

Norfolk - AfC South East (Lots 8 and 10)

Manor Field Infant & Nursery School, Manor Road, Norwich, NR15 2XR

Inspection dates	3–4 June 2015
Previous inspection date	12–13 August 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
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:

- Although the governance, leadership and management has significantly improved since the last inspection, leaders at every level recognise that their use of data to measure the difference the centre group is making to the lives of local families requires further improvement.
- Despite formal and informal consultation, not enough families, including those deemed to need the most help, are involved in making decisions about the centre group's services. This makes it hard for leaders to ensure that what they are providing meets the needs of local families.
- Tracking of children's progress is at an early stage and is not yet helping centre group staff and colleagues in local schools to work together to show what difference the group is making to children's readiness for school. Tracking of the progress of adults towards employability is also weak.
- The weaknesses in tracking of the progress of learners of all ages limits how well the leaders, and those responsible for governance can show how well they are reducing inequalities between the families identified as being most in need and the rest of the families in the local community.
- Health visitors do not automatically share the results of the progress check for two-year-olds with centre group staff. This means that the staff team cannot easily support the families with two-year-old children who are assessed as needing additional support.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- The centre group coordinator, the Action for Children leaders, the advisory board and local authority have greatly improved the quality and range of services and activities on offer, both in the centres and through outreach work. Since the last inspection, this has successfully attracted many more local families to register with and to regularly use services in the three centres.
- The staff systematically check that the families identified as needing most support, namely parents under 25, families with children known to Children's Social Services, and children living in workless households, are using and benefiting from their services. Safeguarding is a strength.
- Parents, the advisory board, partner agencies, local authority, Action for Children and the staff team rightly praise the new coordinator for the improvements made since her appointment.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve governance, leadership and management by:
 - improving the way the local authority and Action for Children support the coordinator to gather, analyse and use data, in order to better demonstrate the impact of the centre group's work on improving the lives of local families and reducing inequalities for those families identified as needing the most support
 - encouraging more families to contribute to decision-making about centre group services including children and adults in the families identified by the leaders as most in need of centre group services, in order to ensure services meet local needs as fully as possible.
- Improve the quality and impact of provision by:
 - working with Norfolk County Council and with school colleagues to improve the tracking of children's attainment and progress, in order to better demonstrate the contribution the centre group is making to the children's readiness for school
 - working with adult and community learning partners to increase the take-up of adult and family learning courses and improve tracking systems in order to support adults' longer-term employability and to map their progress over time.
- Improve access by:
 - working with health partners to improve information sharing so that the centre group can better demonstrate the extent to which they help children identified through assessment at age two to access the help they need.

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 Long Stratton, Harleston and Loddon Children's Centres.

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

The inspectors held meetings with parents, the centre coordinator, representatives from Action for Children, the local authority, the advisory board and partner agencies such as health, social care and education.

The inspectors visited all three centres at Long Stratton, Harleston and Loddon, and held a meeting at South Norfolk Council offices.

They observed the centres' work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including safeguarding policies and procedures, supervision records, partnership agreements and parental satisfaction surveys. Two joint observations were carried out, one with the centre group coordinator and the second with the Family Support Practitioner.

Inspection team

Lead inspector Linda McLarty

Her Majesty's Inspector

Joan Lindsay

Additional inspector

Peter Towner

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

This group of three children's centres is known as Norfolk - AfC South East (Lots 8 and 10). It is one of a number of groups managed since 2012 by Action for Children on behalf of Norfolk County Council. It comprises Long Stratton, Harleston and Loddon children's centres. The Long Stratton Children's Centre is co-located with Manor Field Infant and Nursery School and the Harleston Children's Centre is on the same site as Harleston Primary School. Loddon Children's Centre is based in two rooms at the back of Loddon Infant and Nursery School, and the centre telephone is based in the school office. Due to lack of space, the rooms at Loddon are used mainly as a service delivery venue for sessions provided for non-mobile children, such as infant massage, clinic and 'Breastfeeding Group' sessions. The centres share leadership, management, and a joint advisory board.

Long Stratton is the largest children's centre in this rural group, where the centres are between 10-15 miles apart. Also on the Long Stratton site is the linked early years provider Jack in the Box Nursery. The schools and day care were not part of this inspection and their reports are available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

There are 1,801 children aged from birth to four years living in the communities around the three children's centres. Children enter early years provision with skills and capabilities below the levels typically seen in children of 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 2010, two years prior to becoming part of Action for Children. The majority of the population is of White British heritage, with very small numbers of European migrant families making up the most prevalent minority ethnic group. Unemployment across the communities served by the centres varies, but averages out at 0.88% which is low and equates to 208 adults, all of whom are in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance.

The priority target groups for the centre group are: parents under 25 and in particular those under 20; children living in workless households in the communities of all three centres, and children known to social services and identified to the children's centre group through data sharing.

The group offers services which comprise a mixture of universal and targeted provision delivered on-site and in the community. Due to isolation and poor public transport in some of the outlying villages, outreach work is an essential part of the group's delivery of services. Activities and services include baby clinics, baby and infant massage, stay and play sessions for different age groups, baby yoga, breast-feeding support, weaning sessions, healthy eating and exercise groups, adult education, 'Skills for success' courses, 'Tiny Talk', 'How babies learn', fathers' groups 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

- The centre leaders can demonstrate that most of the families they identify as needing the most support are now using centre services regularly. Staff maintain a strong focus from pregnancy onwards on parents aged under 25, (particularly younger parents under 20 years of age), workless families and families with children who receive support from social services. This has successfully increased the numbers of these families who benefit from using centre services.
- The balance between open-access and focussed activities and services, and outreach into the more

inaccessible villages, is successfully attracting many more families to use the centres. This is helping to address the high levels of isolation which occur in this very rural area, where transport links are very poor and internet access is unreliable. Partner agencies share local knowledge well. This helps staff to successfully identify and involve the families who need most help, or who are less likely to access the centre group's services.

- Most families in the general communities surrounding the centres are registered with the centre group and a large majority are meaningfully involved with services. Staff work well with partner agencies to carefully track attendance to measure the take-up by the families they have identified as needing their services most. This helps to ensure that their resources are used where needed most. For example, the 'hardship' fund is used well to ensure transport is not a barrier to accessing services.
- Take-up of funded nursery education for two, three- and four-year-old children is good, with most families accessing places. All funded two-year-olds are in settings judged to be good or better.
- Assessment of two-year-old children is carried out by the health visitors. However, the results of this are not shared with the centre group. This limits how well the staff can work with their partners to ensure that children identified as needing additional support can access services and quickly get the help they need.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Early years, parenting and adult learning sessions observed during the inspection are of good quality. The coordinator checks the quality, range and relevance of services by observing practice and by analysing attendance information and feedback comments. This helps her to gauge how useful these sessions are in improving the life chances of local families, especially for those identified as most in need of targeted support.
- The centre group's coordinator and governance at all levels acknowledge that tracking of the progress of children requires improvement. This is a Norfolk-wide problem, as the local authority has not agreed a system which centres can use to track children's progress and attainment. However, a start has been made on tracking children identified as most at risk of falling behind. The coordinator has recently visited another local authority to learn about successful tracking systems.
- Across schools in the communities served by the centre group, fewer children reach a good level of development than is seen nationally, or across Norfolk. The local authority, Action for Children and the centre coordinator have accurately analysed the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores for the schools in their three communities. This helps them to effectively focus staff support where needed most. For example, they now provide activities specifically to improve communication and language in the Pulham and Thurlton localities.
- Centre group staff do not work well enough with adult learning partners to increase and track the numbers of adults who complete adult and family learning courses, in order to support their longer-term employability. However, the centre group has successfully encouraged many younger parents to continue with their education and develop aspirations for future employment. The coordinator is working hard to enhance job prospects by increasing the low numbers of volunteers and has developed an increasingly supportive partnership with Jobcentre Plus.
- Parents praise the staff for their care, guidance and support, 'I get advice on anything that is worrying me'. They give moving examples of how this improved their lives. Most parents identified as needing support with parenting have completed accredited courses to improve their family's well-being. Buggy walks and outdoor play activities are helping to improve fitness levels.
- Breastfeeding rates have improved considerably since the last inspection and are now slightly above

the national average. There is a significant improvement in the way the case files record the progress families make, and these now show convincing evidence of the coordinator's monitoring.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- From the last inspection until the appointment of the new coordinator in November 2014, the pace of improvement was too slow. The local authority and Action for Children funded external consultancy support until the coordinator settled into post in January 2015. Since then the coordinator has inspired the staff team and partner agencies to accelerate the rate of improvement.
- Governance, leadership and management have improved since the last inspection. However, the local authority, Action for Children, the advisory board and coordinator agree that they still do not use data well enough to measure the difference they are making to families' lives. The local authority and Action for Children now monitor, challenge and hold the coordinator more closely to account for the use of resources and services to meet local needs. They rightly acknowledge that it is too soon to see the full impact of the many positive changes she has introduced to reduce inequalities for local families.
- Self-evaluation and regular monitoring of the staff's work has accurately identified the main areas for development. Progress towards the targets in the resulting improvement plans is checked regularly and the staff have successfully met many of the goals of the original development plan. There is now a shared sense of responsibility at all levels to further improve the group's effectiveness.
- The coordinator's good knowledge about safeguarding and how to improve parenting enriches the mix of skills in the staff team. She closely observes and checks the team's work to ensure that they remain focussed on the families identified as being most in need. Staff report that they feel extremely well-supported and challenged to improve.
- Staff are well-trained to support their safeguarding roles and responsibilities and implement the robust safeguarding policies and procedures well. Case files indicate that the staff support is pre-empting the need for higher-level intervention for some families, although numbers helped are limited by a vacancy in the staff team. This is currently being advertised.
- Premises are safe and secure. Staff have detailed knowledge of the needs of children subject to child protection plans, children in need plans, and of children looked after by the local authority, and they work well with social care colleagues to help to meet their needs. The Common Assessment Framework processes are used well to ensure that needs are identified quickly and families receive help from the centre group staff and their social care and health partners promptly.
- Health, education and social care colleagues informally report that the improved partnership working with centre group staff is helping to reduce inequalities. More partners now attend the advisory board, where they challenge and hold the centre group much more to account. However, too few parents, including those most in need of support, are involved in making decisions about centre group services, either as part of the Advisory Board or through consultations.

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	80209
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	455019
Managed by	Action for Children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,801
Centre leader	Sarah O'Donnell
Date of previous inspection	12 August 2014
Telephone number	01508 536399
Email address	sarah.o'donnell@actionforchildren.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 21850 Long Stratton Children's Centre
- 21378 Harleston Children's Centre
- 21841 Loddon Children's Centre

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