Strengthen safeguarding arrangements by:
 - regularly reviewing the accuracy of the single central record and increasing the attention given to e-safety
 - improving the quality of family case files so that they provide evidence of robust managerial oversight and help staff to evaluate and measure accurately the progress being made by the children and families with which they are working.
- Increase the numbers of parents, including those from target groups, who are meaningfully involved in decision-making about the development of services and activities.
- Improve the way children are prepared for schools by enhancing:
 - the quality of early-years' sessions and practice to help parents support their children's learning
 - the systems to track and assess children's progress
 - the joint working with early-years settings and schools, in order to support transition to school and to demonstrate more clearly what difference the centre group is making to children's readiness for school.

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with Action for Children, representatives of the local authority and partner agencies, members of the advisory board, the manager, staff and parents.

The inspectors visited all three children's centres: Long Stratton, Harleston and Loddon. The inspectors observed a 'Ready for school' session and a 'Family Fun Day'.

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

Inspection team

Linda McLarty, Lead Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Pamela Blackman

Her Majesty's Inspector

Marianik Ellender-Gele

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

This group of three children's centres is known as Norfolk - AfC South East (Lots 8 and 10). It is one of a number of groups managed by Action for Children on behalf of Norfolk County Council. It comprises Long Stratton, Harleston and Loddon children's centres. The Long Stratton Children's Centre is co-located with Manor Field Infant and Nursery School and the Harleston Children's Centre is on the same site as Harleston Primary School. Loddon Children's Centre is based in two rooms at the back of Loddon Infant and Nursery School, and the centre telephone is based in the school office. Due to lack of space, the rooms at Loddon are used mainly as a service delivery venue for sessions provided for non-mobile children, such as infant massage, clinic and 'Breast is Best' sessions. The centres share leadership, management, and a joint advisory board.

Long Stratton is the largest children's centre in this rural group, where the centres are between 10-15 miles apart. Also on the Long Stratton site is the linked early years provider Jack in the Box Nursery. The schools and day care were not part of this inspection and their reports are available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

There are 1,837 children aged from birth to four years living in the reach area of the three children's centres. Children enter early years provision with skills and capabilities below the levels typically seen in children of their age.

The three children's centres serve rural communities of relative affluence, ranked within the 70% least deprived in the country. They have worked together as a group since October 2012. The majority of the population is of White British heritage, with European migrant families making up the most prevalent minority ethnic group. Unemployment across the group's reach areas varies, but averages out at 1.22%, which is low and equates to 69 adults, all of whom are in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance.

The priority target groups for the centre group, as finalised during the inspection, are: teenage and young parents under 25; children living in workless households in Harleston and Long Stratton; lone-parents in Long Stratton and Harleston; two-year-olds eligible for funded education in Harleston and Long Stratton and rurally isolated families in Loddon and Harleston.

The group offers services which comprise a mixture of universal and targeted provision delivered on-site and in the community. Due to isolation and lack of public transport in some of the outlying villages, outreach work is an essential part of the group's delivery of services. The group offers activities and services which include baby clinics, baby and infant massage, stay and play sessions for different age groups, baby yoga, breast-feeding support, weaning sessions, healthy eating and exercise groups, adult education, Book Start sessions and parenting courses. The group offers family support, and has links with early years settings in the private and voluntary sector.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- The centre group leaders are unclear about the specific target groups most at risk of low outcomes in the reach area and do not prioritise the group's work according to levels of need. As a result, leaders are not able to demonstrate that their staff and resources are used effectively to enable young children and families most in need to access services. Some very vulnerable groups such as those experiencing domestic abuse and violence are not considered to be a target group despite the fact that a third of the staff's workload is linked to these families.
- While information about highly vulnerable children including those subject to a child protection plan, and children who are looked after, is now being routinely shared with the centre manager by the named social worker, this is not being shared with staff. As a result, staff do not swiftly or proactively follow up with individual social workers how best they might engage and work with these very vulnerable children. Consequently only a third of these families are engaged with centre services.
- The large majority of children and families are registered with the group. Contact with expectant families has enabled staff to increase registrations over time. However, leaders are unclear about the percentage of target groups, or children and families in general, that are meaningfully engaged with their services. This is because of the poor analysis and use of data and weak systems to monitor the uptake of services and families' engagement. Checks on what difference services are making to improving lives and reducing inequalities are particularly weak.
- The very large majority of two, three and four-year-olds take up their funded nursery education places. Outreach work in outlying villages is aimed at families less likely to access services, although attendance by the targeted families at events such as the 'Family Fun Day' is low.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- Monitoring of the quality, impact, range and relevance of services provided by the centre group is ineffective. Staff practices are not regularly observed and staff are not well supervised. The manager does not monitor the case files closely enough to help staff measure the difference they are making to the children and families with which they work. These features limit the group's ability to meet the needs of children and families in its area.
- The assessments undertaken by staff using Family Support Processes, (FSP) are generally informative, but the resulting action or support plans are not sufficiently focused. Records do not make clear how parents and carers are involved in the planning. It is unclear how the impact of the interventions is being tracked or evaluated. However, one parent reported 'I am really glad the centre was here and for the support given to me from my FSP worker, without it my daughter might still be in care'.
- The leaders do not analyse data accurately to show what proportion of parents has been helped to improve their parenting skills over time. Leaders do not use data with sufficient precision to assess the level of need in general or to check the impact of the actions taken.
- The centre group cannot show what difference they are making to individual children's readiness for school-based provision, or the extent of their contribution to the improving Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores in the reach area. They do not work closely enough with local schools and early years providers to help children be well prepared for their transfer to school. Where used, the newly introduced tracking of children's learning is of poor quality and has only limited usefulness in assessing children's progress accurately.

- Family support workers and practitioners across all three centres are highly committed to improving the lives of families. They relate well to children, parents and carers who attend sessions and plan some vibrant events, such as the 'Family Fun Day' or activities held in the libraries. However, the quality of provision is too variable and is not consistently helping to prepare children for their future learning in school.
- The 'Ready for School' sessions, which are designed for children at risk of not meeting expected levels of development, are unlikely to make a significant difference to children's skills. This is because the planning for these sessions is insufficiently focussed on promoting learning. Staff do not help parents to get engaged in the learning activities during the session, or to continue these at home.
- The leaders do not know the extent to which they are developing the skills which would enhance the employability of adults, including those in identified target groups. The centre group has no provision for enhancing adults' learning or skills other than the newly introduced 'Choices' programme, which includes supporting parents and carers intending to return to work. It is too early to see the impact of this course. There are no volunteers gaining work experience in the centres.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- Governance is ineffective. The local authority monitors the group's work quarterly and checks on recommendations set at previous meetings. However, the local authority does not give the group a clear enough indication of how well they are doing, or help the group to measure themselves against national benchmarks. They recently removed the group from their 'centres causing concern' list despite considering the centre group's effectiveness to be bordering on inadequate.
- The group has drifted because Action for Children has not monitored the performance of the manager closely enough, focussing more on support than challenge and holding the group rigorously to account. Similarly, the centre manager checks on her staff's well-being, but does not observe, monitor and evaluate the quality of their work frequently enough, or use information gained from this to set measurable targets for staff improvement. She does not hold staff to account for their contribution to improving outcomes for the children and families living in the area.
- Self-evaluation is over-generous and not based upon demonstrable evidence of impact. This is because data are not understood or used effectively. The local authority and Action for Children do not help the manager to analyse and use the data and other information provided, or to set targets with clear milestones against which the centre group's progress and effectiveness can be assessed.
- The manager and her team are dedicated and hardworking, but are not able to show that they are prioritising their resources and services on those children and families most at risk of poor outcomes. They cannot demonstrate how well they are narrowing the achievement gap for some extremely vulnerable groups.
- The named social worker provides the centre group with lists of especially vulnerable children, including those looked after by the local authority, subject to child protection plans or children in need plans. These contacts are not always followed up swiftly enough. This also limits how well staff narrow the outcomes gap for those at risk of falling behind because of their circumstances.
- The advisory board is unable to offer objective challenge because some members lack a clear understanding of their role and the group manager chairs the board. The lack of an independent chair compromises the board's impartiality. The manager has tried hard, but so far unsuccessfully, to secure an independent chair and vice-chair, to widen the advisory board membership and encourage

more regular attendance at meetings.

- Too few parents help to make decisions about the group's priorities or the shaping of services. There are no parents on the advisory board, and the numbers in the parent forum and the response rate to surveys such as that for parent satisfaction are both low.
- Safeguarding procedures require improvement. While Action for Children have extensive safeguarding policies and procedures, the Single Centre Record confirming the required suitability checks on staff is not regularly checked by the manager. As a result, anomalies and omissions in this record are missed, although further discussions and documents seen during the inspection confirmed that all necessary checks were in place, in line with 'safer recruitment' practices.
- Case supervision is inadequate. Cases reviewed by inspectors had not been subject to regular management review. Records of supervision are irregular, of poor quality and do not provide sufficient challenge or support to enable workers to evaluate the impact of their work with families effectively. Staff report that supervision is sporadic and is not always focused, helpful, challenging or reflective.
- The centre pays insufficient attention to e-safety. A policy is in place but staff have not undergone recent training in this area. Consequently the potential of the dangers of the internet are not being reinforced with users of the centres sufficiently.

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

Unique reference number	80209
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	452077
Managed by	Action for Children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,837
Centre leader	Nikki Glennon-Bird
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01508 536399
Email address	Nicola.Glennon-Bird@actionforchildren.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 21850 Long Stratton Children's Centre
- 21378 Harleston Children's Centre
- 21841 Loddon Children's Centre

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