

EPP5 True Stars Children's Centre

The Limes Centre, Limes Farm, Chigwell, IG7 5LP

Inspection dates	29–30 October 2014
Previous inspection date	Not applicable

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not previously inspected	
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 the large majority of families are registered with the centre, not enough families from some priority groups are regularly accessing the centre's services.
- Systems to track the progress of children who attend the centre are in the early stages of development. The centre is therefore unable to show the difference it makes to improving the achievement of those in danger of falling behind or support their readiness for school.
- There are insufficient opportunities for workless adults to improve their basic skills, train or acquire employability skills that will improve their chances of getting back to work.
- Parents are not involved in advisory board meetings or sufficiently involved in shaping the services offered by the centre.
- Leadership, management and governance have not ensured that the centre moves forward during a period of significant changes in staffing.

It has the following strengths:

- The centre works well with other organisations to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable children are identified and that effective early support is provided.
- The centre works effectively with health partners. As a result, families improve their understanding of healthy living and childhood obesity rates are low.
- Families that access parenting programmes value them highly and say how much they have made a positive difference to their lives.
- Volunteering opportunities are a positive feature of the centre's provision.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Focus leaders' work on increasing the engagement of families and in particular those living in workless homes and lone parents, so that a large majority benefit from the centre's services.
- Extend the opportunities for more adults to improve their economic well-being by providing wider opportunities locally for literacy, numeracy and work-related development.
- Improve tracking and assessment systems so that appropriate action can be taken to reduce the gap between the achievement of children eligible for free school meals and their peers and help them prepare well for school.
- Increase the influence of parents in the centre's governance and ensuring they are represented on the advisory board.

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 and the Spurgeon's group; 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

Peter Towner

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

True Stars Children's Centre operates in the Grange Hill, Chigwell Row, Chigwell Village and Lambourne End wards. It is located on the same site as the Limes Farm Community Centre. 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 services. The range of activities offered by the centre includes support at the local community baby clinic, antenatal birth clinic, 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 back into employment and training. Activities are planned with another children's centre to ensure a full range of services is available to families.

The centre manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre. The centre is managed and accountable to the Spurgeon's group on behalf of the local authority. The advisory body consists of representatives from partner organisations, key stakeholders that work with the children's centre and the local authority. Due to reorganisation, there have been significant staff changes since the start of this year.

The children's centre has 945 children under the age of five living in its area. The large majority of the families living in the area are White British. A growing number of families using the centre are from minority ethnic groups. The area is very mixed socially and economically with pockets of deprivation. About 18% of children and adults who live in the area come from homes that are dependent on benefits or where no-one is in work. When they start early years provision, the majority of children have skills, knowledge and abilities that are slightly lower than those expected for their age.

The main priority groups assessed in need of the centre's services are lone parents, children from minority ethnic groups and families living in the most deprived ward of Grange Hill.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Strategies for encouraging families with young children to attend the centre are not fully effective. Despite recent developments, a minority of families from priority groups especially lone parents and families living in workless homes regularly attend the centre and this requires improvement.
- The centre has taken effective action to register a large majority of children and their families, and increasing numbers of minority ethnic families are benefiting from the services provided by the centre. Close links with midwives increase access to services for expectant mothers who are encouraged to register with the centre at an early stage.
- Leaders know the area well and work with partners to deliver services out in the community. For example, the weekly 'Star's Story Time' at Chigwell Library is attended well by families from priority groups. Regular meetings with health professionals enable the centre to obtain accurate and up-to-date information to ensure that families most in

need in the Grange Hill area engage well with the centre.

- Families are supported well to attend services. For instance a crèche is provided to support parents' attendance at the parent programmes delivered at the children's centre. The centre promotes information about its activities and other services well, especially through the use of social media, to encourage those less likely to access services to do so.
- Support for families in their own homes is effective in securing timely help at the time of greatest need. Parents receiving one-to-one support value the difference it makes to their own and to their children's lives. This is helping reduce inequalities.
- Most eligible two-year-olds take up their free entitlement to early education. This also benefits parents who wish to return to work or take up further education. A very large majority of three-year-olds have taken up their free early years education. As a result, these children get a good start in their early education.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre provides a suitable range of different activities which are open to all, or which are targeted towards those with particular needs. However, the quality of practice and services requires improvement because only a minority of some priority groups benefit from the activities that are provided. This limits the impact the centre has on improving their lives.
- The 'Talking with Tots' and 'Caterpillar Music' groups alongside the centre's support and delivery of regular small world play sessions in local pre-schools, home learning visits and parent workshops, are beginning to improve children's early social, communication and language skills. Additionally, these approaches are helping parents to recognise how to support their children's language development more effectively.
- There are appropriate opportunities for parents and children to play and learn together, such as the 'Toy Time' and the 'Newbies Baby Group' group. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development improved this year although the gap between children eligible for free school meals and their peers has widened. The centre's systems for tracking children's progress are in the early stages of development. This means the centre is not yet able to fully demonstrate the impact of its work in getting children ready for school.
- The centre's volunteer programme makes a positive contribution to the life of the community with eight currently working in the centre. Most adults identified as needing help successfully complete their training courses. However, there are insufficient opportunities for workless adults to improve their literacy, numeracy and employability skills.
- Health outcomes are moving in the right direction, due to the centre's effective partnerships with health services. The rates for childhood obesity are lower than those seen nationally. Data supplied by the centre indicate that an increasing proportion of mothers, including those from priority groups, continue to breastfeed their children until they are six-to-eight weeks old. This gives babies a healthy start to life.

- Parents report improvement in their children's behaviour as a result using effective strategies they learnt on the parenting courses. Parents who have been identified to receive individual support at home are equally enthusiastic and make very good progress in improving their parenting skills. The centre is effective in assisting workless and lone parents to deal with housing and benefits issues, sort out debt problems and overcome feelings of isolation.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Over the past year, staff turnover has limited the effectiveness of the centre to engage with more children and families from priority groups. Leadership governance and management requires improvement because it has not yet been able to encourage a large majority of the centre's priority groups to attend and benefit from the centre's services. Registrations, however, have increased and the centre has capacity to improve.
- The advisory board is supportive and provides suitable oversight of the work of the centre but is not sufficiently checking its performance. Parents are not represented on the advisory board. As a result they have limited involvement in helping shape services.
- The centre manager is held to account for the centre's performance appropriately by the local authority through the annual conversation process, their visits and the analysis of the centre's performance data. Consequently the local authority has an accurate picture of the centre's performance and provides suitable support to assist in the centre's on-going improvement.
- Arrangements for the supervision of staff are effective. Staff undertake a range of training to help them in their work, for example, being able to deliver baby massage sessions themselves which reduces costs.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Parents understand the importance of adopting safe practices. The good knowledge of staff and detailed record keeping play an important role in early assessment meetings with other professionals to ensure families remain safe. As a result there is effective intervention for children who are looked after, subject to child protection plans, and or in need.
- Some effective partnerships have been established including close working links with the Limes Farm community. The partnership between the centre, local schools and pre-schools enables them to respond effectively and with flexibility in meeting the needs of children and families. The centre's expectations for the services delivered by commissioned providers are set out clearly and checked regularly.
- The shared building is appropriately maintained and staff strive to make activities in the community hall bright and welcoming. Resources are suitable and are used flexibly to meet the needs of those attending activities. Toys and equipment are used well by staff to ensure activities are stimulating and worthwhile for those who attend.

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	21102
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	452147
Managed by	Spurgeons on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	945
Centre manager	Kim O'Sullivan
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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