

Northamptonshire – Kettering Children's Centre Group

Montagu Street, Kettering, Northamptonshire, NN16 8RX

Inspection date

4–5 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
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 leadership and management of the centre group has experienced a long period of substantial restructuring and uncertainty leading to a lack of focus on key priorities.
- The advisory group's involvement of parents is not sufficiently effective. It provides insufficient challenge to the managers both at the centre and the local authority level to focus sharply on key issues that will improve access to key services and quality of provision swiftly.
- Managers do not make effective enough analysis of data to evaluate the services. This contributes difficulties in demonstrating impact on users and in setting targets to raise achievement levels.
- Too many children are not well prepared for school. Their speech and language development is slow.
- The group does not offer systematic support to many parents to enable them to access advice and guidance in relation to careers, high quality training and skills to secure employment.
- The quality of provision is variable. The managers do not evaluate the overall impact of the services on users routinely.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- The centre group provides good access to services for users from the local areas and beyond, including families from the priority groups. All centres are hubs of the community from where parents and children access services and support.
- Health partnership is excellent. The centres make a substantial impact on improving the health of the users to include midwifery services, health visiting, domestic violence, and emotional well being.
- Staff are highly skilled, extremely knowledgeable and highly responsive to the needs of the communities. They know the communities well and work extremely flexibly to improve the lives of the families.
- Safeguarding is strong. Staff work extremely well with various partners to identify and protect children and families from harm as well as equipping parents well to protect their children.

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:

Montagu Street Children's Centre

Thornton Children's Centre

Desborough Children's Centre

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

The inspectors held meetings with local authority managers, representatives from the district advisory board and parent forum, centre staff, health visitors and midwives and representatives from a range of partner agencies.

The inspectors visited a range of services and activity sessions held at all three centres and the community centres from where the group delivers its services and spoke with the users of services.

They visited services run from the Grange Methodist and United Reform Church.

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

Inspection team

Harmesh Manghra

Her Majesty's Inspector Lead inspector

Joanne Caswell

Her Majesty's Inspector

Peter Towner

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Northamptonshire County Council has commissioned Action for Children to provide universal and targeted children's centre services in Kettering group of centres and three more localities in its area. The children services manager manages all three centres in the group along with another group in the county council area. All three centres share governance arrangements and a joint advisory board. The centres are approximately eight miles apart and cover wards of All Saints, Brambleside, St. Andrews, St. Mary's, Millbrook, Pipers Hill, Spinney, Warkton, Loatlands, St. Giles and Welland. Montagu Street centre is the longest established and purpose built centre since 2003. Desborough is in a rural location, based at a library and is located on the borders of Leicestershire. Thornton centre, although purpose built, has very restricted space for activities. Some services continue to operate in community venues. Montagu Street centre was established in 2003 and has operated as a single centre until 2011 when the other two centres and joined the group under the single manager. Some 23 staff work on full and part-time basis and deliver services to the users. Most have worked at the centre for a number of years. All centre open on a full-time basis, from Monday to Friday, throughout the year. The centres provide the full core offer of services, including health provision, adult learning, parenting courses, family support, universal play sessions and specialist services, such as speech and language provision.

Approximately 2,782 children aged under-five years live in the communities served by the centres. All centres are within the 70% area of deprivation with pockets of greater deprivation in each area. Social isolation and high levels of unemployment are key issues for families. These are particularly acute in Desborough due to limited public transport provision. Some families are transient due to their personal and family circumstances. Kettering has the second highest level of deprivation in Northamptonshire. It is densely populated with higher levels of deprivation and a large proportion of social housing and unemployment. Around 18% of children live in households dependent on workless benefits. The majority of children enter early years and school provision with skills below, or significantly below, those expected for their age. Speech and language is a major issue for Northamptonshire. Most families living within the area are of White British heritage, although there are an increasing number of families from minority ethnic groups. In recent years an increasing number of Polish families have moved into the area and have started using the services. The centres are not attached to any schools and do not offer any on-site childcare.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Provide greater challenge and support to the group manager by broadening the membership of the advisory board and sharpening its remit. Make use of a variety of means including social media to involve parents in identifying needs and gaps in provision, produce high quality and sharply focussed reports with evaluation that measures impact of the provision on the users in the locality.
- Rationalise the collection of data and make efficient use of the information to evaluate the broad range of services on offer. Develop and target provision where it is most needed making the best use of valuable resources.
- The rigour and breadth of evaluation of service delivery so that the centre group measures the effectiveness and impact of its services on families on a continuous basis ensuring that the users receive and continue to receive first rate provision with significant impact on their lives.
- The local authority to facilitate the access to Job Centre Plus, and the provision of adult learning programmes including volunteering to help users to improve their employment prospects in the medium and long-term.
- Children's readiness for school by:
 - monitoring Early Years Foundation Stage data more effectively to accurately assess children's starting points in order to target services, such as by analysing Profile data for cohort groups
 - quality assuring the delivery of all early years services within the centres
 - linking more closely with local early years settings to strengthen the quality of provision within the community
 - providing high quality, timely and sustainable services which target children's underachievement in speaking and listening, and writing with help from the local authority.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Registrations across the group of centres show the large majority are accessing services overall and the majority within the Montague Centre. Registration rates and regular usage continue to improve. Attendance rates are satisfactory. Parents and other centre users are extremely happy with the range of services provided by the centres.
- The centres are conveniently located in the midst of the community and are easily accessible for users. Local churches are used appropriately to ensure easy access. An additional 819 families use the universal services from outside the reach area.
- Staff identify and understand the needs of the vulnerable families very well through strong outreach work. Staff work highly flexibly to provide a broad range of programmes in response to the families' needs. Parents continue to attend and benefit from groups that equip them to become better parents and bond with their children through valuable 'Baby Massage' and 'Baby Yoga' sessions.
- The take up of services by workless families are satisfactory with a higher percentage attending at Thornton. The centre recognises that it does not yet reach the targets that the local authority has set it.
- The centres have strong links with the Speech and Language team. The team has provided some useful training to train centre workers. This helps the staff to provide intensive support for a limited number of parents. The need is far greater than the service can support.
- The provision for adult learning is inadequate. The centres, particularly Montagu centre has run classes in literacy and numeracy in conjunction with Tresham Institute in previous years with good impact on a few parents. However in the current year no classes are running mainly due to low retention rates. Opportunities to develop a portfolio of courses such as first-aid, food-hygiene and short Computer courses are very limited.
- The centres do not promote National Careers Service to users. Parents and users are unaware of their choices and career options. Parents do not have sufficient volunteering opportunities that can enhance their confidence and experience to improve their employment prospects.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Parents develop good levels of self-confidence, improve their self-esteem and make friends and establish support networks to overcome isolation. Parents in all centres feel able to ask for and access high quality support at anytime on a range of issues they feel unsure of.
- Partnerships with health agencies are excellent. Monthly clinic with the consultant obstetrician at Montagu centre is the only clinic of its type in the country and is exceptionally good. This means that highly vulnerable and disadvantaged mothers-to-be receive the highest levels of clinical care and monitoring. This has a very positive influence on health outcomes.
- The quality of support for pregnant teenagers and young parents group is exceptionally high in all centres. They begun to appreciate the level of responsibility of care and protection that a young child needs and become responsible parents very rapidly. They establish strong networks of their own to support each other.
- Parents and children are safe and protected from harm. Parents become acutely aware of the safety and well being of their children. Invaluable training on domestic abuse ensures that parents recognise the signs of domestic abuse and develop strategies that empower them to make positive changes to their lives. Targeted programmes for victims of domestic abuse have a very positive impact on protecting the most vulnerable families.
- Insightful training on 'Bluebells' programme helps parents overcome post-natal depression and overcome social isolation. This provides a strong basis for emotional development for them and their children. The centres offer good opportunities for purposeful play that has strong impact on parents and children.
- Overall children's development across personal social and emotional development is good with the vast majority of children reaching expected levels of development. The data only relates to 2013, it

is not possible to measure year on year progress/attainment. The profile data does not provide sufficient analysis to compare the progress of different cohort groups or to clearly identify how quickly the attainment gap is closing between all children.

- The centres do not make full use of Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data to target services and improve children's readiness for school. Monitoring is not fully effective to ensure services are consistently of a high quality and contribute towards promoting children's language and development. In some groups, staff do not reinforce children's speaking and listening skills. Links with schools and early years settings are not fully in place.
- The 'Jumping Jacks' sessions to promote exercise are used well in all centres. Staff do not make ample use of various opportunities to promote children's development of communications, language and mathematics in these sessions. Some parents themselves do not have high level literacy skills and do not feel confident in supporting the speech and language development of their children.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Performance management is adequate both at the subcontractor and the local authority level. The quality of support from Northamptonshire County Council is much improved particularly through the Early Help and Prevention team. The council has rightly focused on a whole-family model approach. The quality reviews triggered by performance data are robust.
- Parent representation is currently limited on the advisory board and parents have little input in developing, monitoring and evaluating the provision. The centre group has not explored alternative methods to seek parents' views, such as use of social media. The board is good at sharing information; however it has little focus on identifying the gaps, setting priorities and providing the challenge to the managers.
- Data analysis is not robust enough to ensure all services are delivered in response to local need, particularly in improving children's readiness for school. There are no linked teachers who oversee the quality of provision. The centre group does not link with other local schools and early years settings to improve children's readiness for school. Speech and Language team support is also limited.
- The centre group does not focus sufficiently on quality improvement. It is not clear how managers use the findings of evaluation to review the content and focus of the activities. Managers do not routinely and systematically observe the sessions for quality improvement purposes. The focus on measuring quality in annual appraisals is not sharp enough as the quality specifications are not used to evaluate the performance of the staff.
- The self-evaluation report is descriptive and does not clearly evaluate the impact of services on the users. The judgements and the grades in the report accurately reflected the inspection findings. Staff are not fully involved in developing the report to produce a clear overview of the impact of the services they are providing.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet the current government requirements to protect children and vulnerable adults. This covers robust arrangements to check the initial and ongoing suitability of staff to work with children's centre users, thorough checks on venues and activities and detailed records. Parents are suitably prepared to safeguard and protect their children. The Common Assessment Framework process is fully embedded. Children subject to a child protection plan, or those looked after by the local authority, are very well protected.
- Action for Children has restructured the provision to prepare it for the new model of service delivery. During the protracted change period, staff morale has suffered. Although the staff continued to provide highly professional service to the users; they did not have time to 'stop and reflect' sufficiently on their purpose, roles, resources, planning and evaluation. Through continued good training and regular support the staff morale has improved and are now ready to improve the provision to the higher levels of quality.

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.

Kettering Children's Centre Group details

Unique reference number	80003
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	433977
Managed by	The Action for Children
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,782
Centre leader	Lynne Hudspith
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01536 311030
Email address	Lynne.Hudspith@actionforchildren.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 23301 Thornton Children's Centre
- 20951 Desbrough Children's Centre
- 20041 Montagu Street Children's Centre

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