

Hampshire Fareham Children's Centre Group

Tewkesbury Avenue, Fareham, Hampshire, PO15 6LL

Inspection dates 2–4 December 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
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 group of centres is inadequate.

- Children from families most in need are not safe because support for them is inadequate. Managers do not check staff's work thoroughly and so do not know when staff fail to do an adequate job.
- Effective governance is hindered by lack of collaborative working between the four separate partnership boards.
- There are too few opportunities to help parents develop their learning and skills or to prepare them for paid employment.
- Managers do not routinely monitor the quality of sessions used by families, especially those provided by outside organisations who are not employed by the group.
- Not enough families from some priority groups make use of centre services, including parents not in employment and families eligible for two-year-old funding.

It has the following strengths:

- The large majority of local families know about the group and are registered to use its services.
- Facilities are of good quality, with pleasant and secure premises, informative displays and lots of space, toys and resources.
- Children in the local area, including disabled children and those with special educational needs, generally do well in their learning and development so most are well prepared when they start school.
- Parents and carers who have experienced domestic abuse are supported well through the sessions available. Many report improvements in their lives as a result of attending services.
- Parents and carers say sessions give them increased self-confidence and greater self-esteem.
- Levels of childhood obesity and mothers who smoke when pregnant are lower than national levels.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Keep all children safe by:
 - working effectively with social care and health partners so relevant information about the needs of families in greatest need is communicated promptly
 - taking effective and prompt action to work with families known to require support
 - making and recording accurate assessment of the needs of families that staff work with closely
 - ensuring managers have thorough oversight of work done with families so that practice helps keep children safe from harm
 - monitoring how families' lives improve as a result of their individual support services.
- Improve collaboration between the four partnership boards so they provide cohesive and effective governance of the group as a whole.
- Plan and deliver a wide range of adult learning opportunities and training in job-seeking skills so that families' needs are met and their economic circumstances improve.
- Monitor the quantity and quality of sessions and services so that more families benefit from consistently good sessions, including those provided by external providers.
- Increase the number of families using centre services so that at least the large majority of all identified priority groups, including workless families, those receiving funding for two-year-olds and those most in need, benefit from regular services that make a positive difference to their lives.

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the local authority, 4Children, the Strategic Board and Local Children's Partnership. They also met with representatives of each of the four partnership boards. They spoke with parents, staff and managers, including the Senior Family Support Practitioners and the Cluster Manager. Inspectors met with teams who offer support to early years providers and spoke with a number of partner organisations. This included representatives from the health service, family learning and local early years settings, schools and colleges.

The inspectors visited Oak Meadow, Sovereign and Strawberry Meadow, Keepsake and Merryfields Children's Centres, as well as St John's Church Hall. They examined 14 family case files and a number of 'family pathway' folders. They reviewed the group's policies and procedures, improvement and development planning documents and minutes from governors' meetings as well as other relevant documentation. They observed all sessions that were running at the time of the inspection, including health clinics, the Young Parents' group, Bumps to Babies, Baby Yoga, and Boogie Mites.

The inspection covered the following centres: Oak Meadow, Sovereign and Strawberry Meadow, Keepsake and Merryfields Children's Centres.

Inspection team

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Full report

Information about the group

Hampshire Fareham Children's Centre group is a group of four children's centres: Oak Meadow, Keepsake, Merryfields and Sovereign and Strawberry Meadow Children's Centres. There are 6,145 children under the age of five years living in the catchment area of the group. The centres have been managed by 4Children together with a consortium of local schools and Southern Health on behalf of the local authority since 2012. Each centre has its own partnership advisory board. This arrangement has been ratified by Hampshire County Council following a local consultation. The group is managed by the cluster manager supported by two senior family support practitioners. The group offers a broad range of services, including sessions for children and family support, health services, a parenting course and adult learning opportunities. There is an on-site early years setting at Oak Meadow Children's Centre called Oak Meadow Childcare Centre; this is independently managed and subject to a separate inspection and report. The management structure of the group underwent significant change at the beginning of 2014. The group has recently reduced the number of services available to all families in the local area as a result of a contractual requirement to focus more on services for those in need.

The local area comprises a mix of economically disadvantaged households and those that are more affluent. There are very few workless households in the area. The very large majority of families who live within the group's catchment area have White British heritage and there is an increasing proportion of families from Eastern European countries.

The group has identified several priority groups on which to focus their services. These are: workless households, families with two-year-old children in receipt of early years funding, and families with disabled children. Levels of children's learning and development are variable, but most meet age-related expectations when they start at an early years setting.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The very large majority of local families are registered with the group. Information provided by the local authority gives an adequate overview of the catchment area so staff can identify what work is needed. This is supplemented by information from health managers, health visitors and midwives who help initiate successful contact with families and prospective parents.
- The majority of families from identified priority groups use centre services; some groups of families make more use of services than others. Most families with disabled children and those living in areas of deprivation make regular use of what the centres have to offer. However, only the majority of families with parents who are not in paid employment, those with child protection plans and those using early years two-year-old funding use services.
- There are enough early years places in the local area for all who need them. As a result, most three- and four-year-old children make use of their funded place. The large majority of two-year-olds who are eligible take up a funded place in an early years setting or with a childminder.
- Staff make reasonable attempts to encourage more families to make use of services, including those who are less likely to do so. Some services are run from local venues and the group's 'Jungle Bus' takes centre services to the midst of some communities. However, a few families report they do not know enough about what the centre has to offer, or details about two-year-old funded childcare places because this information is not communicated to them effectively.
- The range of provision is adequate. The group has recently reduced the number of services available to all families in favour of more sessions for identified families. Some families and professional partner colleagues say that they miss some general sessions that used to run. Staff are monitoring the effect of these changes because they are in the early stages of implementation and

their full impact is not yet known.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- Poor quality work with individual families fails to prioritise children's safety and well-being. Staff leave it too long before contacting partner agencies to request essential information. Contact made with families is infrequent. Thus staff do not know whether families of some of the most vulnerable children are coping with their circumstances or whether children are being kept safe and well.
- Too many case files are inadequate. Assessment of families' needs is ineffective and resulting actions are not planned well enough to improve the household's situation. While a few files show reasonably frequent and effective work with families, most do not show how well families are progressing as a result of their involvement with the group's services.
- There are insufficient opportunities for adults to develop their literacy, numeracy, English language and other essential skills. Staff do not consider the educational needs of parents enough when planning services. Similarly, there is little opportunity for parents to learn skills that will help them successfully find employment, such as writing applications and interview skills.
- The group prioritises the development of personal well-being and often this is done well. Staff make adequate use of assessment systems to show that parents gain a range of key personal skills from sessions such as Bumps to Babe, Cook and Eat and a money management course. Many parents report improved self-esteem and self-confidence as a result of attendance.
- The group offers a range of parenting courses to suit the varying needs of families. These result in parents, including those most in need of support, improving their confidence and learning behaviour management strategies which most of them successfully implement at home.
- Children are well prepared for school through attendance at early years settings in the local area. As a result, the large majority of children reach a good level in their learning and development. Support for disabled children and those with special educational needs is particularly good and enables them to do well.
- The quality of sessions is variable. Some run directly by the centre are well planned and delivered expertly. In these children, including those needing support with their speech and language, have enjoyable and stimulating learning experiences. However, some sessions do not provide a good quality learning experience for children and parents, including some sessions run by external partners.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- Managers have failed to safeguard children effectively. In too many cases, not enough is known of the needs about children on child protection plans and children in need because communication with social care and health partners about some of these families is infrequent and ineffective. The newly formed 'Early Help Hub' aims to facilitate better communication but it is too new to have had any significant effect.
- Management processes for checking the work of staff are inadequate. Managers did not know that contact with some families known to be in greatest need was infrequent or that work was ineffective. They do not make enough provision for ensuring essential work is covered when staff are absent. This leaves children at risk of harm.
- Leaders do not monitor the quality of sessions delivered to families well enough. They have started checking the quality of groups delivered by centre staff but have little oversight of services delivered by external providers. As a result, they do not know what does not work well so that families attend some sessions that are not good.
- The local authority works effectively with the commissioned partners and sets challenging targets that encourage progress and development. There are rigorous systems in place, such as quarterly and half-yearly monitoring visits. The two-day annual conversation carries out a full review of the

group's work. As a result of such challenge, the group has made significant progress in some areas, such as doubling the number of workless households who used the group this year. However, these systems failed to identify serious management weaknesses concerning the supervision of work done with families in greatest need.

- The four partnership advisory boards are effective in their own right but do not work well together as a whole. Meetings cover pertinent local issues such as information about the area, centre services and progress towards targets set by the local authority. However, effective governance is hindered by a lack of collaboration between the four boards because members have a limited strategic overview of the entire group.
- The group works with a suitable range of partner organisations to support families. However, there is not enough contribution from those that provide adult learning opportunities or workplace skills. This lack of partnership working and absence of relevant services does not meet the needs of parents who seek employment, which is one of the group's identified priorities.
- Staff value parents' views and use these well. Parents have a wide range of mechanisms to give feedback. New sessions, such as for potty training, have been introduced as a result. Parents take an active role in agreeing future topics during parenting courses, which helps ensure opportunities are relevant to their needs.
- There are sufficient resources to meet the needs of local families. The premises and staff capacity are sufficient to meet the needs of the area. However, staff are not always effectively deployed to cover absent colleagues to ensure services continue without interruption.

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 well-being 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	80053
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	447620
Managed by	A partnership between 4Children, a consortium of local schools and Southern Health on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	6,145
Group manager	Sarah Gibbs
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01329 841097
Email address	OakMeadowChildrensCentre@4Children.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 22217 Oak Meadow Children's Centre
- 20466 Sovereign and Strawberry Meadow Children's Centre
- 21643 Keepsake Children's Centre
- 21989 Merryfields Children's Centre

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