

Suffolk - Bury St Edmunds

Hardwick Primary School, Steward Road, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 2PW

Inspection dates

7–8 January 2015

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 proportion of children and families who are registered and accessing services is not yet high enough, although they continue to rise year on year. As a result, the group is not yet impacting positively on outcomes for the large majority of priority families living in the reach area, including teenage parents and those living in workless households.
- There are insufficient opportunities for adults to participate in further education and training to develop their employability skills.
- The systems for monitoring and tracking the progress of adults accessing further education or moving on to employment are not sufficiently well-developed to fully demonstrate the impact of the centres.
- There are insufficient opportunities for adults to make a valuable contribution to shaping services, for example, through a parents' forum or as representatives of the advisory board. Currently there is no parent forum.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- The group provides high levels of care, guidance and support. This results in improving outcomes for those families who access an appropriate range of services.
- Children make good progress and enjoy the good quality sessions with their parents. As a result, they are well-prepared for school and achieve well at the end of Reception.
- Health outcomes are good.
- Strong partnerships with other services, such as the health team has helped to increase the number of families who are registered and accessing services. Similarly, joint working with social care means children in most need are well protected.
- Parents speak highly of the three centres and their staff. The group manager and her team are highly skilled, and driven to reduce inequalities, and celebrate diversity.
- Robust and well-thought out performance management systems and quality assurance monitoring activities are helping to drive up the quality of services and provision.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Increase registration and participation rates further to ensure that the large majority of priority families benefit from the services on offer, particularly teenage parents, and workless families by:
 - developing a well designed process for registering all local families and identifying their specific needs
 - exploring innovative ways with partners to reach more families.

- Improve outcomes for adults by:
 - increasing opportunities for adults to participate in further education and training to develop their employability skills and enable entry to employment
 - tracking adults' progress to show qualifications achieved and employment gained and to demonstrate the impact of learning on their longer term economic well-being.

- Strengthen the governance and accountability of the centre by increasing the representation of parents on the advisory board and developing processes to ensure they make a full contribution in the day-to-day running of the centres.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group 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 Hardwick, Carousel and Bury Library.

This inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with: local authority managers; area manager; representatives from the advisory board; parents; volunteers; community midwives; specialist services manager; social services and adult learning officers; nursery manager; locality health manager and centre staff.

The inspectors visited a range of sessions and activities held at the centres of the group. Activities observed included: 'Stay and Play', 'Marking, Making and Creating', 'Crawlers and Cruisers' and a breastfeeding workshop and ante-natal health clinic'.

They observed the centres' work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. The inspectors looked at the group's self-evaluation, activity plans, case files, safeguarding procedures and a wide range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Qaisra Shahraz, Lead Inspector	Additional inspector
Ann Taylor	Additional inspector
Peter Towner	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Bury St Edmunds Children's Centre Group comprises three children's centres; Carousel, Hardwick and Bury Library. They merged in 2012. Hardwick Children's Centre is on the same site as Hardwick Primary School (URN 134629) and Carousel Children's Centre is on the same site of Howard Primary School (URN 101725); both of these settings are subject to separate inspection arrangements. Their reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Bury Library Children's Centre is based within the town centre library.

The centres work in partnership with a wide range of organisations to deliver services including those open to all and targeted group sessions, family support, health services, adult education and counselling support.

The group's reach area includes Bury St Edmunds and surrounding villages. Hardwick Children's Centre covers Chedburgh, Whelnetham, Southgate and Westgate wards. Bury Library covers Abbeygate, Risbygate, Moreton Hall and Eastgate wards. Carousel Children's Centre covers Barrow, Fornham, Minden, and Risby wards. Overall, the centres serve a demographically diverse population with some pockets of high deprivation. The Carousel Children's Centre is predominantly within the top 30% most deprived in England. In the Bury St Edmunds area, there are approximately 890 children living in households dependent on work-related benefits.

The main priority groups identified by the group are: workless families, lone and teenage parents, those families suffering from domestic abuse and minority ethnic families. Most families are of White British origin. An increasing number of families come from minority ethnic groups.

There are 3133 children under five years of age living in the area. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early year's provision are generally typical for their age.

The centre manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of the three centres in the group as well as two others in the town of Haverhill. The centres are managed and delivered by the local authority. An advisory board is in place. There is on-site day care provision known as Southgate Pre-School at Hardwick Children's Centre.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Leaders monitor registration and participation rates closely and have set ongoing targets to improve take up of services. The centres are aware however that while increasing registration and participation rates overall, the proportion of teenage parents and families from workless households who access their services are relatively low. This limits the group's effectiveness.
- The effective use of information about births and good partnerships with midwives is currently helping to increase the number of families known to the centre.
- Regular prenatal, postnatal and child health checks are held at the three centres as well as much appreciated breastfeeding advice. This means that expectant mothers, new parents and their children have easy access to early childhood health services.
- Fathers are warmly welcomed into all activities. The centre recognises the importance of involving fathers in their child's learning and development. Therefore the centre group has made concerted efforts to involve fathers through activities, such as, a male carer's workshop to meet the needs of 'stay at home' dads. One happy father informed inspectors: 'The group is very important for me. We love it. As there is not a lot around for dads normally.'
- The large majority of two-year-old children who are eligible for free early education take up their entitlement and almost all three-and-four-year-olds.
- Family support workers have a good knowledge of the varied and difficult issues facing many families. Staff are highly sensitive to their needs, including those affected by isolation as new arrivals in the country. Women experiencing domestic abuse have good access to the 'SODA' support group which provides effective support.
- Staff signpost families well to the expertise of partners, such as Job Centre Plus and other adult learning providers. These services are used to support and advise them about financial matters, benefits, routes into employment and further training.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The impact of the centres' services is not yet good because not enough priority families make use of the centres. As a result, this aspect of the centres' work requires improvement.
- Parents benefit from a range of opportunities, such as 'Monday Mums', focussing on the weight issue for pregnant women and 'Parenting', 'Confidence' and 'First Aid' courses. However, opportunities for adults to improve their functional skills, gain formal qualifications and take part in centre's activities which might help them back into employment are currently under-developed.
- Parents, carers and children play together in enjoyable, well-planned and good quality sessions such as 'Stay and Play', 'Crawlers and Cruisers' and 'Marking, Making and Creating'. These activities enable children to make good progress in their personal and social development and help them to develop their language skills.
- Staff celebrate children's achievements well through the 'Acorn Tree' displays of 'WOW' books and the 'WOW moments' in session evaluations. These capture well certain milestones reached by the children in their personal development.

- The 'Community Parent' training which includes the City and Guilds level 2 'Working with Parents' course enables parents to become successful volunteers. They gain useful opportunities to put their new knowledge and skills into practice in centre activities.
- The centre group provides good-quality health and safety information. This includes parents learning about home safety and how to protect their families during the beneficial safety talks sessions. Similarly, there is good support and guidance for parents of disabled children and children with special educational needs.
- Overall health outcomes are positive. The centres effectively promote healthy lifestyles. More children enter Reception Year at a healthy weight than is the case nationally. An increasing number of mothers who continue breastfeeding reflect the centre's effective targeted work and support.
- Family case files are maintained to a high standard by staff and securely audited by managers. They clearly record positive outcomes for families.
- All parents who access the services speak highly of the centres, regarding them as the hub of their communities. They find them warm and welcoming, with friendly and helpful staff. Extreme care is taken to maintain an attractive and stimulating learning environment in all centres.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The leadership team is well-supported, challenged and held to account by the local authority and the advisory board. Local authority officers set clearly defined and measurable targets for improvement. The group's self-evaluation is predominantly accurate and identifies the group's key strengths and areas for development.
- Performance management processes known as the 'Peer Support and Challenge Review' are robust. This includes the quarterly performance reviews which effectively monitor the centres' performance through quality improvement visits, supervision, and monitoring of development plans. Data reports are readily available and well used for performance monitoring by managers.
- Everyone is ambitious to make the centre good and improve engagement rates and outcomes for the families who are accessing the centre services. However, managers recognise that the centre does not have robust tracking systems in place to fully measure the progress made by adults who are signposted to courses elsewhere.
- Parents are consulted effectively in an informal way through session evaluations and through parent feedback board displays, such as 'Help Us Grow'. However, there is no formal parents' forum. Similarly, parents are under-represented on the advisory board. This results in limited opportunities for them to make contribution to the centre's formal decision making and developing its services.
- The centre coordinator and her team of family support workers are highly experienced, enthusiastic and well qualified. There is effective team work and sharing of skills and expertise across the three centres.
- Families benefit from high quality resources and accommodation. With the on-site library at Hardwick Children's Centre, parents have good opportunities to borrow books for their children and thereby enhance their reading skills.
- The centre is committed to inclusion, and reducing barriers for families in most need, including those

new to the country. The group's commitment to providing a wide range of translated materials and a Polish bilingual volunteer helps the centres to support and communicate with Polish families.

- The centre celebrates diversity really well. This is widely reflected in vibrant displays which use positive images of people from around the world and celebrate other languages, festivals and through the choices of bilingual books, toys and multi-lingual 'welcome' rugs.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures meet current requirements. All staff are vetted for their suitability through a rigorous recruitment process. Effective collaboration with social services, in the use of the Common Assessment Framework to identify the needs of the most vulnerable children and the taking of relevant actions helps to ensure that children in need and those subject to child protection plans are effectively safeguarded.

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	80158
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	453900
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3133
Centre leader	Lynda Handshaw
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01284 733940
Email address	lynda.handshaw@suffolk.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 21375 Hardwick Children's Centre
- 20572 Carousel Children's Centre
- 20517 Bury Library Children's Centre

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