

Suffolk - Forest Heath

Foley house, 52 Wellington Street, Newmarket, CB8 0HY

Inspection date 25–26 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not previously inspected	
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:

- The group does not reach enough families from its priority families. Although the number of families accessing services has increased significantly since April 2013, the numbers of teenage mothers, lone, workless and families living in the most deprived areas, fathers and families who speak English as an additional language, are not high enough.
- The quality of sessions delivered across the group are too variable. Staff do not always give enough support to improving target children's communication and language skills.
- Systems to track children's progress and families who are supported and signposted to other services, are not thorough enough. Consequently, the centres are unable to evaluate accurately the difference they are making to children and families.
- Leaders' arrangements for assessing the success of the group's work and planning of improvements are not precise enough for development priorities to be addressed swiftly and appropriately.
- The well established advisory board is currently reviewing its role and membership to better support and challenge the centre in going forward.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Parents value services and staff very highly. They say they always feel welcome and safe at the centres and have a say in what activities are put on for them.
- Most partnerships are strong. Staff work well with health and social care colleagues to give good individual support to those families most in need and make sure vulnerable children are well protected.
- Provision for children with additional needs and/or disabilities is good. The 'Little Stars' group provides excellent learning and development opportunities matched to children's individual needs.
- Parents really value the emotional support and practical help staff provide to them. They greatly appreciate the accessibility and approachability of staff. As one user said, reflecting the views of many, 'Staff are always willing to spare the time to listen to what you have to say and to offer help'.

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 Foley House Children's Centre, Brandon Children's Centre and The Lark Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with local authority professionals ; health and education professionals; partner agencies; family support workers; an early years coordinator; representatives from the advisory board; and parents. They observed the centres' work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centres' self-evaluation form, development plan, annual conversation report, a sample of case studies and safeguarding practice, policy and procedures.

The inspectors visited all three children's centres. Visits to activities were undertaken. The local authority's strategic lead and group coordinator attended all team meetings.

Inspection team

Lead inspector, Susan Smith	Her Majesty's Inspector
Susan Mann	Her Majesty's Inspector
David Baber	Additional inspector
Godfrey Bancroft	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Suffolk – Forest Heath Centre Group has three centres: Foley House and The Larks which are phase two children's centres and Brandon a phase three children's centre. Foley House Children's Centre is situated in Newmarket and shares premises with an adult learning provider called Realise Futures and the 12 + integrated team. It was previously inspected as a stand-alone centre in March 2013 and was judged as inadequate. The Lark Children's Centre is situated at the Mildenhall Jubilee Centre and the Brandon Children's Centre is located on a site with the library service, police, Brandon Pre-school and Forest Heath housing department. There is no linked day-care onsite for any of the children's centres. The children's centres each have their own small team of staff comprising full and part time family support practitioners and support and information officers.

The group is run by the local authority, and shares an advisory board. The group coordinator oversees all three centres. The group works with a range of partners to deliver services to meet its core purpose, including family support, adult learning and health services. In addition to activities that take place at the centres, services are also delivered directly in the community, where parents are able to access them more easily.

There are 3,976 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach area. Generally the area is affluent but there are pockets of deprivation and some isolated communities with poor transport services. Around 13.8% of families are in receipt of out of work benefits and 12.3% are eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Most families are of White British heritage with smaller percentages of families from a range of minority ethnic groups. Children's skills when they start early years provision vary across the area but are typically at the level expected although communication, language and literacy skills are often weak.

The group has identified its main priority groups as vulnerable families, teenage mothers, lone parents and workless, fathers, families living in the most deprived areas and families who speak English as an additional language.

Schools and registered early years providers are subject to separate inspection arrangements.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership, governance and management by:
 - making the best use of all available data in order to demonstrate the impact services have for identified priority children and families
 - sharpening the centre group's development plan so that all key priorities are precise, have measurable success criteria and contain well-informed targets
 - ensuring that systems to monitor and track the work of the centre are fully embedded and effective
 - completing the review of the role of the advisory board and its membership.
- Increase the proportion of families most in need who use centre services by:
 - increasing the proportion of families registered, especially those living in the Brandon Children's Centre catchment area
 - improve the quality of information gathered so leaders and staff can precisely measure the proportions of families accessing services, especially those from workless households and those living in the most economically deprived areas of the group's catchment area.
- Improve opportunities for children to be well-prepared for the next stage of life by:
 - ensuring all sessions delivered in the centres are of good quality and prioritise the development

of good communication and language skills

-monitoring the value sessions add to children's learning and development so that everyone can reach their full potential and more reach a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Not all families who need it currently have access to support from the group. The group has significantly increased the number of children and families they are working with since April 2013 but robust systems are not in place to accurately monitor attendance by those families most in need.
- Parents and families who come through the door and those who receive outreach and family support visits are positive about the work of the group. Many of these families have a long-standing relationship with the centre and some, become volunteers and progress into employment.
- Staff know the most vulnerable local families, including those most difficult to reach, through working closely together with health and social care colleagues. They share information, advice and planning to ensure these families receive sustained and regular support. This leads to productive and useful home visits and individual work that helps these families live safer and healthier lives.
- Positive relationships with key partners have helped to improve access to services, including the delivery of health programmes to mothers before and after the birth of their babies.
- The proportion of children who take-up their two-year-old funded place in early years settings has improved in recent months as a result of the effective work of the Family Information Outreach Co-ordinator and centre staff. Now, most eligible children living in the group's catchment area make use of their free early years sessions to help them gain a head start in their learning and development. The take-up of places in the Brandon Children's Centre area is not quite as good as in The Lark or Foley House children's centres areas.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Families are highly satisfied with the quality of services at the centres. Parents from target groups say how much they appreciate the good support from all staff. Their support helps parents to engage in what the centres have on offer and in the community, meet new friends and break down any barriers due to feeling isolated or depressed.
- The range of activities and services provided at the centre are an appropriate mix of those for target groups and those open to all. Services are increasingly becoming better matched to the needs of users as the group extends its understanding of its priority families.
- Provision for children with additional needs and/or disabilities is good. The 'Little Stars' group is delivered by skilled staff that ensure the session is wholly matched to children's individual needs. Children and their parents thoroughly enjoy this group. Parents especially value the emotional support and practical help staff provide to them.
- The quality of sessions is too variable. On some occasions, such as in 'Funky Fun' and 'Going Global', staff fail to prioritise the development of target children's communication and language skills well enough in their planning or practice. On these occasions, staff do not provide enough examples

of modelling good language and or sustained conversation with children to support this aspect of their learning and development. In other sessions, such as 'Little Stars', this aspect of staff's practice is excellent.

- The proportion of children reaching a good stage of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is lower than levels found nationally and at county level. Children's learning and development in the aspects of communication and language, and writing are poorer than other aspects. In Foley House area, there are less children reaching a good level of development than elsewhere in the group's catchment area.
- Some parents benefit from courses and activities such as, 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' (ESOL), 'Me Time' and 'Ready Steady Play' that help improve their parenting skills, health and their self-development.
- Adults are signposted to job vacancies and some courses, such as numeracy and literacy and there are examples of a few adults gaining qualifications that lead to employment and enhanced life chances. However, the centres do not yet receive information from adult learning providers in order to measure the success of the courses run or to modify services to be more appealing to a greater range of adults from target groups.
- Users receive good access to advice and support regarding issues such as physical and emotional health of the baby, weaning and breastfeeding support. The group offers a range of sessions such as baby massage, breastfeeding workshops and weaning groups. As a result, breastfeeding rates are improving: 49% of mothers maintain breastfeeding their babies, which is slightly below the national average. Activities provided by staff and volunteers, such as 'Wiggle and Jiggle' and 'Walkers and Talkers' promote the benefits of physical activities for young children and their parents successfully.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Self-evaluation of the group's effectiveness has recently been completed and as result staff are working hard to re-focus provision on the needs of the families, and better targeting provision using outreach and partnership work. For example, the group is working with midwives to get more families registered and engaging with the centre at the earliest opportunity.
- The development plan has been reviewed by the group coordinator and the whole staff team. It has identified relevant areas, such as increasing the numbers of families who use centre services. However, performance targets and success measures are not always precise and do not have timescales to show exactly what needs to be achieved.
- Leaders are aware that the impact of the centres' work is not always clear. They continue to improve the systems in place to monitor and assess whether targets are being met and to more precisely measure the impact of services on improving children and families' lives.
- Resources are used well and staff are increasingly developing creative solutions to tackle the challenges they face in reaching more families, particularly those who most need support, living in the area.
- Appropriate performance management and professional supervision arrangements are in place. Staff feel well supported and have access to good training opportunities to enable them to develop their skills and knowledge further which enhances their ability to meet the needs of the community in which they work.

- The advisory board members are aware of their governance role and responsibilities. They are keen to strengthen the role they play in providing support and challenge. The information provided by the group coordinator is increasingly enabling them to do this. An appropriate range of professionals who work in the local area are members of the advisory board, however, attendance at meetings is low with no representation from schools. The centre is quite rightly considering ways to increase the numbers who attend and reviewing the membership to ensure it reflects the community, including parents across the three centres.
- The centre evaluates each session it provides and staff respond to the points and requests parents make. That said, parents are not involved sufficiently in more formal decision making.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and well-implemented. However, the annual review of the policy has been over-looked. The centre has acted quickly to address this, and has already put systems in place to ensure that all policies are reviewed within the required timescale.
- The Common Assessment Framework procedures are implemented well, and referrals and case management are mostly completed effectively. Some case files seen lack enough detail about action planning with families and of how leaders monitor the impact of the interventions undertaken. Staff work closely with social care when children are subject to child protection and attend core group meetings where appropriate so action to keep children safe is taken promptly when needed.

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

Unique reference number	80783
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	443506
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3,976
Centre leader	Tanya Merton
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01638 565533
Email address	Tanya.Merton@suffolk.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 21191 Foley House Children's centre
- 20401 Brandon Children's Centre
- 23203 The Lark Children's Centre

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