

Wantage Area Children's Centre

The Butler Centre, Church Street, Wantage, Oxfordshire OX12 8BL

Inspection dates	10–11 June 2015
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		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		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

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

- Not enough of the families the centre has identified as being in need of particular support are benefitting from its work or that of its key partners on a sustained basis.
- The centre is at the very early stages of delivering its services from a range of community venues. Not all of these activities are well attended by the families they are designed for. As a result, the time of staff is not always used to best effect.
- Over time, too few parents have had the opportunity to volunteer at the centre or in the community or to take part in adult learning leading to qualifications. As a consequence, some parents have not had the opportunity to develop the confidence and skills to improve the economic stability of their families and to move into employment if they need to.
- The centre is not yet tracking the long-term impact of its parenting courses and adult learning on the well-being of families and the progress of parents into further training and employment.

This centre has the following strengths:

- The practice team leader has brought considerable improvements in the centre's work since she was appointed, supported effectively by Action for Children, the local authority and the advisory board. In particular, strong partnerships have been forged in the local community, resulting in renewed confidence, which is leading to better outcomes for more families and children.
- Most families in the area are now known to the centre and are either registered at Wantage or other children's centres in the area or have three- and four-year-olds who are enrolled with early years partners.
- It works very effectively with its most vulnerable families in their own homes to improve family life and to keep children safe from harm.
- Good quality services help parents to promote children's early learning and development. As a result, more children who have attended the centre reach a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year than is the case for those that have not.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve access to the centre for families with children under five by:
 - raising the numbers benefitting from the activities, advice and support of the centre and its partners on a regular basis, especially those in need of most support
 - ensuring that the services now being offered across the community meet the needs of families and, consequently, are well attended by those they are designed for.
- Help more parents to improve their skills and the economic stability of their families by providing them with more opportunities to volunteer and to take part in adult learning, leading to qualifications.
- Track the long-term impact of parenting courses and adult education on the well-being of families and progression into further training and employment.

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 practice lead, managers from Action for Children, a representative of the local authority, the staff of the centre and two members of the advisory board, including the Chair. They also either met or spoke on the telephone to key partners in social care, health, family learning, adult and early years education and the county economic well-being team.

The inspectors visited services at the Wantage Health Centre, the Beacon Centre, the Grove Church Hall and the library mobile bus at Larkdown Play Park.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including policies and procedures in relation to the safeguarding of children, information about the area and families attending the centre, the views of parents and the centre's plans for improvement. They also looked at family case files.

Inspection team

Graham Lee, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Lesley Talbot-Strettle	Additional inspector
Peter Towner	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Wantage Area Children's Centre is a stand-alone centre managed by Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. The centre is run on a day-to-day basis by the practice team lead, who was appointed in November 2014. She also manages the Grove and Hanneys Children's Centre, which is situated in the Wantage area, some two miles away. The two centres work closely together and staff work across both centres. The centres also share an advisory board, made up of key partners. The Grove Area Children's Centre was inspected in January 2014 and the report is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

The centre has been based at the Butler Centre in Wantage town centre for a number of years. It still has its office there but, from the beginning of June, only provides family support at the Butler centre. It now delivers other services from a range of community venues in Wantage and the surrounding area. These include the Beacon Centre, John Vianney Church Hall, Wantage Health Centre, Uffington Village Hall and the children's centre mobile library. Some services are also provided at the Grove Area Children's Centre in the adjacent Grove Church Hall. In collaboration with its key partners, the centre provides family support and outreach work and activities to promote children's early learning, health and development. It also provides parenting courses and facilitates parent information services and access to adult learning for families who need it.

The centre serves the market town of Wantage and surrounding villages. There are currently estimated to be 1046 children aged under five living in the area served by the centre. Some 84% of families are of White British heritage and the remainder are from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The area served by the centre is relatively advantaged. It is estimated that around 5% of children are living in households where no adult is working and which are dependent on benefits. Children's skills and understanding on entry to early years settings are typical for their age.

The centre has identified lone parents, families where no adult is working and part of the Charlton area of town as being in need of particular support.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Access to services requires improvement because there are not yet enough of the families the centre has identified as requiring additional help benefiting from the support of the centre and its partners regularly enough to make a real impact on their lives.
- Nevertheless, the situation is steadily improving under the leadership of the centre's practice team leader. Productive relationships with key partners in health, social care and early years education have led to the good sharing of information about families in the area. As a result, most families with children under five and those expecting children are known and registered at the centre or, in the case of three- and four-year-olds, accessing early years settings.
- In the relatively less affluent Charlton area of Wantage, around the town centre, most families with young children are registered with the centre and increasing numbers are engaged with its services. There are much greater levels of participation in this neighbourhood than in other parts of the area served by the centre. However, the large majority of families from this neighbourhood are not involved with the centre on a regular basis until their needs are met.
- Most of the relatively small numbers of workless families and lone parents living in the area are registered with the centre. The regular participation of these groups has increased considerably in recent months, although the centre is not yet working on a sustained basis with most of these families.
- The centre has been very proactive in supporting entitled families to access the free education funding for their two-year-olds. As a result, most have found places in good and outstanding early years settings. Similarly, almost all families in the area take up the free education entitlement for

their three- and four-year-olds.

- The centre works in close collaboration with the Grove Area Children's Centre to deliver services intended to meet the needs of families at a variety of community venues. This is to ensure that services are not duplicated and staff can be used to best effect.
- However, Wantage is at the very early stages of delivering all of its services in the community. Good quality activities are planned at a variety of community venues but attendance at several has been very low. Therefore, it is not clear that they are meeting the needs of the families they are intended to attract. Additionally, this means that staff are not always being used to best effect.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The quality and impact of services requires improvement because it is not yet the case that a large majority of families identified in need of support are getting the help they need on a regular basis. Moreover, the opportunities for parents to volunteer and take part in adult learning have been limited.
- The centre plans a good range of activities such as 'Messy Play' and 'Stay and Play' to help parents support their children's early learning and development and to prepare them for school. Their progress is tracked through 'learning journals'. However, these sometimes lack detail about the learning that has taken place and the 'next steps' children need to take.
- The centre's work contributes to positive outcomes at the end of the Reception Year. In 2014, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development in the area was in line with the national average. However, those who had attended the centre did better than those who had not. Those who had attended on a fairly regular basis did much better than other children.
- Until recently, the centre had had little involvement with other early years settings in the Wantage area. The centre practice lead has worked hard to develop trusting and productive relationships and has taken the lead in setting up an early years network, which is being led by the centre.
- The centre works effectively with health partners to help parents to adopt healthy lifestyles for their children. Activities like the 'Baby Bar Breastfeeding Support Group', delivered in conjunction with health visitors, are successfully encouraging parents to sustain breastfeeding.
- The centre's partnership with social care is effective in providing timely help to those families in need of particular support in their own homes. Case files show significant improvements to family life over time, reducing the risk of harm to children.
- There have been a number of parenting programmes provided to help parents with different aspects of their children's upbringing. These have been popular, and feedback from parents shows that they have been successful in improving family life. However, the long-term impact of this work, on priority families in particular, has not been tracked over time.
- There have been limited opportunities in the past for parents to take part in adult learning leading to qualifications to improve the economic well being of their families. Moreover, there has been little tracking of their progress into further training and employment. However, new partnerships with adult learning have set up clear pathways for parents to follow in the future.
- The centre has a particularly effective partnership with Oxfordshire's economic well-being team. The advice they have offered some of the centre's more vulnerable families has pointed them in the right direction for help and saved them a considerable amount of money over time.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The practice team leader has had a significant impact since her arrival in November. She has the highest aspirations for families and communicates high expectations to all. A range of positive partnerships have been created, or revived, and the community is working together to improve the outcomes for families and children in the area. As a result, the centre is improving strongly and leaders demonstrate good capacity for sustained improvement.
- The staff at the centre are well qualified and have regular training to update their skills. Although

there have been a number of temporary staff of late, rigorous systems for their supervision and performance management have ensured that momentum has not been lost. This is supported by the thorough checking of the quality of services provided by centre staff and key partners.

- Action for Children and the local authority play important roles in supporting and challenging the centre to improve. Well-established policies and procedures and regular visits support the practice team lead to fulfil her role effectively. The local authority has a good understanding of the centre's work and check that Action for Children is doing the right things to bring about improvement and reduce inequalities in the area.
- In recent times, the advisory board has been poorly attended and ineffective in supporting the centre to improve. The practice team lead has re-invigorated the group well. Meetings are now well attended and members believe that they are listened to and their views taken on board. They now know what is happening in the centre and understand the information about families in the area. They understand and support the priorities of the centre.
- Policies and procedures in relation to the safeguarding of children are comprehensive and robust. For example, there are detailed risk assessments in place to ensure that children are safe in all the activities at the various venues used by the centre.
- The centre's work in relation to children subject to child protection plans and the Common Assessment Framework is thorough and effective and demonstrates considerable improvements over time for these children and their families.
- Staff are generally deployed well across the two centres, although some activities are currently poorly attended, which is not the best use of staff time.

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	23445
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	455069
Managed by	Action for Children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1047
Centre leader	Ruth Harding
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Email address	Ruth.harding@actionforchildren.org.uk

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