

Woodlands Children's Centre

Shepherds Lane, Glemsford, Suffolk, CO10 7PU

Inspection date

18–19 November 2014

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 centre requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Despite registering a large majority of children overall, not enough are registered or accessing services in some of the centre's more outlying areas. In addition, although a majority of children from workless households are registered with the centre, not enough are engaging regularly with centre services.
- The system for health services to inform the centre of new births is not always put into practice. As a result centre staff are unaware of the parents to contact after their baby has been born.
- Not enough children and adults are having their progress followed up over the longer term. Some checks are made, for example a small number of children have been tracked through to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, but there is not enough evidence, other than anecdotal information, to show the impact of the centre's work.
- Some of the information and data provided by the local authority are not as precise as they could be. The use of this information as a management tool, especially in relation to the centre's priority groups' access and engagement, is relatively new.
- The cluster advisory board is supportive but not sufficiently challenging. There is not a clear enough understanding of the centre's priority groups or of the impact of the centre's services on priority families. This limits the centre's capacity to improve.

It has the following strengths:

- The centre has been very successful in working with young parents who make frequent use of its services. In addition, all of the young children in Glemsford village which is rated the least advantaged area, are registered and most engage well with the centre.
- Parents value the centre and staff highly. They rightly feel that the levels of care, guidance and support they receive, often for very sensitive issues, are excellent. The centre works very well with a wide range of partners to achieve this.
- Staff are very well trained especially in matters relating to safeguarding children and domestic abuse. This has a very positive impact on families' lives.
- The two part-time centre managers work very well together to ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the centre and effective use of staff resources.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the large majority families from the centre's outlying districts and those in workless households access and engage with services by:
 - assessing the specific needs of families in areas where registrations are low and finding out why more children and families are not using the centre
 - developing services or working with partners to meet the needs of these specific families
 - using information effectively to monitor the families' engagement with services.
- Work with health partners and the local authority to ensure that new birth information is provided to the centre in a timely and consistent way so that babies can be registered as soon as possible.
- Implement systems to track the longer term impact of the centre on more children and parents by:
 - working with schools and early years settings to monitor the progress of children when they transfer to a different setting
 - developing a robust system to get feedback from partners about parents' progress and track the benefits of the centre's support or when signposting families to other services.
- Ensure the information about priority groups' access and engagement is accurate and used as an effective management tool by the local authority, the centre managers and the advisory board to meet the needs of those families.
- Develop the challenge provided by the cluster advisory board by ensuring members have a clear understanding of how to measure the centre's impact, especially in relation to identified priority families.

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 the two centre managers, a representative from the local community and members of the cluster advisory board. They spoke with several partners including those from health services, Job Centre Plus, local community groups and charities. They also met with staff members, parents and volunteers.

The inspectors visited the 'Stay and Play' session taking place at Glemsford Village Hall.

They looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self evaluation and development plan, safeguarding policies and procedures and a sample of case studies. Both centre managers and the local authority representative attended all the team meetings.

Inspection team

Joan Lindsay, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Peter Towner

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Woodlands Children's Centre opened in 2010. It is one of three stand-alone children's centres that make up the Sudbury cluster, all managed on a day-to-day basis by two part-time centre managers. The centre provides family support, adult learning and health services. The centre is managed directly by the local authority. A cluster advisory board is in place.

Woodlands Children's Centre is situated in a purpose-built building adjacent to Glemsford Community Primary School. Services are also run from Glemsford Village Hall. A privately run pre-school is also based on the school site. The school, pre-school and the other two children's centres were not part of this inspection. Their inspection reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

There are 407 children aged up to five years living in the area served by the centre. The centre is based in the village of Glemsford and serves outlying rural areas. Of the four separate defined localities in the area, two are considered to be in the top 50% least advantaged in the country. White British heritage families account for most of the population. The percentage of children under five living in workless households is 15% overall, which is below the national average. There are 14% of families claiming Working Tax Credit in the area served by the centre, below the national figure. Children generally enter the Early Years Foundation Stage at levels in line with those typical for their age.

The centre has identified priority groups needing most support as: teenage mothers or pregnant teenagers; children who are subject to social care supervision; families with young children living in Glemsford village, the least advantaged area; children living in workless households.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- A push to increase registrations has led to over 70% of children being registered. However, this masks a relatively low number in two of the centre's more outlying rural areas. In addition, the centre has only recently had information in relation to priority families' regular engagement with services. This shows that children from workless households are not engaging as frequently as other priority groups.
- Not enough has been done to establish which services would best meet the needs of families living in outlying villages or to encourage more families from workless households to use the centre regularly by developing services that meet their specific needs.
- There are good links with health services at a local level as antenatal appointments and baby clinics are held at the centre. This has improved access for expectant mothers in Glemsford village so that 54 have been able to see midwives over the last 12 months. However, there is an inconsistency in the way the centre is informed about new births in some parts of the area it serves, which limits staff's ability to follow them up and has a negative impact on the number of new registrations.
- The centre has been very successful in engaging younger parents, with all known teenage parents registered at the centre and the large majority using services frequently. Although very small in number, families with children subject to social care supervision also engage well with the centre, as do local families in Glemsford village. Popular sessions such as 'Stay and Play' held in the village hall have been effective in encouraging families to attend regularly.

- Nearly all eligible two year-olds take up their entitlement to free early education as the centre has been active in supporting families to do so. Similarly, most three and four year olds also take up their places with the vast majority in good or better settings.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The quality, range and relevance of services requires improvement because there are not enough specific services that meet the needs of families in rural parts of the area served by the centre or families from workless households. This is because the centre has not carried out an in-depth analysis of why some families are failing to register or use services regularly.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results for children living in the local area have improved significantly in 2014 and are above the national and county levels. However, this is not consistent across all four schools in the centre's area. As yet, only a small number of children who have accessed the children's centre are tracked through to the end of the reception class in the adjacent school. There are no consistent means to monitor the progress of priority group children when they are at the centre. However, anecdotal evidence from parents and early years settings is positive about the impact the centre has, especially on children's social skills and independence.
- There are several examples of how parents have progressed significantly in their education, training and on to employment. However, links with partners such as Job Centre Plus and adult education are not developed to the extent that there are regular updates on progress. As a result the way the longer term benefits of support from the centre or its partners is recorded and tracked, is not well-embedded.
- Over 60% of babies are still being breastfed at six to eight weeks, well above the national average. However, a slightly higher than average number of young children are obese. The centre works well with local community groups such as the Women's Institute to develop families' understanding of healthy lifestyles. The Forest School sessions led by the centre have also been effective in encouraging families to be active outdoors.
- There are very good levels of information sharing between partners so that staff know and work well with the very small number of children who have social care supervision. Staff are particularly aware of safeguarding issues around domestic violence. This, plus a package of structured courses for mothers and fathers and work with counsellors and charities, has been very effective in improving the lives of vulnerable young children. A typical comment from parents summing up this support is 'I can't express how much they have helped me'.
- The 'community parents' programme supporting those who volunteer is well-structured. It has produced positive outcomes for those who have participated as well as providing valuable support to the centre where staff resources are stretched.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Not enough use has been made of information about the numbers accessing and engaging with the centre by the local authority, centre managers or the advisory board to ensure priority families and those in the more outlying districts are having their needs met. Some of this information is imprecise and has not been available until recently for example in relation to workless households.
- The local authority has recently implemented a system of quarterly reviews rather than a major annual one. Records of visits accurately highlight the centre's strengths and areas for development; the centre managers' assessment of the centre is also accurate. However, the

targets in the development plan are not linked specifically enough to the centre's priority families nor are they consistently measurable and related to the impact the centre has in reducing inequalities.

- The cluster advisory board covers the three centres in the cluster. There is good representation from parents and a wide range of partners. However, members are not adequately equipped to challenge the centre as they are not provided with enough information about this particular centre's priority groups, their engagement and the impact the centre has on improving their well-being.
- Although resources are limited and staff work across all three centres in the cluster, they are managed well by the two centre managers. Good use is made of Glemsford village community groups such as the Parish Council and the Women's Institute who run the 'Tot Rock' session in conjunction with the centre. This has had a positive impact on the number of local families, including young parents who regularly use the centre.
- Well-implemented safeguarding policies and procedures are central to all the centre's work. Staff are very experienced and well-trained and are swift to act on any concerns regarding risks to a child or vulnerable adult. The use of the Common Assessment Framework to support families is very well-embedded. Although currently only a very small number of children are subject to child protection plans or are considered to be a child in need or looked after, these families are supported extremely well.
- Families hold the centre in very high regard and frequently recommend it to others. They feel fully involved in the development of centre services through very well attended parents' forum meetings and good attendance at cluster advisory board meetings. They see the centre as an important community resource as they and their children always receive a very warm welcome summed up by the comment 'My child has practically grown up here'.

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	21258
Local authority	Suffolk County Council
Inspection number	447517
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	407
Centre managers	Clare Frewin and Hannah Seymour
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
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