

# East Reading Children's Centres

c/o Katesgrove Children Centre, Elgar Road, Reading, RG2 0BN

<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 November 2014
Previous inspection date	5–6 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
Access to services by young children and families		<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
The quality of practice and services		<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This group of centres requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Systems to check children's, adults' and families' progress are now in place. However, it is too soon for the centres to show the difference the group is making in the longer term.
- The level of challenge provided by the advisory board, to drive the centre's improvement, is not yet good.
- Parents' collective views are not strongly informing or influencing the governance of the group.
- Monitoring and observation of sessions do not always focus strongly enough on the impact of the activities on children's learning and development.
- Family development workers are building their skills and confidence in direct work with families, but the number of families benefiting from this work is currently quite small.
- Health information is not available to the group at a local level, and the group does not receive information regarding new births. This inhibits leaders' ability to target further improvement.

### It has the following strengths:

- Significant progress has been made in all aspects of the group's work over the last year. Notably, most families in the area are now registered and the large majority have engaged with the centres.
- The local authority has worked extremely effectively with the group manager following the previous inspection. Strong teamwork and the sense of shared responsibility are positive features of the group. Managers and staff are clear about what more needs to be done to improve further.
- Information provided by the local authority regarding the needs of families in the area has improved; relevant target and priority groups are now more clearly defined. Dedicated support is available to ensure managers and staff understand data and information and use it effectively.
- Tracking of children's learning and development shows that those who attend a group regularly make good progress.
- The centres are working well with partner agencies to support some priority families effectively.

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

- Embed systems to track children's, adults' and families' progress in order to demonstrate the impact of the group's work.
- Strengthen the challenge the advisory board is providing to the group by expanding the range of members, and providing training to all members which clearly outlines their roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure that systems are in place to share more parents' views with the advisory board, thereby strengthening their role in the governance of the group.
- Ensure that observation and monitoring by senior managers have a strong focus on the impact of the centres' work on children's learning and development.
- Build the skills, confidence and capacity within the family development worker team so that more target and priority families can benefit from direct family support.
- Work with health service partners to ensure that information is shared regarding new births and the health of families in the local area.

### 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 met with: the local authority representatives; the cluster manager and the senior management team; the advisory board; parents; volunteers; partners from a range of services including health, the Children's Action Team and education. The inspectors visited all three children's centres.

The inspection covered the following centres: Katesgrove; East Reading; and Hamilton Road.

They observed the centres' work and carried out joint observations with the senior management team. They also looked at a range of relevant documentation.

### Inspection team

Penny Fisher, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Susan Mann

Her Majesty's Inspector

Helen Cawston

Her Majesty's Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

East Reading Children's Centre cluster is a group of children's centres run directly by the local authority. The group is made up of three children's centres: East Reading and Katesgrove Children's Centres were designated in January 2008, and the Hamilton Road centre was designated in December 2009. The children's centre cluster manager oversees the group and is supported by a senior leadership team. Changes to the staff team have continued over the last year; a full staff team is now in post. Governance is provided by an advisory board, which oversees all three children's centres.

Katesgrove Children's Centre is the hub for the group and is a full-time centre. East Reading and Hamilton Road Children's Centres are open part time. The centres offer a range of services, including health services, family play sessions, adult learning and family support. There is no linked early years provision attached to any of the three centres. Waterloo Meadows Play Centre, an after-school and holiday club, run by the local authority, operates on the same site as Katesgrove Children's Centre. Separate reports for early years and school provision in the area can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

There are 2,553 children under the age of five years living in the area. East Reading is a densely populated area, which is ethnically, socially and economically diverse. The East Reading area has the second highest number of children under the age of five living in deprived parts of the authority. There are three areas which are among the 20% most deprived in England; overcrowding and a highly transient population are features of these areas. Children's skills vary when the children start in early years provision and Reception classes in local schools.

The local authority has identified the group's target groups as: families that are referred for support by Early Help services; vulnerable expectant mothers referred via the maternity pathway; children with identified additional needs referred to the early intervention panel; children in need supported by social care; and children that are subject to a child protection plan. These are target groups for all children's centres in Reading.

In addition, three local priority groups are identified by the centres. These are: families living in temporary housing at a local hostel; teenage parents; and families living with children under the age of five years in the most deprived area in East Reading.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

**Good**

- Strategies to increase the number of families using services are effective. The manager and staff are rightly proud of the significant progress that has been made in the last year. Most families are now registered and the large majority of families, including those from target and priority groups, have engaged at least once with the centres over the last 12 months.
- There is an ongoing drive towards engaging children and families that need services the most. Sensibly, the centres are focused on ensuring target and priority families attend services regularly. The number of families engaging at least five times in the last year is good for some target and priority groups such as expectant mothers and children with additional needs. However, not enough families from the highly mobile and most deprived area of East Reading are attending activities regularly.
- The availability and analysis of information regarding the local area have improved significantly over the last year. The local authority provides the group with the most reliable information available. For example, the number of children in the reach area is thought to have increased since the 2011 census and strenuous efforts are being made to gather more up-to-date information.
- Most eligible two-year-olds are now taking up their entitlement to free early education. The group is

working with early years providers locally to increase available places. All three- and four-year-olds in the local area are receiving their entitlement to free early education.

- There has been a clear change of focus towards providing services for target and priority families over the last year, including with those less likely to use the group's services. This means that staff are building relationships with some of the most vulnerable families in the community, such as those housed at the hostel and young parents.
- Health partners are not yet sharing information regarding new births in the area with the children's centres. However, discussions to move this forward are ongoing at a strategic level. The centres do receive this information from registrars, which is positive, but this may not be comprehensive and builds in a time delay before the centre staff can ensure that new families are aware of support and services that the group can provide.

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

### **Requires improvement**

- Systems to measure the difference that services are making to families' lives have been introduced. However, these are mostly new and time is needed for them to become embedded in practice. It is, therefore, too soon to see the medium and long term impact of the centres' work.
- Sessions and activities are generally of good quality, but in some sessions there is not a strong enough focus on children's learning and development. The quality of early years provision in the area is better than average for Reading as a whole. There is good support available to childminders. The centres are provided with good quality data regarding how well children achieve at school and these help leaders to know how well services are reducing inequalities.
- Systems used to measure how well some children progress are effective. These clearly show that regular attendance at centre sessions makes a positive difference to children's development because sessions are tailored appropriately to their needs. Plans are afoot to use similar systems to show how well more children progress, but these are not sufficiently established to give a clear picture.
- The group works with partners to deliver a broad range of adult and family learning sessions that meet parents' needs well. Services designed to improve families' health, safety and economic circumstances are delivered successfully. The group has recently introduced systems to measure the difference these services make to families' lives through the tracking of adults' progress. The number of volunteers working in the centres is increasing.
- Health services value their partnerships with centre staff. Families benefit from a coordinated approach to improve both their own and their children's health in areas such as healthy diet, emotional and mental well-being. Partnership working between staff from the centres and health professionals is well coordinated, but shared targets on aspects of health, such as breastfeeding and obesity, are not fully established.
- The number of families benefiting from direct family support work is too low. The centres continue to develop the skills and confidence of the family development workers in this new area of work to enable them to support more families who most require early help. There is limited, but effective, joint work with families where there is a child protection or child in need plan in place. Staff are proactive in contacting social workers to see if there is a role for children's centre services in reducing the risk of harm to children.
- Significant progress has been made since the last inspection regarding the management of family support work. Referral routes into the centres are clear. Case files accurately reflect the work undertaken to support children and families within their home. Early help assessments clearly identify need and show where families have made progress. The manager provides regular and robust supervision of this work; actions are set and monitored and ensure staff are supported effectively.

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

### **Requires improvement**

- The advisory board is led by a dedicated and trained parent chair. Meetings take place regularly and members are well informed about the centres' target and priority groups. Board members receive regular updates on the group's performance. However, not all members have been trained in their roles and responsibilities. This limits their ability to provide strong challenge to the group and drive further improvement. Representation from schools and children's social care on the board is under developed.
- The group gathers parents' views through questionnaires and parent forum meetings. Parents have helped to shape the holiday activities within the centres. Parent representatives attend the advisory board, but there is no system in place to make sure the board is aware of the views of more parents, so that these can influence governance.
- The manager and staff are hard working and dedicated. They have experienced much rapid change over the last year. Time is now needed to consolidate this work, ensure systems are used consistently and all practice is good. Leaders and managers monitor quality through regular auditing and observation. However, there is not a strong enough focus on the difference play activities are making to children's learning and development, especially those most in need and those who attend regularly.
- The local authority has responded well to the inspection that took place a year ago, and progress against all of recommendations made in the inspection report is evident. Staff told inspectors that the local authority has taken clear and decisive action. The new performance framework, which includes quarterly monitoring, supports the group to target its resources effectively.
- The group knows its strengths and areas for further development well; self-evaluation is accurate. The manager ensures that staff supervision takes place regularly. Training needs are identified and staff have undertaken a range of training opportunities. Annual appraisals contain individual targets for the year; some of which require updating.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures meet requirements. All staff are properly checked, as are volunteers and advisory board members, to ensure their suitability. All have completed safeguarding training. Staff protect children's safety, for example by reminding parents not to use their mobile phones to photograph or video children during activities. Designated officers are in place and staff are aware of how to report any concerns. However, multi-agency designated officer training is overdue; staff are booked on to the next available course.

**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.

**Group details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	80285
<b>Local authority</b>	Reading Borough Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	450587
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	2,553
<b>Centre leader</b>	Mr Brian Matthews
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	5–6 November 2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	0118 901 5664
<b>Email address</b>	Brian.Matthews@reading.gov.uk

**This group consists of the following children's centres:**

- URN 21640 Katesgrove Children's Centre
- URN 21345 Hamilton Road Children's Centre
- URN 22578 East Reading Children's Centre

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