

# Soham Children's Centre

The Weatheralls Primary School, Pratt Street, Soham, CB7 5BH

<b>Inspection dates</b>	22–23 October 2014
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
The quality of practice and services		<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a good centre.

- Most families are registered with the centre and a large majority take advantage of the services, advice and guidance offered.
- The centre works very well to support families in their own homes at times of greatest need, and this helps to improve families life chances and reduces the risk of harm to children.
- Adults access a good range of courses and advice to improve their financial stability and chances of employment. Volunteers gain valuable work experience that has led to several gaining employment.
- The centre's work to help children prepare for school is effective and assists their learning and development. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is rising rapidly.
- The centre manager provides effective leadership, which is bringing about rapid improvements to the centre and for families in the area. She is well supported by a well-qualified staff team and strong support from the local authority.

### It is not outstanding because:

- The centre's work to help families live healthily is not sufficient to help reduce child obesity.
- The advisory board is not always provided with sufficient information or targets to enable it to challenge and monitor the centre's performance.

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

- Work more closely with health partners to reduce childhood obesity by providing more effective support and useful sessions that are well attended.
- Improve leadership and management by providing the advisory board with information and more targets to measure the impact of the centre and challenge it more 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 three 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 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
Qaisra Sharaz	Additional Inspector
Peter Towner	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Soham Children's Centre operates in the Bottisham, Burwell and Soham wards and is based on the same site as the Weatheralls Primary School (URN: 110769). The school is subject to a separate inspection and the latest report can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The range of activities offered by the centre includes a domestic abuse programme, a specialist support group for those with post-natal depression, antenatal birth classes, and baby massage. As well as delivering volunteering and adult learning on site, the centre signposts families to a range of providers that offer adult education and activities designed to support parents and carers back into employment and training. Activities are planned with one other local children's centre 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, parents and key stakeholders that work with the children's centre and the local authority.

The children's centre has 1,251 children under the age of five in its area. The large majority of the families living in the area are White British. The area is relatively affluent with pockets of deprivation. About 4% families with children under five who live in the area come from workless households.

When they start early years provision, the majority of children have skills, knowledge and abilities that are typical for their age.

The main priority groups assessed in need of the centre's services are those with domestic abuse within the family, mental health issues (particularly post-natal depression), disabled children and those who have special educational needs, and families in most need.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

**Good**

- Most of the families with young children in the area are registered at the centre. A large majority of them are engaged and take advantage of the services, advice and guidance available.
- The sharing of new live birth information with health partners ensures that the centre knows new families and families expecting children.
- The centre is very good at reaching groups who need support the most. The 'Time 4 Me' group for women with post-natal depression and the domestic abuse within the family group are well attended and valued by parents. As one parent commented: 'I came to realise that I can trust again and life can be normal. So I am much more relaxed now.'
- Staff's work with families in their own homes is highly effective in getting them the support quickly at the time of greatest need. As a result these families join in the services

of the centre and are able to make marked improvements to family life and the well-being of their children over time.

- The centre works in close partnership with health and other professionals to prioritise families most in need of support. For example, the centre holds regular speech and language drop-in sessions. Effective partnership working enables early identification of children's specific needs such as communication delay.
- The centre has also focused successfully on the involvement of fathers, including grandfathers, in its work. The Sunday 'Sun Dads' group at the Burwell Sports Centre provides a range of sporting activities that have been successful in involving more of them in the centre's work to the advantage of their children.
- Most eligible two-year-olds take up their early years place because of the centre's successful partnership with schools and early years providers in the area. The vast majority of three-year-olds have taken up their free early years education, which supports improved learning and development.

### **The quality of practice and services**

**Good**

- The centre has a good 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 methods for managing their children's behaviour and appropriate plans for improving and maintaining positive relationships in the family.
- The centre works well with local preschool settings to promote children's learning and development and ensure children are ready to start school. Data for the area shows the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Year's Foundation Stage is rising rapidly and inequalities are narrowing.
- 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.
- Those adults who take part in courses do well and move on to further education or get jobs. Volunteers are well supported and gain valuable skills that have helped them back into work. Increasing numbers of 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, 'Well Baby Clinic' and 'Ely Milks' breastfeeding support sessions. Above average numbers of mothers continue to breastfeed their children until they are at least six-to-eight weeks old, giving babies a healthy start to life. However, the work done with health staff to reduce the rising obesity rates in young children has not made enough difference.

**The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management****Good**

- The centre is improving quickly under the committed and effective leadership of the centre manager who has high expectations. Consequently, the centre is providing good quality services, which are benefitting an increasing number of families.
- The local authority supports and challenges the centre through the annual conversation processes, regular visits and analysis of the centre's performance data. This has a positive impact on the centre's performance for example, as seen in the increasing number of families registered and accessing the centre.
- The centre knows itself and its community well. Self-evaluation accurately identifies the centre's strengths and weaknesses and what needs to be done to improve. There are, however, insufficient quantifiable targets and information provided to the advisory board to enable members to measure and challenge the centre's performance confidently and robustly.
- Leaders work well with key partners and this enables them to respond effectively and with flexibility in meeting the needs of families. The partnership between the centre, local schools and early years providers is strong. As a result, children, including disabled children and those with special educational needs, are prepared well for the next step in their learning.
- Arrangements for the supervision of staff are effective. Staff have regular conversations with the centre manager, and to check on the quality of services and groups are making the planned difference to families and children's lives. Staff undertake a range of training to help them in their work such as domestic violence awareness.
- The safeguarding of children and their families is of the highest priority for all staff. Procedures and policies for safeguarding are fully in place and understood by all. The centre works successfully with its key partners to reduce the risk of harm to children subject to child protection plans. There is effective intervention for looked after children, those in need, and children supported by the Common Assessment Framework procedures.
- Parents are consulted frequently and effectively through surveys and their representation on the parents' forum and advisory board. Consequently, families contribute well to shaping the services provided. For example, at the parents request, the centre has introduced a regular 'Stay and Play International Saturdays' group.
- Resources are used well to enable the centre to move forward and improve outcomes for those most in need. The shared use of services and activities with the neighbouring centre reduces costs. Parents make good use of sensory toy library, games musical instruments and visual stimulation equipment to develop their children's senses.

**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**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	22748
<b>Local authority</b>	Cambridgeshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	451658
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	1251
<b>Centre manager</b>	Mary Barnes
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01353 727188
<b>Email address</b>	mary.barnes@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

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