

Uplands Children's Centre

Ashburnham Way, Lowestoft, NR33 8LJ

Inspection dates	26–27 November 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not applicable	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a good centre

- A very large majority of families in the area are registered with the centre and regularly use the services, advice and guidance available. This makes a positive difference to their lives.
- The centre is welcoming and well organised with resources used effectively to meet the needs of children and families in the area.
- Health outcomes are good. Obesity rates are below average and high breastfeeding rates are consistently increasing.
- The centre provides a good range of services that help parents to support their children and prepare them ready for school.
- Safeguarding is given a high priority. The centre works well with a wide range of partners to reduce the risk of harm to children and families most in need of help and protection.
- The centre manager provides effective leadership, which is bringing about sustained improvement 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:

- There are not enough eligible two-year-olds taking up the free early education to which they are entitled.
- Not enough parents from workless households participate in courses or training that will increase their chances of employment.
- The advisory board is not always provided with sufficient information or targets to enable it to challenge and monitor the centre's performance rigorously.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority and early years providers to increase the take-up of free education so that most eligible two-year-olds access a good or better place.
- Increase the numbers of adults in workless households who access training and development so that at least the large majority improve their chances of gaining sustained employment.
- Strengthen leadership and management by providing the advisory board with information and precise targets so they can measure the impact of the centre's actions to drive improvement and can challenge it 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 the 'Baby and Me' and 'Jo Jingles' activities 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

Michael Miller

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Uplands Children's Centre operates from one site and serves the Carlton and Carlton Colville wards. 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 well baby 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 two other children's centres in the locality to ensure a full range of services is available to families.

The centre is run by the local authority. It has an advisory body consisting of parents and representatives from partner organisations that work with the children's centre and the local authority.

The children's centre has 785 children under the age of five living in its area. Nearly all the families are White British. The area is very mixed socially and economically with pockets of deprivation. About 18% of children and adults who live in the area are 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 typical for their age.

The main priority groups assessed in need of the centre's services are children under one year of age, parents with mental health issues, teenage parents, disabled children and those who have special educational needs, children subject to a child protection plan and a children in need plan.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Most of the families with young children living in the area including those with children under one, and teenage parents are registered with the centre. A large majority are regularly using the services, advice and guidance available. The most vulnerable children, including those subject to a child protection plan or assessed as in need, benefit from the centre's services to keep them safe from harm. The effective working with midwives increases access to services for expectant mothers who are encouraged to register with the centre at an early stage.
- 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 promote their physical and emotional development successfully. One parent's comment, typical of others stated, 'Little Stars is a great place for children to relax in a stimulating and fun environment.'
- Children and families access a range of useful services when they are in regular contact with the centre. Attendance is high at good quality stay and play sessions that enhance children's early learning such as 'Mucky Ducks' run by the centre's own staff. Monthly appointments at the Citizens Advice Bureau sessions enable a high number of families to seek advice about financial matters.
- 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 the early identification of children's specific needs such as communication delay.
- Family support practitioners have a very 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 including parents with mental health issues are very well supported. Through its attractive displays and posters the centre promotes information on its services and other services of help and advice well.
- A very large majority of three-year-olds known to be eligible for free early years education have taken up their entitlement. This supports improved learning and development. At just under 70% there are not enough eligible two-year-olds living in the area taking up their free early education place.

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' assessed 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.
- Play and learning experiences for children accessing the centre activities such as 'Jo Jingles Music' and the 'Sounds, Noises and Words' groups are well planned and enjoyable. Effective partnerships with local schools and pre-schools support children's school readiness and assist their smooth transition to 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 above the average and inequalities are narrowing.
- Health outcomes are moving in the right direction, due to the centre's effective partnerships with health services. The rates for child 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 is giving an increasing number of babies a healthy start to life.

- The centre provides high levels of care, guidance and support, particularly to families most in need in times of crisis. Case files are well ordered and show very effective partnership working with health, educational and social care services. The files provide detailed examples of effective targeted support that helps families get back on their feet and enjoy improved well-being.
- Volunteers gain a level 2 'Working with Parents' qualification, are well supported and gain valuable skills, which have helped them back into work. However, not enough parents from workless households have been helped to take up training that will enhance their employability.
- Families are highly satisfied with the quality of services at the centre. Parents from priority groups say how much they appreciate the very good support from family support practitioners. This helps parents engage in the centre and in the community, meet new friends and break down the barriers they feel in relation to isolation.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre is well led and managed by the highly competent centre manager. The governors and local authority have good oversight of the centre's performance and hold it to account through effective monitoring. These features result in improved outcomes for children and families.
- The centre manager is very well supported by a committed and well-qualified staff team with a wide range of skills. Staff work very well together to provide an attractive and welcoming environment for children and parents. The outdoor facilities and environment are used very well to promote children's development, and to help parents appreciate how to use the outdoor area to provide purposeful and engaging activities for their children.
- Self-evaluation accurately identifies the centre's strengths and weaknesses. Key priorities are identified and the centre has a suitable development plan that includes clear intentions. 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.
- Supervision arrangements work well. Staff have regular conversations with the centre manager to check that the quality of services and groups are making a difference to families and children's lives. The training opportunities available to staff enable them to develop and keep abreast of new developments, and to expand their knowledge, expertise and qualifications.
- 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 assessed risks. 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.
- Parents' responses to surveys help shape services. Parents' views are regularly sought through the 'Parents' Choice', a specific group set up to enable parents full involvement in shaping services. For example they raised funds for a day outing to a soft play centre for 70 adults and children.
- Resources are used effectively and efficiently to enable the centre to move forward and improve outcomes for those most in need. The shared delivery of services and activities with neighbouring

children's centres reduces costs and ensures there is a good balance of universal and targeted services to meet the needs of children and families in the area. The centre's library extends the resources available to families. Registered families have borrowed 525 books so far this 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	23382
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	447516
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	785
Centre manager	Jackie Lanham
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01502 533580
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