

Centre Place Family Centre

Estuary Housing, Centre Place, Southend on Sea, SS1 2JD

Inspection dates	28–29 January 2015
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

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 is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Information provided about which children and families are registered and using the centre is not easily accessible and is not always timely or accurate. This is particularly so for those from priority groups.
- Leaders and managers are not using the information that is available well enough to ensure that the large majority of families who need help most, such as children living with one parent or in workless households, are engaging regularly in centre services.
- The local authority, the commissioned provider and the advisory board are not using data consistently enough to set challenging targets to help the centre improve.
- Service level agreements and the flow of information from some agencies and other children's centres are not robust enough. As a result the centre is not being updated regularly enough by partners about new births, which children are subject to social care supervision and outcomes for those receiving one-to-one support. This hinders the centre's ability to track the progress of some of those accessing partners' services such as adult learning at colleges.
- A small number of safeguarding procedures, such as the regular risk assessment of sessions held at the centre and ensuring all covering letters relating to visiting professionals' recruitment checks, are not rigorous enough.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Despite the size of the area served by the centre having significantly increased from April 2014, almost 80% of local young children are registered and a large majority accessed children's centre services in 2014.
- The newly appointed centre manager has quickly and accurately assessed the centre's strengths and areas for development. She is providing strong leadership with a focus on reducing inequalities.
- The centre is at the hub of the community; it has developed strong local partnerships with the police and the housing association. These have contributed to good levels of welfare support where families and children have experienced domestic violence or there are issues with housing or benefits.
- Parents are very positive about the centre, typically stating 'I always feel at home when I come here'. They also play an important role in shaping services through volunteering and active membership of the advisory board.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority to ensure that data relating to how many children are registered, accessing and using the centre regularly are easily accessible, as up-to-date as possible and accurate. Ensure that all those who lead, manage and monitor the centre use this information to set challenging improvement targets that are specific, measurable and challenging.
- Ensure that leaders and managers at all levels ascertain why some children and families from priority groups such as lone parents and those from workless households are not engaging regularly by:
 - identifying the specific needs of children and families and why more are not using the services after they register
 - adapting services to meet their needs
 - accurately recording and monitoring all contacts at the other local children's centres.
- Review service level agreements and the arrangements to exchange information with other agencies and children's centres. Work with those parties to ensure the centre is provided with as much detail as possible about new births, families who are subject to social care supervision, who are being directly supported by Cambridge Road Children's Centre staff or who have been signposted elsewhere such as for adult learning. Establish a system to track the long term impact of the centre's work on improving the well-being of children and families who need support the most.
- Ensure that all safeguarding procedures are followed consistently by:
 - conducting risk assessments and recording findings before each session
 - obtaining covering letters for all visiting professionals who work unsupervised with children in relation to recruitment and vetting checks.

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 the centre manager, an assistant director of Estuary Housing Association, the commissioned provider, and representatives from the local authority. They also met members of the advisory board, parents and volunteers. They held conversations with various partners such as those from health services, adult learning, managers of early years settings and several other Southend children's centre staff members.

The inspectors visited a family session held at the Store House, a local voluntary organisation, and also observed the Baby and Toddler group that took place in the centre.

They looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self evaluation and improvement plan, safeguarding policies, practice and procedures and a sample of case studies. The centre manager and representatives from Estuary Housing Association and the local authority attended all the team meetings.

Inspection team

Lead inspector, Joan Lindsay

Additional inspector

Marinette Bazin

Additional inspector

Peter Towner

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Centre Place Family Centre opened in 2008. It is a single centre but works closely with two other children's centres in the South Central Southend Collaboration. These two children's centres, Cambridge Road and Summercourt, are managed independently and are subject to separate inspections; their reports can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>. As part of the collaboration, Centre Place provides family support, adult learning and health services. Responsibility for providing one-to-one family support for children and families sits with Cambridge Road Children's Centre.

Centre Place Family Centre Nursery is located in the same building and is also managed by the centre manager but was not part of this inspection. The centre is managed by Estuary Housing Association on behalf of the local authority. An advisory board is in place. The centre manager had been in post for six weeks at the time of this inspection.

In April 2014, the area served by the centre was increased significantly and now encompasses 1,211 children under the age of five years. The centre is based on a large housing estate, close to the heart of Southend. Of the nine separate defined localities in the area, six are considered to be in the 30% least advantaged in the country with two being in the top 10%. White British heritage families account for 84% of the population. The percentage of children under five living in workless households is 33% overall, which is well above national average. Children generally enter the Early Years Foundation Stage at levels below those typical for their age.

The centre has identified priority groups needing most support as: young children living in workless households; lone parents of young children; and families where there is domestic violence.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Not enough children and families from households where there are lone parents or no one in paid employment are using the centre regularly and this requires improvement. The centre has only recently received information about how frequently identified priority groups are accessing services. Consequently, this has not been used effectively enough to analyse why engagement levels for some of these children and families are not higher, or what services would best meet their needs.
- Data provided by the local authority are not easily accessed by centre staff. What are available are not always reliable or accurate. For example, the information they provide does not consistently include children and families' attendance at other local children's centres, including those in the collaboration.
- At 80%, most young children are registered with the centre and the large majority accessed services at least once in 2014. Outreach work, such as staff attendance at the Store House family food bank sessions, has encouraged families to visit the centre and benefit from attending activities such as the Baby and Toddler group.
- The centre has been successful in supporting a significant number of children and families who have experienced domestic violence. Working closely with other agencies such as Safer Places and running specific programmes at the centre has led to good engagement from these priority families.
- Families expecting babies and those with young children have good opportunities to access health services. Very well-attended weekly antenatal clinics run by midwives and the health visitors'

attendance at the Baby Buddies' group encourages access by those who might be reluctant to visit the centre. The developmental checks taking place at the centre provide good opportunities for families to meet health professionals and seek advice.

- There is a high take-up locally of free early education places by eligible two year olds with over 78% placed, all in good or better provision. The on-site nursery provides places for 37 eligible children, almost half the total. Close links with the nursery ensure families also engage well with the centre.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The quality, range and relevance of services require improvement. This is because there has not been robust enough monitoring of who attends the centre and makes use of services elsewhere. This is especially so for children and families who need most support such as lone parents and those from workless households. Consequently, the centre has not effectively analysed which services would best meet their needs.
- Signposting to other children's centres or services such as for adult learning or one-to-one support is not consistently followed up. The systems in place for partners to feed back outcomes to staff are not fully effective. Consequently, the centre is not always able to track and measure the longer term impact of its work on improving the outcomes for families and children including the progress they make.
- The centre is not automatically made aware of which children are under social care supervision although they know how many children are considered children in need, are looked after or are subject to a child protection plan. However, not having more detailed information limits the support the centre can offer. Cambridge Road Children's Centre leads on providing one-to-one support for families living in the collaboration's extensive area but there is not a consistent flow of information about the impact of the work being done specifically with Centre Place families.
- Families receive good support where there have been incidences of domestic violence. This is because local partnerships are strong and information sharing is regular and informs timely early help. They also receive effective guidance and support when housing issues arise that affect their well-being.
- Health outcomes are good and improving. Immunisation rates are high; the number of babies still being breastfed at about two months has risen from below national averages in 2013 to slightly above in the first two quarters of 2014. The centre has good links with health services as well as a strong focus on healthy lifestyles encouraging families to be active and eat well through cooking courses and a keep fit programme.
- There has been a significant increase in the percentage of children reaching a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, up from 42.8% in 2013 to 60.9% in 2014. This is now in line with the level seen nationally. Good links with early years settings and a focus on developing children's confidence and independence has led to them being well prepared to move on to school. Parents feel the centre plays an important role in this aspect of their child's development. They feel well supported through sessions such as Play Together, Grow Together.
- Parents are fully involved in shaping services. There are six volunteers at present who provide valuable support at sessions, on the reception desk and also run the community cafe. The proactive chair of the advisory board is a local parent and several others attend advisory board meetings. Volunteers say that supporting the centre has built their confidence greatly and given them the opportunity to 'give something back' for the help they have received reflected by the comment 'It's given me so much; the change in me has been drastic'.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**Requires improvement**

- There is a lack of easily accessible data to enable the local authority, leaders, managers and the advisory board to measure the centre's impact, especially on improving the outcomes for families and children who need support the most. Where this information has been extracted it is not always complete in relation to families using other children's centres and so is not entirely accurate.
- What information that is available is not used well enough to set measurable, challenging targets for example in the local authority's annual review and monitoring visits, or by the advisory board. This hampers the centre's capacity to move forward.
- The newly-appointed centre manager has quickly come to grips with the challenges facing the centre. She has already implemented some changes especially in relation to the exchange of information with other children's centres. However, it is too early for those changes to have an impact on measuring the centre's work with children and families in priority groups.
- Not enough in-depth analysis of the needs of some of the identified priority groups has been undertaken to ensure that resources are being used as effectively as possible to fully address local inequalities. However, staff are enthusiastic, well trained and committed to improving the lives of local families. As a result, the centre is seen as a hub of the community and is credited with helping the local area to be viewed in a more positive light.
- Safeguarding policies are comprehensive but some of the day-to-day procedures are not always adhered to such as risk assessing each session. All the necessary recruitment checks are carried out on staff and volunteers but there is not a full record of covering letters from visiting professionals.
- Children, who are subject to child protection, are considered to be children in need or who are looked after, are supported well when the centre knows who they are. However, systems for this information to be relayed to the centre by other professionals are not fully in place. Centre staff are quick to act on any concerns however and are clear about the procedures they need to follow should an early help assessment be required or there are immediate safeguarding concerns.
- 'I always feel at home here' and 'I want to stay on this estate because of the centre' sum up parents' very positive views and how, in many cases it has transformed their lives. They are proactive in advertising the merits of coming to the centre, attending the advisory board and feel fully involved in its life and development.

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 details

Unique reference number	20614
Local authority	Southend Borough Council
Inspection number	454485
Managed by	Estuary Housing Association on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,211
Centre manager	Kirsty Reed
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01702 617446
Email address	Kirsty.reed@estuary.co.uk

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