

Chatterbox Children's Centre

School House, Copleston Road, Ipswich, IP4 5HB

Inspection dates

Previous inspection date

2–3 December 2014

Not Previously Inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
		Not applicable	
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 there has been an improvement in the number of families registered with the centre and accessing services, there are still not enough families from the most disadvantaged areas benefitting from the centre's work.
- The groups of children and families that the centre has identified as a priority are too broad for all their needs to be accurately assessed. It is not then possible for the centre to demonstrate what difference it is making in the lives of the large majority of these families.
- Children's learning is not routinely monitored and recorded, so their progress towards reaching the expected levels of development for their age when they go to nursery are not known.
- The centre does not use all available information to track the progress of adults that have taken part in training and as a result can't demonstrate the difference they have had to the development of their skills and knowledge.
- The targets the centre has for checking how well it is doing are not detailed enough, and some are hard to measure so it is not easily able to show how its work is making a difference to families in the area.

It has the following strengths:

- Information provided by health partners enable centre staff to make contact with the families of all new-born babies and families new to the area. As a result registrations are increasing well.
- Parents who use the centre hold it in high regard. Children and families who may be experiencing difficulties in their lives are well supported by caring and knowledgeable staff.
- The centre works effectively with health partners so that sustained breastfeeding rates are strong and obesity rates for reception age children are low.
- The centre works very closely in partnership with other organisations to make sure that families are well-protected and have access to services and information that helps them improve their individual circumstances.
- The management team and enthusiastic partnership advisory board are committed to improving centre services and outcomes for the families they are supporting; the impact of their work is starting to have a positive effect on families' lives.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Further increase the number of families that engage with the centre's activities, particularly those from the most disadvantaged areas.
- Implement systems to:
 - record children's learning and demonstrate their progress
 - track the progress of parents who attend adult learning programmes to show their journey on to further education, training or employment.
- Improve leadership, governance and management by:
 - more clearly defining those groups that need the centre's support the most
 - using this information to set precise and measurable targets in order to judge the impact of the centres' work on meeting the needs of those groups.

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 parents, centre staff, members of the partnership advisory board, representatives from professional partnerships including health, social care and early years providers, and officers from the local authority.

Inspectors observed the centre's work including an activity which was a joint observation with centre staff.

Inspectors took into account parents' views as expressed directly to them during the inspection, as well as through their recorded evaluations about the centre's work.

Inspectors analysed a range of relevant documentation such as the centre's checks on its performance, development plans and data, information relating to safeguarding and a selection of case files.

Inspection team

Lead inspector, Mary Dudley

Additional inspector

Peter Towner

Additional inspector

Anthony Mundy

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Chatterbox Children's Centre is one of six children's centres located within the North/East Ipswich locality, in the county of Suffolk. The centre is managed directly by the local authority supported by a partnership advisory board. Services are delivered through an integrated locality approach. The centre delivers a shared programme of services with two other children's centres. Together they provide family support, adult and family learning, early education and health services, across the three areas. The other two centres are Quayside Children's Centre (URN 23241) and Wooden House Children's Centre (URN 23286) both of which are subject to separate inspection arrangements. Reports are available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The area the centre serves is socially diverse. Almost one in ten children under five years of age are living in households where families are in receipt of out of work benefits.

There are 1407 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach area. The large majority are White British with a small percentage from other ethnic groups. Almost 13% of children in the Chatterbox reach area speak English as an additional language. Primary school data show the most common languages spoken in the area are Polish, Malayalam, Latvian, Dari Persian, Romanian, Spanish and Telugu. Children enter early years provision with skills broadly in line with those expected for their age.

Families face a varied range of challenge. The centre has identified its main priority groups as families living in the areas of highest levels of deprivation in the reach area, nought-to-three year olds and teenage parents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The number of families registered with the centre and accessing services is increasing. Information from health partners on parents expecting children as well as new born babies means centre staff contact families at an early stage and provide information on centre services. However, more work is still to be done to engage families from those groups the centre has identified as a priority including families living in the areas of highest deprivation and children under three years old.
- Activities provided by the centre are well-attended. A lack of space in the centre has led to some groups being split into smaller age ranges to limit numbers. Some groups such as 'Little Chatterboxes' and the 'Twins and Multiples Club' are run by parents to help meet the demand from families in the area.
- The centre actively encourages parents to take up the entitlement for their two, three or four year old child to access early education. Most children have taken up their free entitlement to early education and are in high quality provision. Staff are currently engaged in encouraging the few parents that have not taken up the entitlement to do so.
- Home visits and outreach work is effective in helping families in need of support to access centre services, and continue their involvement until they no longer need support. Parents told inspectors how encouragement from health visitors, support from centre staff and the warm welcome they get when arriving at the centre means the children's centre is a place that they want to be.
- The centre does not have an accurate picture of the needs of all children and families in the groups it has prioritised. Although the centre and its partners are supporting all teenage parents in the area the needs of nought-to-three year olds and families in the more deprived parts of the

area have not been precisely identified.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The quality, range and relevance of services available provide an appropriate balance between those open to everyone and those for children and families who need targeted support.
- Family support workers are highly valued for the work they do with families, some of whom have complex problems. One parent expressed the views of many parents spoken to, when she said, 'I don't know where I would be without them'. Their work is recorded in well-maintained and up-to-date case files that provide details of the positive impact of the centre's work in helping families get back on track.
- A small minority of families have improved their economic well-being through their engagement with the centre and its partners. Increasing numbers of adults receive advice and guidance on employment issues and unemployment in the area is relatively low. Fourteen families have received support to claim their benefit entitlement and as a result are £46000 better off.
- The centre has worked closely with health partners to support the improvement of families' health and well-being. Health services deliver clinics from the centre, midwives and health visitors provide advice and information for new and prospective parents and breastfeeding support volunteers are on hand to help new mums. Breastfeeding rates at six-eight weeks are above the national average and childhood obesity rates are well below national and local figures at just over 4%.
- The centre does not monitor children's progress from their individual starting points. Observations made of children's progress in sessions is not used to record their development or inform future planning in a meaningful way. The centre does not carefully track all of the targeted children who access its services to measure how much value they add to raising achievement, reducing inequalities and ensuring children's readiness for school.
- Parents have access to a good choice of learning opportunities and retention levels on courses are high. A well-structured volunteering programme provides an opportunity for parents to gain qualifications. However, their achievements and any further training or employment they go on to is not tracked by the centre which then cannot measure the difference it has made to the progress parents make.
- Effective integrated working through a well-established Common Assessment Framework process helps keep children and families safe. Good information sharing, particularly for cases that are being 'stepped down' from social care or referred to them, ensures continuity of care. Children and families improve their circumstances, inequalities are reduced and the numbers of child protection cases and child in need cases in the area are low.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The managers and staff team are strongly committed to improving the lives of families in the area. They have worked hard to engage with families from the more deprived parts of the area and attendance information shows they are having some success. However, clearer and more precise identification of target groups would enable the impact of the centres work to be more easily measured.
- A clear performance framework is in place as the basis of support and challenge by the local authority. Quarterly performance monitoring has replaced the 'annual conversation' undertaken by external consultants and oversight is more rigorous. However, some of the centres targets are too

vague to accurately measure the difference it is making to families in the area.

- Governance structures are well-embedded and enhance the centres' services. The well-attended partnership advisory board is led by an energetic and enthusiastic parent who effectively represents the views of parents in the area. Members of the board have provided funding for a play bus to be located in an area of disadvantage and have supported the setting up of parent-led sessions in the centre.
- Supervision arrangements work well and support the professional development and performance management of staff.
- Resources, including staffing, are well allocated and used effectively. The range of activities offered to families is enhanced by the constructive use of volunteers.
- Safeguarding is given a high status and staff and volunteers are safely recruited. The centre works closely with health and social care professionals to maintain a strong focus on reducing risk of harm to children who are looked after, subject to child protection plans and those in need. All staff receive appropriate training which is regularly updated. A full range of effective policies and procedures, which are reviewed annually, underpin the work.

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	20642
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	451709
Managed by	Suffolk County Council
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1407
Centre leader	Tracey Baldry
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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