

# Harwich Town and Windmill Children's Centre Group

Noahs Nursery, Barrack Lane, Harwich, Essex, CO12 3NS

**Inspection date** 22–23 October 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b> Previous inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
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 children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Leaders do not always ensure they receive or make enough use of information they collect to show the difference services are making to families' lives. For example, they are not working with local schools and early years providers to collect information about individual children's achievements at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage to help them measure the impact of services.
- Not enough adults access literacy and numeracy courses to improve their education and skills for gaining future employment.
- The centres are not looking closely enough at how well children do at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage to check where there are gaps in the skills children have when they start school. For example, children in Harwich Town do not start school with the skills they need for writing.
- The centres are not doing enough to find out why families' who are harder to engage are not accessing services, particularly in Bathside.

### This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Leaders, staff and those in governance are enthusiastic and have high aspirations for the centres which are improving. They are supportive of new initiatives and work with the wider community, for example the centre is working with a studio school for vocational training supporting 'Fresh and Fruity', a pilot scheme where families purchase locally grown fruit and vegetables at a reduced cost.
- Staff develop good relationships with parents and gain their trust. As a result, families most in need, including those with vulnerable children receive the help they need to make positive changes in their lives and improve their parenting skills.
- A successful volunteer programme provides opportunities for adults to gain new skills and to give something back to the community. For some adults this has contributed to gaining paid employment.
- 'Outdoors is so big I can run' is a comment made by a child who enjoys learning outside in the nearby woods, during 'Forest Fun' sessions. Such sessions help parents understand the importance of playing outside and children learn to persevere, take risks and explore the world around them.

## **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. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Harwich Town Children's Centre and Windmill Children's Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with representatives from the commissioned provider Barnardo's, representatives from the local authority, health partners, adult education, Jobcentre Plus partners, the manager of Oaklea Montessori, parents, Homestart, family support workers, early years workers, volunteers and members of the advisory board. The inspectors visited a range of activities and sessions held at the Windmill Children's Centre, St Nicholas Hall and Frayatts Hospital. Visits to activity sessions were undertaken with the commissioned provider, who also attended all team meetings. Inspectors looked at the groups' self-evaluation documents, activity plans, case files, safeguarding procedures and a range of other relevant documentation.

## **Inspection team**

Wendy Ratcliff, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sue Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jackie Cousins

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

Harwich Town and Windmill Children's Centre group in Essex is run by the charity Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority. The group is made up of two centres: Harwich Town, a phase one centre and Windmill, a phase two centre. Barnardo's has been responsible for running the centres since April 2012. The centres have had some changes in staff, including a new team leader who started in January 2013. There is one advisory board, which includes key partners. The children's centre group offers a range of services to meet its legal obligations. Services are provided at Windmill Children's Centre and from community venues, including, St Nicholas Hall, Fryatt Hospital, Dovercourt Central Church, The railway Club and Whinnery Grove woods. The centres are open from 9am to 5pm for 50 weeks of the year. Harwich Town Children's Centre is run from a small office on the same site as Noah's Nursery. Children's centre staff work from the office at various times during the week. Families accessing the centre when the office is closed are directed by nursery staff to the Windmill Children's Centre. Windmill Children's Centre is on the same site as Oaklea Montessori Nursery and Two Village Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School.

Schools and registered early years provision are subject to separate inspection arrangements. Reports can be found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>.

There are approximately 1260 children under five years of age living in the area the centres serve. Most of the population is White British with smaller percentages of families from minority ethnic groups. The geographical area the centres serve is socially and economically diverse. Harwich Town is a densely populated area with areas of higher deprivation and social housing. Around 37% of children are living in households dependant on workless benefits. Harwich Town is identified as one of the 30% most deprived areas nationally. The skills of children living in Harwich Town when they start early years provision are typically below what is expected for their age. There are small rural villages surrounding Windmill Children's Centre, with areas considered to be more affluent as well as areas of deprivation. Around 24% of children are living in households dependant on workless benefits. The skills of children living in these areas when they start early years provision are typically average with weaker aspects in communication and language.

The local authority is currently consulting on its proposals to shape future services of children's centres in North East Essex from April 2014.

### What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Leaders, managers and those in governance should ensure that systems to monitor and track the work of the centre are fully embedded by:
  - making the best use of all available data in order to demonstrate the impact services have for children and families
  - working with schools and early years providers to track the progress children make
  - effective recording and follow up of actions given to staff after formal observations.
- Increase the number of adults who access literacy and numeracy courses and keep a closer check on how well those who do access courses get on.
- Sharpen the analysis the Early Years Foundation Stage profile data and use this information when planning services to ensure children are provided with effective support to develop the necessary skills to be ready for school, particularly skills for writing.
- Increase the engagement of families by carrying out a detailed needs analysis to find out why those who are considered harder to engage are not using services, particularly in the more deprived areas of Harwich town.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- At 77% a large majority of families are registered with the centres and the majority access what the centre has to offer. Leaders know the main trends of the area, and have used information about levels of deprivation and local knowledge to deliver a range of services. As a result, the number of children and families from target groups are increasing, including lone parents, teenage parents, families from minority ethnic groups and families from workless households.
- The centres are not making enough use of the information they have available to monitor the number of families who use the centre to find out why some families are not accessing services. For example, registrations in Bathside are high but only a minority of families in this area of deprivation are participating in what the centres have to offer.
- Staff work productively with a range of professionals and organisations, such as health visitors, social care professionals and Homestart to prioritise families most in need of support. They work closely with partners to share appropriate information to support families identified as needing specific help, particularly to reduce the risk of harm to children.
- Staff work with early years providers to support families who are eligible to take up their free entitlement to early education. As a result, most three-year-olds and 97 two-year olds are accessing places.

### The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Children's attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is below both local authority and national averages. Not enough children have the skills they need when starting school and the attainment gap is not closing. While leaders recognise this and provide a range of services that support children's learning and development, they are not looking at the Early Years Foundation Stage data closely enough to refine the planning of activity sessions to focus on where children need the most help.
- The centres are not yet measuring the impact of some of the key work they are doing with children and families. For example, the achievement of children who attend the centre regularly is not tracked effectively in order to show how services help them gain the skills they need for the next stage in their learning. However, staff are gaining confidence in the use of soft outcomes universal learning (SOUL) records in order to show more clearly whether or not universal and specially planned services are helping families to make improvements in their lives.
- Parents attend a range of courses, such as first aid and parenting programmes. Parents enjoy their learning, gain confidence and increase their parenting skills. However, leaders recognise that more adults need to access literacy and numeracy courses, especially for those living in workless households.
- Levels of obesity for children continue to be a priority for the group. Staff have recently provided families with swimming vouchers to help promote the importance of physical exercise and courses, such as 'cooking with confidence' help to promote families' awareness of healthy eating. Breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks are improving as a result of breastfeeding support and sessions such as, 'preparing for baby'.
- Parents explain how their children benefit from sessions, such as 'stay and play' and 'sing and talk together'. Children learn to be imaginative because of the expertise of staff. Staff are good role

models and use effective questioning, such as, 'what is the monster like?' encouraging children to think creatively.

- Staff provide effective one-to-one support for families who need the most help. Staff gain parents' trust through parenting courses and specific activities in the home. This has resulted in families gaining confidence to attend centre activities, improve their children's behaviour, and for some children, being removed from child protection plans.

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

Requires improvement

- Leaders are aware that the impact of the centres' work is not always clear. Following a period of change, new systems are now in place to monitor the effectiveness of what the centres offer and more precisely measure the impact of services for children and families. They are supporting staff with the implementation of these systems to ensure they are effective, such as, the process to formally monitor the quality of activity sessions. This process identifies actions for staff to make improvements in their work.
- The local authority checks if the centres are meeting the targets it has set four times a year. The recent review accurately identifies that the centres need to develop tracking systems in order to more robustly show how services are improving children and families' lives. It is working with health partners at a strategic level to improve the information centres receive about families expecting children in order to support earlier contact with families.
- Robust safeguarding policies and procedures are in place to support the centres' work and staff understand their roles and responsibilities well. All children who are subject to a child protection plan are known because staff have effective partnerships with health and social care. They work closely together using common assessment procedures to ensure families get the support they need.
- Advisory board members show a commitment to supporting the centres' work. There are examples of the board identifying gaps in what the centres offer as well as responding to families' views. For example, the board is planning to use locally sourced funding to provide families with access to laptops and electronic tablets at the centres so they can search for job information, training courses and place housing bids.
- The parent voice group (PVG) effectively seek the views of parents as well as arranging successful community events, such as Halloween parties. Such events attract families who are not yet using the centres. Leaders are working with the PVG to review the group's role to ensure their voice is clearly heard in decision-making.
- Resources, including staff deployment, are used appropriately to meet the needs of children and families. The centres work well with some key partners and support new initiatives in the wider community. They ensure families who need the most help can access services they need by providing crèche places and in some circumstances funding for transport costs.

**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**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	80677
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	433030
<b>Managed by</b>	The charity Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	1260
<b>Centre leader</b>	Sally McInerney
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01255 502081
<b>Email address</b>	sally.mcinerney@barnardos.org.uk

**This group consists of the following children's centres:**

- 23129 Harwich Town Children's Centre
- 23130 Windmill Children's Centre

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