

Cherry Blossom Children's Centre

Hadleigh Road, East Bergholt, CO7 6QT

Inspection dates	11–12 September 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		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 is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Although most families living in the area are registered with the centre, not enough families in the more deprived areas and lone parents use the centre's services.
- There are insufficient opportunities for workless adults to train or acquire skills that will improve their chances of gaining employment.
- The achievement gap between children eligible for free school meals and other children in the area is widening. As a result, too many children are not ready for school.
- The advisory board is not always provided with sufficient support, training and information to enable it to challenge and monitor the centre's performance effectively.

It has the following strengths:

- Leaders, staff and the advisory board are enthusiastic and have high aspirations for the centre. They have put in place suitable steps to continue to make improvements.
- Health outcomes for families are good because of high quality provision and effective partnerships with health workers.
- Parents benefit greatly from attending parenting programmes and from individual support. They gain confidence, learn new parenting skills and develop a better understanding of their children's needs.
- Safeguarding is given a high priority. The centre works well with a wide range of partners to reduce the risk of harm to families.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the engagement of families and lone parents, and in particular those living in the more deprived areas, so that a large majority regularly access services.
- Strengthen partnerships with early years providers and schools to reduce the achievement gap between groups of children, particularly those eligible for free school meals.
- Extend the opportunities for more adults, particularly from workless homes, to improve their economic wellbeing by providing more opportunities locally for literacy, numeracy and work-related skills development.
- Improve leadership and management by providing the advisory board with support, training, and information to enable it to challenge the centre's performance effectively.

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; representatives of the local authority; the children's centre manager; a member of the 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. Inspectors jointly observed one activity with the centre leader.

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

Godfrey Bancroft

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Cherry Blossom Children's Centre operates in the Dodnash Ward from one site. It provides outreach services in the village of Shotley. 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 some services. The range of activities offered by the centre includes support at the local community baby clinic, antenatal group, breastfeeding support and baby massage. The centre signposts families to a range of providers that offer adult education, volunteering opportunities, and activities designed to support parents and carers into training or back into employment. Activities are planned in partnership with other local children's centres to ensure a full range of services is available to families.

The local authority runs the centre. The centre manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre. The advisory body consists of representatives from partner organisations and key stakeholders that work with the children's centre, the local authority and parents.

There are 722 children under the age of five living in the area it serves. The large majority of the families living in the area are White British. The area is relatively affluent with pockets of deprivation. Levels of unemployment and the proportion of families dependent on benefits are below the national averages. When they start early years provision, the majority of children have skills, knowledge and abilities above those expected for their age.

The main priority groups assessed in need of the centre services are: families living in the more deprived areas; children living in workless households; lone parents; teenage parents; and disabled children and children of disabled parents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Access requires improvement because only a minority of families with young children from priority groups regularly engage with the centre. In particular, only a small minority of families living in the more deprived areas and lone parents are registered and access services.
- Registration rates are increasing and most families in the area are registered with the centre. The centre is well informed about families expecting children and teenage mothers. The information enables managers to plan precisely services such as the fortnightly 'Parentcraft' sessions which are run by the midwifery team for expectant parents.
- Leaders know the area well and work with partners to deliver services out in the community. For example, the weekly 'Stay and Play' sessions provided in the Shotley ward are attended well by families from priority groups. Weekly meetings with health professionals enable the centre to obtain accurate and up-to-date information to ensure that some of the most vulnerable children and families engage well with the centre.

- The weekly 'Little Stars' sessions are well attended and are successful in engaging with disabled children and those with special educational needs. Children benefit from fun packed activities, which promotes their physical and emotional development. One parent commented that is typical of others, 'Little Stars is an awesome place where children thrive.'
- Family support practitioners have a good knowledge of the various issues facing families in their community. Effective work with families in their own home ensures that many of those who are suffering from a range of difficulties are very well supported. 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.
- The centre works appropriately with local early years partners to ensure all eligible two-year-olds from disadvantaged families take up their entitlement to early education. Nearly all three-year-olds have taken up their free early years education, which helps to support their learning and development. However, partnerships with early years providers and schools are not yet contributing fully to reducing the achievement gap between groups of children, particularly those eligible for free school meals.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The quality of practice and services requires improvement because the engagement rate of some priority groups is too low. This reduces the centre's overall impact on improving outcomes for children and families.
- Children's attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is above the local authority average, and slightly above the national average. However, there is some variation between groups, and the proportion of children eligible for free school meals achieving a good level of development declined in 2014.
- The impact of centre services on families' economic well-being is not well established. Volunteers are well supported and gain valuable skills that have helped them back into work. However, not enough families, particularly from workless households, have been helped to take up training that enhances their skills, employability and life chances.
- Health outcomes, such as the number of mothers continuing to breastfeed at six-to-eight weeks are improving, while obesity levels in young children are lower than average. This is reflected in the centre's strong focus on encouraging a healthy lifestyle through innovative projects such as 'Mini Maulers,' a four-week programme that uses elements of rugby and yoga to encourage fitness and positive interaction between parent and child.
- The centre provides high levels of care, guidance and support, particularly to vulnerable families in times of crisis. Well-maintained case files are kept up to date and are of a good standard. The files show how well the centre works with other agencies and partners and the positive impact this has on reducing inequalities and improving families' lives. Adults that have completed a first aid qualification say that they are more confident about keeping their families safe at home and know what to do in an emergency.
- The centre has an appropriate balance of services open to all with specific services

planned to meet families' needs. For example, parenting programmes are well targeted to families who need them most and are of good quality. Parents engage well and increase in self-confidence, learning new techniques for managing their children's behaviour and appropriate strategies for improving and sustaining positive relationships in the family.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The quality of leadership, governance and management requires improvement because strategies to engage families have not ensured that the large majority of families from some of key priority groups are accessing and engaging with the centre's services.
- Leaders and managers know the centre's strengths and weaknesses. Key priorities are identified and the centre has a suitable plan that includes clear intentions for improvement. However, the support, training, and information provided to the advisory board by leaders do not always enable members to challenge the centre's performance confidently and robustly.
- The centre manager is held to account for the centre's performance and is supported effectively by the local authority through the annual conversation process, their regular visits and the analysis of the centre's performance data. These all have a positive impact on the centre's performance together with target setting. For example, as seen in the increasing number of families registered at the centre.
- Sound professional supervision and management arrangements are in place to check on the performance of staff, ensure their safety and well-being and assist their training and development. Staff have good access to further training and development opportunities.
- Parents' responses to surveys help shape services. Regular meetings with parents and their representation on the advisory board ensure they formally contribute to the centre's decision making about its future development. For example, in response to the parents' request the centre now delivers first aid courses.
- Safeguarding is a high priority, and policies and procedures, including staff vetting checks, reflect this. The centre makes very good use of the local authority's 'Signs of Safety' procedures for identifying and responding to risk. 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.
- The centre's resources are used effectively to make sure that families' needs are met. There is an extensive range of toys, books and portable sensory equipment for disabled children and those with special educational needs to use at home. Effective use is made of the library with 339 books issued in the last year.

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	20662
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	451654
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	722
Centre Manager	Lee Elliston
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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