

Norfolk - AfC South West (Lots 11 and 36)

Ashleigh Infant & Nursery School, Sheffield Road, Wymondham, NR18 0HL

Inspection dates	13–14 May 2015
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
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 children's centre group is good because:

- Leaders and managers are highly motivated, work very well together to challenge each other and make sure families receive high quality services. Significant progress has been made in improving the quality of services and increasing registration levels since the new management arrangements began in October 2012. There is no complacency and services continue to improve.
- The very large majority of families, including those who are identified as most in need of support, engage regularly to improve their life chances.
- The quality of care, guidance and support is commendable. Users are unanimous in their praise for both centres in the group.
- Much thought and attention to detail ensures all the centres offer a pleasant and welcoming environment where children and families feel safe and make use of facilities.
- There is good support for families with disabled children and those who have special educational needs, with a dedicated and popular support group, facilitated by specialist children's centre staff. The children's centre's sensory room at Attleborough is well used and valued by families.
- Self-evaluation is detailed and supported well by data. Staff supervision is regular and there are good opportunities for professional development and regular training.

It is not outstanding because:

- The tracking of the progress that parents make during centre group services or when they are signposted to partners' services to help them build education and employability skills is incomplete.
- Staff do not systematically track the progress of individual children from their starting points at the centres. This limits the centres' ability to fully demonstrate the impact of their good work with children.
- The membership of the advisory board is not fully representative of the range of services in the community it serves. It has not yet had strong enough impact at providing challenge to the centre leadership team.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that tracking of adult learners, especially those from priority groups, is systematic so that the group can clearly demonstrate the impact of their learning on family outcomes.
- Continue to develop the system of tracking children's progress so the group can effectively demonstrate the impact of services by collating the information held on individual children more effectively.
- Review the membership of the advisory board to ensure that it is representative of the local community and provides more challenge and support to the centres' leadership and management team.

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. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Attleborough, Wymondham and Hethersett Children's Centres.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leadership team, staff, members of the local advisory boards and a representative from the local authority. They spoke to partners from across a wide range of services and agencies, including education, health, social care and the voluntary sector. Many parents across the two centres also met with inspectors and contributed their views.

The inspectors visited both centres and a range of services offered, including, 'Little Gardeners', 'Chatterbox' and 'Bounce and Rhyme' session. They observed the group's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including case files.

Inspection team

Lead inspector Susan Brockhouse	Her Majesty's Inspector
Peter Towner	Additional inspector
Steve Nelson	Additional inspector
Ann Taylor	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

This group of three children's centres is known as Norfolk - AfC South West (Lots 11 and 36). It is one of a number of groups managed by Action for Children on behalf of Norfolk County Council. It comprises Attleborough, Wymondham and Hethersett Children's Centres. The Wymondham and Hethersett Children's Centre operate from purpose built premises on the site of Asleigh Infants and Nursery school. Attleborough Children's centre is based on the first floor of the adult education building in the town's centre. The centres share leadership, management, and a joint advisory board.

The schools and day care were not part of this inspection and their reports are available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

There are 3617 children aged from birth to four years living in the reach area of the three children's centres. The group is part of the Southern Cluster of Children's Centres, alongside Dereham and Litcham; Long Stratton, Harleston and Loddon. Children's skills, knowledge and ability on entry to early education vary but generally are at the levels expected for their age.

The three children's centres serve rural communities of relative affluence, ranked within the 70% least deprived in the country. They have worked together as a group since October 2012. The majority of the population is of White British heritage. Unemployment across the group's reach areas varies, but averages out at six per cent.

The priority target groups for the centre group, are: two-year-olds eligible for funded education, children subject to a child protection plan, children in need and children subject to a family support plan, disabled children and those with learning difficulties and their families.

The group offers services which comprise a mixture of universal and targeted provision delivered on-site and in the community. Due to isolation and lack of public transport in some of the outlying villages, outreach work is an essential part of the group's delivery of services. The group offers activities and services which include baby clinics, infant massage, stay and play sessions for different age groups, breast-feeding support, weaning sessions, healthy eating and exercise groups, adult education, Book Start sessions and parenting courses. The group offers family support, and has links with early years settings in the private and voluntary sector.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Registration and participation rates have increased over the last two years with the large majority of families, including those expecting children, now making use of the services provided by the centre and its partners. This is because skilled and knowledgeable staff and effective sharing of information with other professionals results in a secure understanding of the needs of local families, especially those who are most vulnerable.
- The proportion of two-, three- and four- year- olds taking up their free entitlement to early education is high. In East Harling there are insufficient places. The children's centre is working creatively to support families without places, through extra group sessions and the provision of transport in exceptional circumstances.
- Skilled and dedicated staff provide much needed support to some of the most vulnerable families in their homes. This has secured the engagement of a number of families who might otherwise have chosen not to access services.

- Centre staff routinely check up that families, especially those who are most in need, are regularly accessing services. The 'Contact Pathway' is implemented effectively to ensure that families who do not attend are quickly identified and contacted by staff to ensure that they are safe and provided with appropriate support to ensure they continue to access services and activities to meet their needs.
- There is very good support in place for disabled children and those with special educational needs. Specialist groups and strong working relationships with organisations, such as Portage, mean most of the children with additional needs and their families are supported through children's centre services.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- A good range of well-located services are offered to children and families. A sensible balance is achieved between those available to everyone and those designed to support those families identified as in need of support. As a result the take-up by families most in need is high.
- The centre successfully promotes healthy lifestyles through a range of effective activities, including 'The joy of food' and 'Weigh and Play'. Many of these health-related initiatives are developed with effective health partnerships, which include ante-natal and post-natal visits. Due to the centre's effective provision, the rates for child obesity are lower and the rates for sustained breastfeeding at six to eight weeks are better than the rest of the county.
- Children who access services are prepared well for school. Good quality sessions, that promote the improvement of children's communication and language skills, their personal, social and emotional development offers chances for exciting play and learning. Often the focus is playing outdoors, in the woods for example, or through growing and planting as part of the 'Little Gardeners' group.
- Tracking the progress of children who have accessed the children's centre is underway. However, there is a lack of an overall tracking system to pull together all the assessments taking place on individual children.
- The group's volunteer programme has proved popular and ensures that the centre group benefits from having regular support at many of the activities it offers such as Breastfeeding Café, Little Gardeners and Chatterbox. Plans are in place to increase the numbers who are able to take up this opportunity and provide reflective learning opportunities to support employability learning.
- Parents actively contribute to the development of the wide range of good quality services and activities offered by the group. For example, in response to suggestions from parents, a highly successful group for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities was set up.
- Several families were keen to tell inspectors their personal stories about how the group has helped them to make positive changes in their lives. Staff skilfully gain families' trust and create an environment where families feel confident to provide sensitive information and seek the help they need. One parent told inspectors, 'if it was not for the children's centre, I'd be a total mess'.
- Parents receive good support to help them improve their parenting skills through programmes which are tailored to meet individual needs. Parents gain increased confidence and develop effective strategies to help them manage their children's behaviour.
- A suitable range of adult education courses are available. However, managers recognise that the centre does not have robust tracking systems in place to see whether all parents it signposts to

courses elsewhere successfully complete them, or if they go on to further training or employment.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Strong and self-critical leadership ensures that the group's performance is improving over time as reflected in increasing registration figures and improving health outcomes. Regular meetings led by the local authority keep a close check on how well the group is doing and provide plenty of challenge to help move things forward. Self-evaluation processes are robust. Well-focused action planning and clear management procedures mean that the group has good capacity to build for still greater effectiveness.
- Safeguarding and safe recruiting arrangements are robust and staff have received relevant training. Policies and procedures to promote safeguarding meet requirements and are understood by staff. Children subject to a child protection plan, children in need plan or helped by the Family Support process receive well-integrated support. E-safety is promoted well and parents are aware of the risks associated with using computers and social media.
- The group is well resourced at both sites; for example, there is a vibrant sensory room at the Attleborough centre and inviting baby weigh area at the Wymondham centre. Staff are also used very effectively across the group to meet most priority families' needs. Finances are managed very well to ensure that families' needs and local priorities are met effectively. For instance, a well managed hardship fund ensures families in crisis and in most need received essential items such as safety equipment, carpets and transport to attend activities.
- Most partnerships are strong. Effective joint working with children's social care and health visiting colleagues ensures early help is put swiftly in place to support the most vulnerable families. Partnerships with midwifery services and social housing providers are not so well developed. However, the Local authority has secured an agreement with the midwifery service and a new antenatal education programme 'Pathway to Parenting' is being piloted within centres.
- Staff are well qualified; opportunities for continuous professional development are encouraged and staff feel well-supported and highly valued. Senior leaders regularly monitor the quality of the group's activities delivered by their own staff and commissioned services, encouraging an ethos of reflective practice. Regular consultations and evaluations of services show that parents report a high level of satisfaction with services.
- The group's advisory board has a stable membership and they have a good overview of the centre group's performance and knowledge of where further improvement is required to reduce any inequalities. However, the membership does not provide a true reflection of all the agencies that work in the community, especially those in the voluntary sector. Therefore independent challenge is not as secure as it should be.

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

Unique reference number	80021
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	453890
Managed by	Action for Children on behalf of the local authority.

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3617
Group manager	Sue McNeilly
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
Telephone number	01953 713896
Email address	Susan.McNeilly@actionforchildren.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20139 Attleborough Children's Centre
- 23705 Wymondham Children's Centre
- 21466 Hethersett Children's Centre

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