

Riverside Children's Centre

Haverstaff Road, Lowestoft, NR33 0TQ

Inspection dates	14–15 July 2015
Previous inspection date	22–23 September 2010

	This inspection:	Good	2
Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
Access to services by young children and families		Outstanding	1
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 is a good centre:

- The centre is firmly established as one of the hubs of the community where many family activities take place and where families say they are always warmly welcomed and feel well supported.
- Participation rates are very high with most families accessing and using the services regularly. Support for the large number of pregnant teenagers and young mothers is particularly good.
- The quality and impact of services is good and is enhanced by strong partnerships and great teamwork with a large number of community groups and local organisations.
- Significant numbers of workless and lone parents are taking up education and skills training and many have been able to find work. An adult learning monitoring system tracks how parents are preparing to seek employment which is a big improvement since the last inspection.
- An impressive array of professionals supports families exceptionally well. In complex cases staff are challenged to provide new and innovative solutions, which are often research based. Parents say 'staff never give up on us.'
- Leadership, governance and management are good. The centre is continually improving and shows steely determination to improve children's life chances, many of whom are living in poverty.
- Good resourcing including spacious and attractive accommodation, good staffing levels and high quality toys and equipment enhance all planned services that meet local needs well.
- All the safeguarding arrangements to reduce harm to children and keep families safe are very effective.

It is not outstanding because:

- Leaders and managers are starting to evaluate activities but tracking systems to measure how well the centre is performing are in the early stages of development. Evaluations do not clearly measure the impact of services and are not used fully to plan the next steps in learning for children.
- Links with local pre-school settings and schools are not fully developed. As a result children who are eligible for free school meals do not achieve as well as their peers. The achievement gap between boys and girls is also wide.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the quality and impact of services is outstanding by:
 - making sure the impact of services and programmes is measured
 - using assessment information to plan next steps in learning progression for children
 - placing a greater focus on tracking children's progress, especially interventions for disadvantaged children and boys
 - working with the local authority to develop and link tracking systems to those in pre-schools and schools to demonstrate the longer term impact of children's centre services.

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 two Additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives from the local authority, health partners, social workers, local pre-school setting and school. They also met with representatives of adult learning and training services groups, children's centre staff, parents and members of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited a range of activities and sessions at the Riverside Children's Centre and at Kirkley Children's Centre where the main health and baby services are delivered. Senior centre staff attended all team meetings.

The inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the self-evaluation form, development plans, a sample of case files, parents' satisfaction surveys, and safeguarding policies and procedures.

Inspection team

Catherine Stormonth

Additional inspector, Lead inspector

Ann Taylor

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Riverside Children's Centre is one of three children's centres in South Lowestoft which are managed by Suffolk County Council. All three centres are managed by one centre manager with one practice lead who has supervisory responsibility for all the outreach workers who work across the whole area. Health services are based at the Kirkley Children's Centre where all the clinics take place. The centre operates from large purpose-built premises in the Riverside area.

The centre is governed by an advisory board of key partners and parents. The centre provides early education, childcare and healthy lifestyle services, family support and adult learning courses. Most children enter early education with skills that are slightly lower than those expected for their age, especially in communication and language development.

The centre's reach area includes 598 children under five years of age, the majority of whom are White British. The largest minority ethnic group is of Eastern European background and there are very small numbers of Asian and African families. The centre serves the families of South Lowestoft where four out of five areas fall in the 30% most deprived in England.

The centre's key priority groups include workless and low-income households, lone parents, vulnerable children under one, parents with disabilities and mental health issues and the high number of pregnant teenagers and young mothers.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Outstanding

- Staff have a great knowledge of the entire area served by the centre and the local population. Excellent links with health services enables early contact with nearly all expectant parents and almost all families are registered. The very large majority of priority families come to the centre regularly.
- Large numbers of families from both universal and priority families attend the popular baby clinics, baby and toddler activities and parenting classes. The quality of antenatal care and support for pregnant teenagers and young mothers is outstanding and most are keen to engage. New mothers automatically attend baby and new mother sessions at the centre.
- A commissioned service working with the community development team act as catalysts for improving access to adult education. Adult learning tracking shows a rising trend in course participation. The numbers of parents accessing education training and skills development have doubled in the last three years.
- The centre has clear targets for engaging with families at the centre or in family homes. Ten family support practitioners work closely with health and social care teams and have some very effective ways of working with families in greatest need who would not normally use the centre.
- Most children undergo both one and two-year-old health and development checks where additional needs, medical conditions and disabilities are accurately identified and supported with well-timed interventions. The monthly speech and language 'drop in' advice sessions are busy and parents are

pleased at the useful advice they receive to improve their children's communication and language skills as part of preparation for school.

- Nearly all three and four year-old children who are entitled to free early education have been successfully placed in pre-school settings. The centre has also helped to place the maximum number of two year-olds to fill all available capacity in pre-school settings locally.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The quality and range of services are good and they have a positive impact on most of the priority children's well-being and their families. The centre together with determined health partners actively seeks sustained engagement with those most in need. 'Young parents' is a good example which supports teenagers throughout their pregnancy and continues right up until their children are two years-old. Retention rates are high and mothers successfully return to education and training.
- Opportunities for adults to participate in activities to improve their education, skills development and chances of returning to work have improved significantly since the last inspection. There are better links with training providers such as Lowestoft College, Boston Lodge and local recruitment organisations which are reporting much higher participation rates. The parent development worker works closely with workless lone parents and has helped them to access courses, gives advice about career preparation and finding work. The rate of lone parent unemployment has almost halved in the last six months and even allowing for seasonal variation in a seaside location, this reflects a successful back to work programme.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results for 2015 show a big improvement on 2014 when more than two thirds of children achieve a good level of development by the end of their reception year. The achievement gap between disadvantaged children is showing an improvement on 2014 and inequalities have been reduced for all groups of children. However, the achievement gap between boys and girls remains too high and activities specifically focused on boys' early learning are not sufficiently developed. Links with local pre-school settings and schools are at an early stage and the tracking systems are not joined up. This makes it hard to demonstrate the longer term impact of the children's centre services.
- The centre works closely with the local education psychology services and other specialist services to help support the large number of families with mental health issues. Innovative approaches such as the 'video interaction guidance' focus on attachment theory and have been found to work very effectively. Parents told inspectors that they were inspired to solve their own problems around bonding with their children and were able to develop happier and closer relationships as a result.
- Family support practitioners specialise in different aspects of need including support for domestic violence and problems with housing, debts and welfare benefits issues. Families' get individual help and support when needs arise and many difficult circumstances are fixed quickly and effectively.
- Training for community parents is good and there are eight volunteer parents who help to run and facilitate activities such as the successful breastfeeding support group 'baby cafe' and the 'inbetweeners' messy play.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre runs very smoothly with highly skilled and knowledgeable staff that form a strong team

devoted to helping families in most need. They are appropriately qualified and from a range of professional backgrounds. The systems for supervision, performance management and the continuous professional development of staff are a real strength.

- Leadership, governance and management are good overall. The advisory board has good representation from partner agencies and parents. It is kept well informed about the centre's work and has a good understanding of areas for development and is able to hold the centre to account.
- Support from the local authority is generally effective but the priorities and targets identified in the 'annual conversation' report are not always clear. The local authority is actively seeking sufficient places for the two year-olds who have not been able to take up their entitlement to early education. An extension to a day care centre and a child minder recruitment drive are helping to provide additional places for the autumn term.
- Resources are used efficiently to meet local needs. The buildings, grounds and equipment offer outstanding accommodation for all of the planned services. There is tight management control over limited finances and effective tendering and procurement processes have helped to stretch the money a bit further for commissioned services this year. The centre provides good value for money.
- The centre knows its main strengths and priorities for improvement. There are many files with a range of evaluations of activities, programmes and events but there is little to bring it all together to give leaders and managers a fully informed over view of the centre. The emphasis is on enjoyment and coverage rather than a sharp focus on impact. Tracking is not used fully to plan the next steps in learning for children. It is also not linked to systems in pre-schools and schools to help evaluate the longer term impact of centre services.
- Staff successfully contribute to safeguarding families and reducing harm to children especially those with child protection plans or those assessed as in need. Staff use assessment processes including the Common Assessment Framework and record keeping is thorough. It shows how families are stepping down support levels when they feel able to.
- Parents can channel their views in many different ways so that their voice is heard and their opinions influence decision making at both management and advisory board levels. There is an active 'parents' choice' forum and ideas are collected and activities are shaped in response to parents' suggestions.

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

Unique reference number	22519
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	465489
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	598
Centre Manager	Jackie Lanham
Date of previous inspection	22-23 September 2010
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