

# Milton Keynes Cluster Six Children's Centre Group

c/o Abbeys Primary School, Melrose Avenue, Milton Keynes, MK3 6PS

**Inspection date** 9–10 December 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>Previous inspection:</b>	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 children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- While the large majority of families are registered, not enough lone parents, families from workless households and families with two-year-olds living near to The Art Room Children's Centre use services regularly.
- Systems to check the difference that centre services make to families' well-being are not always detailed enough to enable leaders to understand fully the group's impact. In part, this is because agreements with some partners lack precision about the tracking of progress.
- Recording in some case files is not always of a high standard.
- Governance arrangements are developing. Reorganisation of the advisory board is not yet complete and too few parents regularly attend the existing board.
- A minority of parents use mobile phones within the centres and this is not being robustly challenged. More work is required to increase parents' understanding of keeping children safe by raising awareness about the appropriate use of mobile phones and social networking sites.

### This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Leaders and managers have high aspirations for the group. Its effectiveness is improving due to the swift and effective actions being taken following the reorganisation of the three standalone children's centres into one group in September 2014.
- Staff provide good quality care, support and advice. Parents develop trusting relationships with them and appreciate the support they receive.
- Every centre in the group offers a pleasant and welcoming environment, with high quality equipment and well-presented displays.
- The group has an effective volunteer programme that helps parents to develop their employability skills. The majority of volunteers progress to further training and employment.

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

- Improve access to services by:
  - ensuring that the large majority of lone parents, families from workless households and those near to The Art Room Children's Centre with children aged under two years use the group's services.
- Improve the quality and impact of practice and services by:
  - developing rigorous systems to track the progress that children and adults make
  - reviewing the current agreements with partners to ensure they provide the group with information on the progress made and outcomes achieved by service users
  - ensuring all family case files are maintained to a high quality and provide a clear and detailed account of the group's work and its impact.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership, governance and management by:
  - completing the reorganisation of the advisory board so that the members are in a position to challenge and drive improvement across all three centres and involve more parents in decision making
  - embedding parental knowledge and understanding around the appropriate use of mobile phones and social networking sites.

## Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group 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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

The children's centres that form this children's centre group are Daisychain, The Art Room and The Saplings.

The inspectors held meetings or telephone conversations with senior management, representatives of the local authority, chair of the advisory board, parents and a range of partners.

The inspectors visited all three children's centres, looked at a range of documentation and observed a range of the centres' work, including Stay and Play and adult learning sessions.

## Inspection team

Kathryn Gethin, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Joy Law	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jameel Hassan	Additional Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

Milton Keynes Cluster Six Children's Centre group was established in September 2014. It consists of three children's centres: Daisychain; The Art Room; and The Saplings. All three children's centres are located in Bletchley and are based on school sites. The Art Room Children's Centre was previously governed by The Children's Society and had a period of turbulence with several different managers. The Art Room Children's Centre links with Drayton Park School. Daisychain Children's Centre links with Abbeys Primary School. The Saplings Children's Centre links with Knowles Nursery School and Knowles Primary School. The schools are subject to separate inspection arrangements and their reports can be found at: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Governance of the group is provided by Milton Keynes local authority, in conjunction with a separate advisory board. In September 2014, a significant reorganisation concerning the management and delivery of services and activities took place with previous stand alone children's centres being configured into groups. As a result, there have been many staff changes at all levels. The new Cluster Six group provides a range of services and activities that include health services, adult learning and family play sessions.

There are approximately 3,031 children aged under five years living in the predominantly urban area served by the group. The large majority of families are of White British heritage. Levels of unemployment are above levels seen nationally, as is the proportion of young children living in households dependent on workless benefits. Most children enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities below those typical for their age.

The centres' main priority groups are: teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers; lone parents; and children living in workless households.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Over the last three months, there has been a concerted drive by leaders, staff and partners to improve the number of children and families registered with the group. Targeted leaflet distribution to local schools, staff attendance at baby clinics, pre-school and toddler groups, and promotion of the group's services at fun days are underpinning the rapid increase in registrations, including those who are hard to reach. The majority of teenage mothers, pregnant teenagers, workless families and lone parents are now registered with the centre.
- The centre group has accurately identified the families most in need of support, but is not yet managing to engage and maintain meaningful contact with the large majority. This means that priority groups such as lone parents, workless families and those living near to The Art Room Children's Centre with children under two years of age are not making the most of the services on offer.
- Staff effectively link with pre-school providers and schools to support families to access early education and childcare. They test out different ways in which to reach and facilitate eligible children's take up of their free entitlement to early education. While below the national figures, the proportion of two-, three- and four-year-old children accessing funded education places is improving, particularly for eligible two-year-old children.
- The staff team is persistent in making sure that an increasing number of families are getting the right help at the right time. The team uses a range of information available to it and works effectively with partner agencies to support children and their families who are in most need.
- Good partnership working between health partners, children and families practices, social care and children's centre staff means that information is shared appropriately and pregnant teenagers, teenage mothers, parents and children are well supported. Early identification of developmental

delay or children being placed at risk means that they receive effective, appropriate and timely support.

- The neighbourhood employment partnership provides effective support for target families, including workless families and lone parents. This support helps them to develop their confidence, their writing skills and, with further training, help them secure sustained employment. Progression to further training, volunteering and employment is supported well.

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

Requires improvement

- The system to track children's and adults' progress and measure the centre group's effectiveness, particularly when signposted to partners' services, is under developed. Some agreements with partners lack the detail required to inform the centres of the outcomes for families. Therefore, the group is unable to sufficiently analyse the impact of its services on reducing inequalities and improving families' well-being.
- The centres have an effective volunteering programme that helps parents to develop their employability skills. Volunteers' skills and aspirations are matched very well to placements and the majority of volunteers progress to further training and employment.
- The group provides a range of services for all. Specialist services, such as speech and language therapists, dieticians and dental health practitioners, attend clinics at all three children's centres. Parents are effectively supported in developing their understanding of the importance of healthy eating and physical exercise and the impact these have on preventing and reducing obesity and tooth decay in young children.
- Staff provide effective care, guidance and support for parents. Effective courses help parents to develop their confidence and parenting skills. Specific courses to enhance awareness about diet and exercise are well attended and success rates are high. One parent has made significant progress in developing her confidence and self-esteem and is now running her own domestic cleaning business.
- In most cases, staff effectively link children's experiences to the early learning goals and identify their next steps in learning. Staff discuss with parents what their child enjoys doing at home and encourage them to support their child's learning and development with different activities. In the majority of cases, learning journals are detailed and capture the child's learning and development very well using photographs and written observations, in partnership with parents. These show that the majority of children are making good progress.
- Local schools report that children who have attended children's centre services on a regular basis settle better at school. There is good communication between school and the children's centres about the needs of local families.
- Recording in case files is not always of a consistently high standard. There are some gaps in the information and different systems for recording are used. The move to a new electronic system has the potential to alleviate this.
- The children's centres are warm, welcoming environments and provide parents with a wealth of information. Excellent displays of children's work and photographs of children and parents clearly enjoying the activities, and the annotated comments of children's and parents' learning, reflect positively on the relevance, breadth and quality of the services available.

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

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have been highly effective in guiding the centres through a period of significant change. Expectations are high and there is a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the group. In a relatively short timescale, robust action has been taken to identify those families most in need of services, review all policies and procedures and tackle any poor performance.
- The local authority sets challenging targets and three separate well-targeted action plans are in place. There is one to address the organisational change, one to address priorities for the families

and one to address the issues raised by previous inspections. These are monitored on a frequent basis and any delay is swiftly identified and addressed.

- Leaders are aware that monitoring of services provided is not always clear. The new 'Family Star' outcome tool has recently been introduced to demonstrate the impact of family support work on reducing inequalities. Although, this is in the early stages and not yet embedded.
- Resources are used well across the group. A review of staff skills has taken place and the staff group has been streamlined to work as one across the area served by the group. Administrators rotate between the three children's centres and joint training is now in place. As a consequence, staff are beginning to take more responsibility for the group's effectiveness as a whole.
- Governance is not yet fully effective. The move from individual advisory boards to one that represents the group has not yet been completed. There is a lack of challenge from current board members concerning the group's performance as a whole. In addition, parents are not regularly represented on the board and are not routinely involved in decision making.
- All safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and have been recently reviewed; staff training is up to date. A strong focus on domestic abuse has enabled families to access relevant courses and this has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of cases reported in the last year. All children in need and those subject to a child protection plan are known and staff work closely with other professionals to ensure families get the support they need.
- Regardless of the clear notices within the centres about the use of mobile phones, a minority of families continue to use them. The group has yet to challenge this effectively and promote e-safety, including safe social networking practice.
- Supervision is robust. The centre coordinator meets individual staff on a regular basis. Case files are discussed and actions agreed. There is clear recorded evidence where poor performance has been tackled and training needs identified. The consistency of case file practice is recognised as an area for ongoing work.
- A recent survey showed that the vast majority of parents are very satisfied with the services provided. Their responses included suggestions to further develop services.

## 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.

**Children's centre group details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	85381
<b>Local authority</b>	Milton Keynes
<b>Inspection number</b>	452650
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	3,031
<b>Group manager</b>	Tracy Seymour
<b>Telephone number</b>	01908 641454
<b>Email address</b>	tracy.seymour@milton-keynes.gov.uk

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

- 20907 Daisychain Children's Centre
- 23149 The Art Room Children's Centre
- 23256 The Saplings Children's Centre

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