

Northamptonshire - Action for Children Wellingborough

Earls Barton Junior School, Broad Street, Earls Barton, NN6 0ND

Inspection dates	29–30 May 2014
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Good	2
		Not applicable	
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 is a good centre.

- Good leadership, governance and management ensures that most families, including those from the target groups have good access to a wide range of children and adult services.
- The Children's Services Manager and her staff make certain that the centres are constantly improving services and activities are tailored to meet the needs of families.
- Relationships between the children's centres and other services and organisations, including health and education, are very good. Many families are safer, healthier and their children are more ready for school because of the groups' activities and support.
- Disabled children and children with special educational needs make good progress through attending the centres.
- Staff are skilled because of the close attention that is paid to their professional development. This together with high levels of commitment ensures that the services they provide are of a good quality and have a positive impact on the lives of families.
- The group provides very valuable support for families who find themselves in challenging circumstances. Parents praise the support they receive from the centre staff and their professional partners. Typically they say that the centres 'have made me a stronger person' because 'the staff are extremely caring and will always talk to you'.

It is not outstanding because:

- The group is developing systems but does not consistently check and record the progress children make through all the centres' activities to closely measure its impact on learning.
- The systems for monitoring and tracking the progress of adults accessing education and training, especially workless families, are not sufficiently well developed to ensure they have the maximum impact.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen systems to measure and record all children's progress when they attend centre activities in order to fully assess the groups impact on learning through the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Work with the local authority, Job Centre Plus and other services to develop and implement strategies to monitor and promote progression through adult learning to vocational training and employment, particularly for workless households.

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 inspection covered the following centres; Penrith Drive Children's Centre and Nene Lake Children's Centre.

The inspectors held meetings with leaders, managers and other centre staff. They met with representatives of the local authority, the local advisory board and Action for Children. They also held meetings with health service partners including health visitors and family nurse partnership, Early Years providers, Homestart, Job Centre Plus and adult learning representatives. They also accompanied centre staff on a visit to a local traveller family site. The inspectors spoke to several parents throughout the inspection.

The inspectors visited a range of sessions held on the site including crèche activities, 'New Beginnings', 'Baby Play Time', a healthy food activity and activities in the 'Sensory Room' for children with a disability or special education needs. The inspectors also visited 'Chattertots' and a Diversity Event which were held off-site.'

They observed the centre's work, the group's self-evaluation documents, activity plans, case files, safeguarding procedures and a wide range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Andrew Clark, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Steve Nelson	Additional inspector
Peter Towner	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Northamptonshire-Wellingborough group consists of two children's centres, Penrith Drive and Nene Lake, which are led by the Children's Services Manager. The local authority has commissioned management of the group to Action For Children.

To meet the core purpose, the group provides a range of family support services, play and learning activities, adult learning and health promotion activities, and they signpost families to other relevant services. Many of the activities at Penrith Drive are delivered in the centre such as parenting and adult training services, Job Centre Plus, child health assessments services and crèche facilities. Nene Lakes also provides Job Centre Plus and health assessments on site with many other services delivered by the centre or its partners in other venues in the locality. The centres work closely with a number of pre-school providers and child minders to support children's development. These settings are subject to separate inspection reports and their reports are available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The two centres serve a varied range of communities from densely populated housing estates to small village and rural communities. A significant proportion of the area served by the group is in the top 30% most deprived in England with a few areas in the highest 10%. The proportion of children living in households where no one works is above average as is the proportion of families in receipt of benefits. This varies across the areas covered by the two centres with some families in more affluent circumstances. The large majority of children are in white British families with a small, but increasing proportion, from families of minority ethnic background, including Eastern European, heritage.

There are around 2135 children under the age of five living in the areas served by the group. They generally enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with a range of skills which are below those typically expected for their age.

The centre has identified the following priority groups: disabled children and children with special educational needs, minority ethnic families, children living in workless households, teenage parents and lone parents particularly those in the most deprived areas.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families **Good**

- Most children and families in the area are registered with the group and the large majority access the wide range of services that are offered. Active involvement in the local community including partnership work with ante-natal services and other health professionals, social care and schools ensures that the staff are made aware of families, including those expecting children, that are in the most need of their services.
- Staff work hard to involve families who fail to participate regularly including regular phone calls and visits. This has resulted in increasing numbers of families accessing the services including lone parents, teenage parents, those who are living in the areas where there is the most economic hardship and families from minority ethnic heritages.
- Staff are very successful in ensuring families with disabled children and children with special educational needs are registered with the centres and make good use of their

services. In particular, the 'sensory room' is in regular use to provide respite and support as well as training opportunities for children and their families.

- Families' needs are assessed accurately and thoroughly. Multi-agency meetings are used well to ensure support is carefully matched to meet families' needs. Outreach work is effective and involves a wide range of partners. For example, close partnership with local health partners, especially through the Family Nursing Service, has ensured that all teenagers who are expecting babies and other young expectant parents are visited by the group's staff before the birth of their baby.
- Assessment at the age of two is used well to identify children and families who need additional support from family support workers or other agencies. Staff work well as a team to make sure that parents are aware of all the help which may be available to them including their children's entitlement to free early education when relevant.
- Arrangements for two-year old children to take up their free early education places in the locality are good and 97 per cent do so. Parents are signposted to local provision and almost all three-and four-year olds take up their free places.
- The warm welcome families receive when they first enter the centres and the high quality of toys and activities in the reception areas make a good contribution to ensuring adults and children return for further activities. The centre is particularly active in encouraging families from the traveller community to participate in its activities.
- Many families in workless households register with the centre and increasing numbers are using the services. However, numbers are slightly lower than for other target groups although the information to track the regularity with which they take advantage of all the centres offer, especially for adult learning and employment services, is less well established and reliable.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- A wide range of good quality and relevant activities is delivered by the group's staff team and their partners. There is a clear pathway of progression of services and activities from ante-natal to school, that includes good support for families with disabled children and children with special educational needs.
- Families, who find themselves in complex and chaotic situations, receive prompt attention from centre group staff. Family support workers work closely with key agencies and organisations to effectively provide early interventions and support families in times of need. They are particularly good at fostering good relationships and providing help and support where there is economic hardship particularly through partnerships with Citizen's Advice Bureau and Job Centre Plus.
- The centre group also provides strong support in helping parents to overcome domestic violence through the close work undertaken with Relate and specific training programmes. Several parents commented very powerfully about the positive impact this work had had on their families well-being.
- Case files are maintained to a high standard and staff's record keeping is good. They make good use of computers to track cases. The child's views play an increasing role in planning the type of support given to a family. This means that early help has the maximum impact on

the well-being of young children.

- The centre group provides a good range of training and guidance on health issues. Positive messages about breastfeeding are reinforced through weekly groups, health visits and the work of volunteers. These activities and the work of breastfeeding peer supporters is leading to a rising trend in women starting to breastfeed their babies and a rising trend in the proportion sustaining this over time. The proportion of children who are overweight or obese has declined and is better than the national average across the centre group.
- Parents and children play together in enjoyable well-planned sessions such as 'New Beginnings' and 'Chattertots' which enable children to make good progress in their social and language development. These and many more activities prepare them well for starting school. However, staff do not always systematically record the progress children make in order to ensure the centre has the maximum impact it can on their learning.
- Parents benefit well from parenting courses, gaining an improved understanding of how to manage their children's behaviour and promote their children's well-being. The group enables parents to undertake training and engage in personal development opportunities including volunteering that improves their confidence and self-esteem. However, it has not done enough to work with partners and the local authority to measure the achievements of adults over time, especially those in workless situations, so that it can accurately determine the group's impact on improving employability.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The Children's Services Manager leads by example and has ensured that there is a very well motivated staff team. They share her high aspirations because they are very involved in decision making and in setting the strategic direction of the centre.
- Performance management and supervision are well established and methodical. They include direct observation of sessions and regular team days. Staff training and the appraisal process are carefully linked to where the centre needs to develop further. Team leaders are well trained in managing and supporting others and have well defined roles which make full use of their knowledge and skills.
- The skilled work force successfully focuses its efforts on having the maximum impact on reducing inequalities, tackling discrimination and improving the well being of local families. The professional discussions that occur between members of the local advisory board also contribute well to improving outcomes for local families.
- Staff take their duties relating to safeguarding very seriously. Policies and procedures are thorough and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes are used well to assess need and to decrease levels of risk. The centre provides good support for looked after children, their carers as well as children who have been identified as being in need or who are subject to a child protection plan. This is helped by a good working relationship with colleagues from social care.
- Members of the advisory board and the area partnership board have a clear view of centre priorities and where improvement is needed. They have regular access to training,

so understand their role in supporting and challenging the centres. Members recognise that staff are led and managed well and know how staff performance is managed. They know that the centres make good provision to meet the needs of local families. They share the ambition of centre leaders to improve the lives of local families even further.

- Leaders are well aware of where the group needs to develop further. They work well together to set goals and ensure that resources and services are available to meet the needs of young children and their families.
- Monitoring by the local authority is frequent and thorough, with challenge given to leaders about outcomes, and the engagement of those in greatest need. The data provided by the local authority is increasingly good and focused on the needs of the two centres as a group. However, some of the data, for example on aspects of adult learning and the progress of children who use centre throughout the early years, is too general and not fully appropriate centre group's needs as it is only to the Wellingborough area not the groups.

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

Unique reference number	80237
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	444656
Managed by	Action For Children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2135
Centre leader	Lynne Hudspith
Date of previous inspection	No Previous Inspection
Telephone number	01933 671700
Email address	Lynne.Hudspith@actionforchildren.org.uk

This group consists of the following children’s centres:

- 22359 Penrith Drive Children's Centre
- 22085 Nene Lake Children's Centre

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