

Southampton North Cluster Children's Centres

Cutbush Centre, Cutbush Lane, Townhill Park, Southampton, SO18 2GF

Inspection dates 19–21 February 2014

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 group of centres is good.

- Well-established information sharing, especially with health, results in the cluster knowing where all children live and understanding the needs of groups in the community very well. This information is used very effectively to identify those most in need.
- Tracking shows that children who attend centre services do significantly better at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage than those who do not attend. The cluster's persistence and creative approach, by calling on every family eligible for two-year-old funding, ensures that most two-year olds who are eligible for funded early years education take up their entitlement.
- Excellent partnerships with Jobcentre Plus, and others who support parents to improve their financial well-being, enable parents to take full advantage of the support available.
- Self-evaluation is used well to inform priorities across the area and identify where centres need to focus their efforts and resources.
- The strong and effective leadership has supported staff and families well through a time of significant change and has maintained a good balance of services and ensured that families can access the information and services they need.

It is not outstanding because:

- Too few families living in the most disadvantaged areas regularly access centre services. The number of families falls short of the large majority that the cluster of centres aims to attract.
- Records of individual support work with families are not always summarised to be clear, helpful and effective. Key contact details are not always easily found. The outcomes for these families are not always clear enough for the cluster to show whether it is succeeding in making a difference.

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with leaders and managers of the cluster, cluster advisory board members, centre staff, the local authority, early years providers and local authority early years staff, social care strategic managers, parents and volunteers, and partners from health, adult learning and Jobcentre Plus.

The inspectors visited Swaythling Children's Centre, Townhill Park and Harefield Children's Centre (Cutbush), Harefield Hoppers, Townhill Park Community Centre, St Denys Community Centre, Hardmoor Early Years, YMCA Nursery, and The Avenue Centre (Portswood).

The inspection covered the following centres: Bitterne and Bitterne Park Children's Centre, Portswood and Bevois Children's Centre, Swaythling Children's Centre, Townhill Park and Harefield Children's Centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Denise Blackwell	Her Majesty's Inspector
Graham Saltmarsh	Additional Inspector
Penney Mathers	Additional Inspector
Claire Griffin	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Southampton North Cluster Children's Centres serve a large geographical area stretching from the Common in the west to the Eastleigh, Hampshire boundary in the east. The River Itchen splits the cluster with few connecting transport links. There are 4,160 children under five years of age in the area.

There are two main centres in the cluster. Townhill Park & Harefield Children's Centre is a purpose built centre located at Cutbush in the Townhill Park estate. Swaythling Children's Centre is located on a primary school site in the middle of a large local authority housing estate. Both of these centres are bases for health visiting teams. Portswood & Bevois Children's Centre and Bitterne & Bitterne Park Children's Centre provide a smaller range of services, working alongside the main centres. All four centres also use a range of community venues to deliver services with key partner agencies.

The reach area is very diverse in terms of ethnicity. In Portswood 50% of families are from a Black and Minority Ethnic background. The area links into the central area and Swaythling where 40.72% of families are from a Black and Minority Ethnic background. In contrast 75.19% of families in Bitterne are White British and in Townhill Park this is 83.77%. Children's levels on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision are variable with some meeting expected levels of development and some who are below levels expected for their age.

The reach area also has very diverse housing and deprivation indicators. With regard to deprivation indicators in Swaythling, 78% of families are living in a 30% most deprived area. In Townhill Park this includes 54% of families, in Portswood 31% of families while in Bitterne it includes 7% of families. Housing ranges from large detached houses to local authority and housing association homes including a number of flats and tower blocks. There is a high proportion of privately rented accommodation.

All four centres in the cluster are managed by Southampton City Council. There is a Team Manager who also manages the East cluster. There are also two Children and Family Centre Coordinators for the cluster who share responsibility for the four centres. There is one advisory board for the cluster made up of professional partners and parents.

Swaythling has a voluntary managed pre-school on site. Hardmoor Early Years (Swaythling) and Townhill Early Years (Townhill) are the linked, designated childcare providers for the centres. These settings are inspected under separate arrangements. Their reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve the recording on case files, and in particular ensure:
 - all case summaries contain key worker contact details
 - action plans include objectives that are specific, easy to measure and time bound
 - outcomes for children and families are collated, recorded and used to identify the difference the cluster is making to the lives of those most in need of support.
- Continue to increase the number of families attending the centres who live in the most disadvantaged parts of the cluster's reach area.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Outreach work is used effectively to identify and establish contact with targeted families. Because they know their reach area very well, they are able to maintain the involvement of families who are unwilling or unable to travel outside of their own communities. Over 86% of families identified through assessment as in need of additional support are regularly engaged with centre services.
- Consultations enable families to give their views on the changes that have taken place while ensuring services continue to be matched to their needs. For example, a small group consultation with parents was used successfully to identify barriers to engagement and how the centres can move forward given the reduction in budgets. Parents are keen to be involved and talk with confidence about the impact of centre services on their lives.
- Some excellent work to identify lone parents has taken place on the Townhill Park estate. Building on this, all centres in the group now include a question to help identify lone parents and their needs on registration forms. However, the data related to lone parents are not yet sufficiently robust to enable the cluster to clearly track their engagement across the whole of the reach area.
- The excellent partnership with health means that the cluster knows where all children live, including those in target groups. The very large majority of families from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds regularly participate in centre services and carry on until their needs are met. Staff take activities out to areas where comparatively few families participate and are on track to successfully encourage uptake of early education entitlement for over 80% of two-year olds by visiting individual targeted homes.
- The use of data and staff's excellent understanding of transport and other challenges faced by families in the area enable the centres to identify where families are not accessing services. A large majority of 73% of children in need are now accessing relevant services. However, only 58% of families in the most disadvantaged areas, are regularly engaged with centre services, and there are plans in place to improve this.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Records of children's achievements are gathered by centre staff. Detailed and comprehensive crèche observation and monitoring show that children rapidly make substantial progress in their learning from comparatively low starting points. Children are well prepared for moving on to nursery and school through a well-prepared and organised process that involves parents and children at every stage.
- Jobcentre Plus holds twice weekly sessions in both Swaythling and Townhill Park centres, where outreach staff are on hand to support families, particularly lone parents, to register at the centre. Staff carry out a thorough analysis of their learning needs with parents to match them through a 'Learning Opportunities' form to a good selection of training courses, including courses leading to qualifications such as Childcare Levels 1 and 2. The impact of this work is excellent with 50 lone parents moving off of Income Support since April 2013.
- Townhill Park and Harefield Centre has successfully achieved the Healthy Early Years Award, with other centres in the cluster working towards it. The 'Family Point' sessions are open to all families. They are delivered in partnership with health, are very well attended and provide access to breastfeeding support. As a result, although breastfeeding rates vary across the reach area from above to below the national average, they are starting to rise.
- Target families find the Incredible Years parenting course very helpful and a large majority complete the course successfully. Follow-up evaluations show that families are less isolated, have better relationships between parents and children and participation in family learning and literacy courses improves. Parents we met during the inspection say they are more able to play with their children and their lives have been transformed.
- Partnership working through the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub ensures those who are most in need are provided quickly with early help. However, the records kept by staff in the centres are not

always detailed and helpful as summaries do not always include the contact details of key workers and action plans do not include objectives that are specific or easy to measure. As a result outcomes are not always clear on closed files or used to identify the difference the cluster is making to the lives of children and families.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Safeguarding policies, procedures and practices are clear and a strong culture of safeguarding is established throughout the clusters' work. Records are carefully kept of pre-employment checks and managers regularly check the quality of safeguarding files. Supervision and training arrangements are good and staff and volunteers know who to contact with any concerns.
- There was nothing inspectors could tell leaders about priorities for improvement that they did not already know, and had plans in place to address. Because leaders know themselves and the area extremely well, self-evaluation is very well informed and feeds directly into the priorities for their work. Well-presented data are regularly analysed and support the cluster business priorities as well as the more detailed action plans.
- Excellent and much valued partnership work takes place across the cluster. There is strong acknowledgement of partners that children's centre staff continued to deliver a good service through the restructure. Partners often comment that the cluster has the willingness to work and develop new ways of working to ensure the needs of families are met.
- Leaders have rightly concentrated their efforts since September on supporting staff through a period of significant change, building a strong and effective staff team that enables resources to be used creatively and effectively to meet families' needs. As a result they are now at a stage where they are ready to roll out some of the excellent work that was taking place in individual centres. Their work to build both staff and community capacity has given them a firm foundation on which to move forward in the future.
- Although the cluster advisory board is quite new, its members have already developed a good understanding of the needs of the area. They have clear terms of reference and review business plans to ensure they understand the priorities for the reach area. They already show that they are ready to challenge the cluster on its performance and ask pertinent questions related to their priorities.
- The local authority sees centres as an essential and vital part of the Early Help team and is fully aware of the specific challenges for this cluster. It sets challenging but realistic targets to ensure the cluster is reaching families most in need and that no families fall into gaps in provision and services. It acknowledges that the strength of this cluster is the dedication of staff who are willing to go that extra mile to ensure all families receive the support they need.

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 well-being 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.

Group details

Unique reference number	80636
Local authority	Southampton City Council
Inspection number	430121
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	4160
Centre Leaders	Team Manager: Simon Dennison, Coordinators: Diane Lidster and Mandy James
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	02380 915480
Email address	simon.dennison@southampton.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20325 Bitterne and Bitterne Park Children's Centre
- 22396 Portswood and Bevois Children's Centre
- 23089 Swaythling Children's Centre
- 23342 Townhill Park and Harefield Children's Centre

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