

Exmouth Children's Centre Group

Moorfield Road, Exmouth, Devon, EX8 3QW

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| Inspection dates | 22-23 July 2014 |
| 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 | | Requires improvement | 3 |

Summary of key findings for children and families

This group of centres requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The number of families, including those most in need, who participate regularly in the group's activities, does not represent the large majority from the local area.
- The centre group does not receive sufficiently detailed information from health partners to identify and establish contact with families expecting a baby, new births or about children with disabilities who would benefit from support.
- Not enough parents, especially from workless homes, enhance their education, engage in training, or extend their workplace skills. Links with Jobcentre Plus are ineffective.
- Children are not prepared well enough for school because their communication skills are not sufficiently developed. Too few two year-olds take up free early years education because there are not enough places for them.
- Arrangements for tracking the progress made by children and parents who attend the centre's activities are not fully effective.
- The local authority does not provide the centre group with important details about recorded incidents of domestic violence.

It has the following strengths:

- The new leadership team has a clear and effective focus on priorities for improving the quality of services and outcomes for families. It is building a strong reputation for its increasingly effective support and guidance.
- A high number of families benefit from well-structured parenting programmes and effective individual support. Parents are fully involved in governance and helping shape future services.
- Volunteering arrangements are good and provide parents with very useful experiences of working effectively in children's early education settings.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority to:
 - increase the number of families using the centre,
 - establish effective protocols for sharing key data and information,
 - effectively market the group's services on offer.
- Work closely with key partners, including health visitors, to ensure the accurate identification of all families with disabled children so that their needs can be assessed as early as possible and they can be offered appropriate support.
- With health partners and the clinical commissioning group review urgently the arrangements for sharing information about families expecting or with a new born baby so that the centre group can make parents aware of all of the services and support available, particularly for those most in need.
- Extend the opportunities for at least the large majority of parents, particularly those from workless homes, to enhance their economic well-being by:
 - building stronger links with training providers and Jobcentre Plus
 - carrying out regular checks on individual education and training needs
 - establishing a system to track how well adults make progress when they access courses or programmes, and use the data gathered to help plan future services.
- Develop an action plan to ensure children receive the assessment and support they require to improve their communication, language and literacy skills and be better prepared for school.
- Increase the take up the free offer of early education for two year-olds by working with the local authority to increase the number of places available in the areas where they are most needed.
- Introduce effective processes for tracking and reviewing how well those who use the group's services make progress and reach personal goals.
- Seek detailed and timely information about reported incidents of domestic violence involving a child under five years from the local authority so that appropriate support and services can be offered.

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 parents, group managers and centre staff, members of the advisory board, key partners and representatives of the local authority.

The inspection included the following centres, Moorfield Road Children's Centre and Egremont Road Children's Centre, which comprise the Exmouth Children's Centre Group.

The inspectors visited Withycombe Health Clinic, a number of activities and toured the Littleham area.

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

Inspection team

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|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Dan Grant, Lead inspector | Additional inspector |
| Kay Crosse | Additional inspector |
| Joyce Cox | Additional inspector |

Full report

Information about the group

Exmouth Children's Centre group formed as a group in April 2014. It consists of two previously stand-alone children's centres, that have merged and share services, including staff, and one overall manager. The two buildings are situated in the town of Exmouth and services are provided for families living in the town and its surrounding villages; including Otterton, Budleigh Salterton and Woodbury. The group aims to meet its core purpose by offering a range of services which include family play sessions, parenting courses, adult learning and family support. These services are delivered to families from the children's centre buildings, community venues in the area and through outreach home visits.

There are approximately 2,428 children under five years of age living in the reach area. The area is largely affluent with only a few families living in one area considered to be within the 18% most disadvantaged in the country. The target groups identified by the centre group are: workless households, families living in the area of greatest disadvantage and vulnerable two year-olds including those receiving various forms of support from the local authority and its partners.

At 95% the large majority of families within the area served by the centre group are White British with the remaining 5% made up of mainly Eastern European families in the Exmouth town area. Housing is mostly private with small pockets of social housing. Levels of unemployment are low, with only a small number of children living in households dependent upon workless benefits. Most children enter early years provision with knowledge and skills that are typical for their age. However, a significant proportion of children have communication, language and literacy skills which are at a lower level than expected for their age.

The centre group is managed by The Children's Society on behalf of Devon local authority, in conjunction with an advisory board made up of delivery partners, members of the local community and parents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The staff team have worked effectively to register the large majority of local children and families with the centre, including a high proportion of those most in need. However not enough families attend regularly and are benefiting from what the centre group has to offer.
- The centre group and its health partners do not work together effectively to ensure all families expecting a baby or with a newly born child register for services. This means that not all families get the support they need quickly enough. Without agreed protocols too much is left to the discretion of individual health staff. This has led to some families experiencing unnecessary delays in finding out what services are available across the group.
- The centre group is working increasingly effectively with target groups. Those without paid employment, families who live in the area of highest disadvantage and those with children who are subject to statutory support such as child protection plans are rightly prioritised for help and support. However, the number of disabled children known to the centre and taking up services is too low.
- The proportion of families using funding for high quality early education for two year-olds is low. This is largely because the local authority has not established sufficient places in the area where they live.
- A high number of parents benefit from accessing well-structured programmes, which help them gain a clearer understanding of some of the rewards and challenges of family life. Staff use their skills and experience well to help those who attend to overcome difficulties and develop positive parenting skills.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Services require improvement because not enough are provided for all the group's assessed priority families as well as disabled children and families experiencing domestic violence. Information about the services on offer is well presented and staff provide effective advice and guidance to those with pressing needs. However, there is too little attention paid to checking what impact services have on improving the outcomes for children and families.
- Staff are very welcoming and highly committed to their work and this motivates parents who attend the activities. Sessions, such as 'Get up and Go', are very popular with families because they can see the benefits of attending and enjoy meeting with staff and other families. The group is working to achieve an appropriate balance between services open to all and those set up for specific purposes.
- The centre group has established good partnerships with many of the early years providers in the area. However, children's communication, language and literacy skills are lower than expected for their age and although help and support is provided it is insufficient to ensure all children are prepared well enough for school.
- Partnership work with health staff is improving as reflected in the increasing immunisation rates and reducing obesity levels in children. The proportion of mothers who choose to breastfeed their babies has remained high. Support and encouragement for families to adopt healthy lifestyles is particularly effective.
- Too few parents, especially those from workless households, enhance their education, engage in training or extend their workplace skills. Links with Jobcentre Plus are not well established and not enough parents receive sufficient information, advice and support related to finding work. However, there are good volunteering arrangements which provide parents with useful experiences of working effectively in children's early education settings.
- Staff make thorough assessments of the needs of families receiving one to one support and keep detailed records of the progress they make. The group manager maintains good oversight of this work and provides effective supervision.
- Support to improve parenting skills is given high priority and in the last year the staff team have delivered accredited parenting programmes to over 60 local parents. Parents' evaluations are very positive and it is clear that this work has been particularly effective.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The recently formed centre group is establishing a positive reputation with partners and with families in the area they serve. The new leadership team has the full support of the staff team and morale is high. They have a clear focus on priorities which ensure that as the group becomes more effective then the outcomes for local families improve. This is leading to inequalities being reduced for the families using its services.
- The leadership team receives good support from senior managers from The Children's Society and appropriate challenge from the advisory board. Leaders ensure staff receive relevant training and supervision.
- The local authority monitors the centre's performance regularly but has been slow to enhance the data and other information it provides to help the group meet all local needs. This includes establishing strategic protocols with health partners in respect of letting the group know about new births, children with disabilities and reports about domestic violence.
- Effective safeguarding policies and procedures are in place which ensures families using the group's services are safe and well protected. Staff use Devon's adapted version of the Common Assessment Framework (DAF) procedures effectively and have a good level of experience and knowledge of safeguarding. Good attention is given to promoting the welfare of children in need; those looked after by the local authority and those subject to child protection plans.
- Arrangements to consult with families about the work of the centre and to involve them in

evaluating the centre's effectiveness are good. Staff seek the views of parents and children at the end of sessions and the group has a recently established a vibrant parents' forum. Parents are involved in governance of the centre and the chair of the advisory board is a grandparent.

- The centre group has adequate resources. The main buildings are well maintained, bright and welcoming. Toys, equipment and the outdoor play and learning environment are used well by staff to ensure activities are stimulating and worthwhile for those who attend.

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. |

Group details

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| Unique reference number | 80120 |
| Local authority | Devon |
| Inspection number | 442812 |
| Managed by | The Children's Society on behalf of the local authority |

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|--|---|
| Approximate number of children under five in the reach area | 2,428 |
| Group manager | Sally Hammond and Calendula Bowen |
| Date of previous inspection | Not applicable |
| Telephone number | 01395 226789 |
| Email address | calendula.bowen@childrenssociety.org.uk |

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 21120 Exmouth and District Children's Centre
- 21121 Exmouth 2 Egremont Road Children's Centre

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