

West Swindon Family Centre

15 Gainsborough Way, Freshbrook, Swindon, SN5 8PD

Inspection date 12–13 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Inadequate	4
The quality of practice and services		Inadequate	4
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that is inadequate. It is not good because:

- Not enough families from the area it serves are either registered or attend on a regular basis. Many of the families who do attend come from outside the area. Until recently, the information on the area has not been sufficiently detailed or reliable enough to use in planning how to reach families and provide the right services for them. The numbers of families registered and using the centre are steadily increasing, but the numbers are still too low and the increase has been too slow.
- The centre is at an early stage of checking the difference it is making and it does not identify sufficiently the outcomes it intends to meet. Action plans are not as clear or measurable as they should be; as a result, progress to improvement has been slow.
- Too few adults are encouraged to access further education, employment or training, so that not enough families are improving their lives. Pathways towards employment and improving life chances are not clear or well understood by families.
- Governance arrangements are weak, and the advisory board and the trustees do not ask challenging questions that will improve practice. Managers have not been well supported to see the bigger picture and form relationships across agencies to plan the services families need. As a result, opportunities for closer working with other agencies have been missed and the centre has not been reaching enough of those families in the area who most need help.

This children's centre has the following strengths:

- Staff are well qualified, experienced, enthusiastic and well trained. Families appreciate how friendly and approachable they are, and benefit from positive relationships and support in times of need.
- Good care and advice are given to families in a supportive environment that encourages the confidence of both children and their parents and improves the quality of their lives. Help with legal advice, managing debts and understanding benefits that are available is good.

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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, managers from the local authority and centre staff. They also met health, education partners, early years practitioners, volunteers, trustees and spoke to social care, housing, women's refuge partners and a representative from the advisory board.

The inspectors visited West Swindon Family Centre and Oliver Tomkins School. They had discussions with parents, the breastfeeding support group and a representative from Swindon local authority. They did an observation of 'stay and play' jointly with the operations manager. They observed 'Panda', 'Let's get cooking' and 'Bugalugs' sessions, and looked at the centre's self-evaluation, development plan, parent evaluations, a sample of case studies and safeguarding procedures.

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

Inspection team

Penny Mathers	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Jameel Hassan	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

West Swindon Family Centre is based in a converted four-bedroomed house in the centre of the community it serves, a short distance from Oliver Tomkins School. The children's centre is a phase two centre that started to provide children's centre services in 2006. It is managed by a charity called West Swindon Family and Community Project on behalf of Swindon Borough Council. A board of trustees oversees the work, as does a joint advisory board that is shared with four other centres nearby.

The centre manager and a small team of part-time workers offer a mixture of universal and targeted services to meet the centre's main aims, including support groups for childminders, parenting courses, baby yoga, infant massage, cooking classes and play sessions. Child health clinics, family advice service on debts and benefits, confidential counselling sessions, one-to-one support and breastfeeding support are also part of the services available. Parents are signposted to other groups available within the locality, such as postnatal and weaning support. Nursery provision is available on site for 20 children, providing 10 sessions a week for two-year-olds who are eligible for funding; this is subject to separate inspection arrangements.

The centre serves 864 children under five years of age. It is not located in an area of deprivation, but there are pockets of deprivation among areas that are more affluent. The population is mostly White British, but with increasing numbers of families from minority ethnic heritage. Most children enter early years provision with skills that are very slightly above levels typical for their age. The centre has identified teenage parents, children affected by domestic abuse, lone parents, children of minority ethnic groups, children known to social care and children at risk of obesity as the main focus of their work.

What does the centre/group need to do to improve further?

- Improve access to services by:
 - increasing registrations and engagement, especially of those families most in need
 - working together with the local authority to develop user-friendly data
 - fully analysing the data, planning and taking action to tell families about the services.
- Improve target setting in all aspects of work, including case files, supervision and in the development plan, to ensure that all actions are detailed, measurable and focused on outcomes and that it is easier to see the difference the centre is making and improve the rate of progress.
- Further develop strategic partnerships:
 - with key agencies, including health, schools and social care, in order that opportunities for close working are developed further
 - with learning skills providers and employment agencies, so that there are more opportunities for adults to improve their personal skills and education and to gain employment.
- Improve the skills of the trustees, the advisory board and the managers in using the information supplied by the local authority to set and monitor the outcomes planned for families in need, so that it is clear what difference the centre is making to the lives of the families it works with.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- Not enough families from the area the centre serves access services. Families across the Swindon area access services from a range of centres and this has masked the low numbers attending from the area the centre services. The numbers of families registered and attending the centre have increased over the last year, but the numbers are still low, with only 34% of the 864 children under five years of age who live in the centre's reach area attending the centre.
- Recent information collected includes clear records of attendance by children and families, including

those from target groups. Numbers are increasing and the centre is starting to know which groups they need to encourage to attend. Staff are prioritising families for activities well, but plans to encourage the target families to use the services have been slow to develop and, as a result, not enough families who are most in need get the services they require to improve their lives.

- The centre has been successful in working with other agencies to engage teenage mothers and children who are known to social care and are identified as in need or looked after, or who are subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework. A good range of activities are available at the centre, and agencies including health and social care are confident that once the needs of the children are identified the staff will support the families well through the right activities and improve their lives.
- Work beyond the centre is limited at present, but plans have been made to identify suitable sites to run activities in areas that better meet the needs of the community. Families appreciate the 'stay and play' session run at Oliver Tomkins School, and families who have experienced domestic abuse value the sessions delivered at the women's refuge.
- Only a few children from minority ethnic groups, children living with domestic abuse, or fathers attend the centre. The centre has no targets to increase numbers and it is not as clear as to what actions should be taken to increase the numbers who participate and so improve their life chances. A minority of lone parents in the area attend, although some do come from out of the area, and a very small minority of children from Black and minority ethnic groups attend, with a few coming from outside the area.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- Monitoring and tracking of the progress of children and families are weak. Records are not detailed enough to show parents what progress they, or their children, are making. As a result, the centre is unable to identify clearly the impact it is making in improving parenting skills and children's readiness for school. However, it is only a few parents who have improved their parenting skills and systems are not fully in place to accurately record these outcomes.
- Good quality care and sensitive support are provided to those families that receive services. Many parents report the centre has made a difference to their lives, with one parent reporting, 'I am more confident in being a parent, my son is happy, sociable and confident.' Childminders speak very positively of the support they have received and the difference it has made to their care giving.
- Centre staff are good role models and use their knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage well to check on the quality of services and plan sessions, but in a few sessions there are not the right activities or resources to meet the specific needs of individual children's speech and language development. 'Stay and play' sessions are popular and promote good interaction between parents and children, but photographs in learning journals are not labelled to inform parents about their children's development or used for future planning of activities.
- Healthy lifestyles are well promoted and children at risk of obesity are supported through colourful noticeboards, healthy snacks, and in the 'Let's get cooking' sessions, but some opportunities are missed to progress parents in their cooking skills. Breastfeeding support is provided well through breastfeeding champions; the number of mothers who breastfeed has increased and good support is available through the 'Breastmates' support group.
- Staff have good relationships with a range of agencies and attend multi-agency meetings to plan work with families, so that one-to-one support and help with managing debts, claiming benefits and legal advice on housing are valued by parents and help them stabilise their lives. Good links exist with the local housing association, health visitors, schools and the family nurse. Staff signpost families to a wide range of services, including the women's refuge, speech and language therapy and services for children with special needs at Saltway Children's Centre.
- The quality of partnership working with agencies that helps with learning and employment is underdeveloped. Parents' opportunities to take part in adult learning courses are limited. The centre does not check on the long-term impact the learning has had, so it is not clear whether parents' lives are improved as a result.
- Good administrative systems are in place to support volunteering and there are five volunteers who

have received a satisfactory level of training, but their progress, attendance and future training needs are not being sufficiently well monitored.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- The local authority monitors the centre regularly and now provides better quality information, which is leading to a slow, but steady, increase in the number of families attending. Target setting and action planning are weak and managers do not have clear and specific plans about how they are going to develop the centre and reach those most in need. As a result, too few families are benefiting from the services.
- Governance by the trustees and the advisory board has lacked challenge. Changes to the advisory board over recent times have not fully supported the centre in making plans to improve. Trustees and the advisory board members have not made good use of evidence and information to set outcome measures to improve the lives of families in their area.
- Staff take up good opportunities to access a comprehensive range of professional development so they are knowledgeable and skilled in supporting parents and children. Despite the extended period of change, staff morale is good and staff work well together to deliver good quality services to those who access them. Day-to-day management of the centre is good and activities are flexibly planned.
- Self-evaluation identifies most of the strengths and areas for development. It is evaluative in parts and demonstrates a growing understanding of the provision and where improvements are needed. Centre managers work hard to improve their skill in analysing data and, in spite of a reduction in funding, are keen to think creatively about developing services in other locations to develop activities where they are most needed.
- Those parents who do attend the centre are encouraged well to give their views on services. They evaluate the activities, attend the advisory board and parents' forum, and are confident that the staff will listen to their views. Staff are quick to respond to parents' ideas for taking the service forward.
- Safeguarding is given a high priority, risk assessments are routinely undertaken and all necessary pre-employment checks are completed. Staff know whom to contact with any safeguarding concerns. Parents feel safe at the centre and know how to keep their children safe.
- Resources and space are limited, but staff use what they have at the centre well. More needs to be done to advertise the centre and its services; but good improvements have been made to the website, and noticeboards are eye catching and informative.

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 details

Unique reference number	23522
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	430225
Managed by	West Swindon Family and Community Project

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	864
Centre leader	Julie Batson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01793 871303
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