

Inspection report for Bartongate Children's Centre

Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	362438
Inspection dates	24–25 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Joyce Cox

Centre governance	Widdon Primary School Management Committee
Centre leader	Mary Welsh
Date of previous inspection	15 February 2007
Centre address	Sinope Street Gloucester GL1 4AW
Telephone number	01452 417593
Fax number	01452 417593
Email address	bartongatecc@gloucestershire.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Widdon Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY340978 Bartongate Full Day Care

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

An inspection of the childcare and education arrangements across the Early Years Foundation Stage was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior leaders, representatives of the local authority, and representatives from the range of partners who offer services, parents and carers, the leader of the Partnership Board and members of the Management Committee. Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Bartongate Children's Centre is located on the site of Widden Primary School. It was formed by the amalgamation of Widden Early Years Centre, Colwell Nursery and staff from the local Sure Start programme. It was registered as a children's centre in 2006. Bartongate is a phase one children's centre providing the full core offer, including family support, full day care, child and family health services and Jobcentre Plus. The centre also operates out of a base at Hatherley Infant School where it provides sessional care, adult learning opportunities and health and family services. Local statistical data indicate that the area is one of high unemployment and high social and economic disadvantage.

The local population is mixed, with families coming mainly from Asia, the Caribbean and, increasingly, many from Eastern Europe. There are a small number of White British families. Most children enter childcare and early education with skills that are much lower than those expected for their age. The centre is governed by a management committee from Widden Primary School on a Service Level Agreement.

A new centre manager took up her post on 1 November 1 2010.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

3

Main findings

The centre offers satisfactory support to children and families. Parents and users describe the centre as 'friendly'. They told inspectors they appreciate the time staff take to get to know them as individuals. A particular strength of the centre is its approach to safeguarding. Staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures, they are well trained and ensure that any concerns are promptly shared with relevant agencies. Case studies evidence indicates that families regularly turn to the centre for help in times of crisis. This effective support, however, only benefits a small proportion of families within the centre's reach area.

Outcomes for users, including those who are most vulnerable, in all areas are satisfactory. This is because services and activities are adequately matched to the needs of users. Children who attend the Early Years Foundation Stage day and sessional care behave well and make steady progress in their learning. However, the centre does not currently assess children's attainment when they join the centre or have sufficiently robust arrangements to measure their progress over time. Early Years staff vary in their competence in delivering high quality provision and in their ability to interact and play with children. Most children appear happy but some Eastern European children who speak no English occasionally appear sad and bewildered because of a lack of bilingual support. The centre's self-evaluation is sound but generous. This is because procedures for monitoring, evaluation and the collection of data, particularly relating to national indicators, are not sufficiently rigorous. Nor does the centre make sufficient use of local data to evaluate the effectiveness of its work. The centre does not yet have a coherent system in place to demonstrate the impact of its services on users.

The centre meets its statutory responsibilities for the promotion of equality and

diversity. It has been successful in engaging specific groups of ethnic minority parents, for example in providing bilingual support for Asian families. The new centre manager and the management committee have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for development across the centre. This, coupled with sound provision and outcomes, demonstrates the centre's satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority and the management committee to ensure centre staff and all key partners rigorously monitor and evaluate their work and develop systems for demonstrating the impact they have on users' outcomes.
- Improve outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - improving staff knowledge and expertise in assessment procedures and in interacting and playing with children
 - tracking children's progress regularly from their individual starting points
 - providing bi-lingual support for children and parents from Eastern Europe.
- Improve outcomes and the quality of provision by identifying potential users and implementing strategies to engage a greater proportion of users from the reach area.
- Ensure that at centre and strategic levels, progress towards all the appropriate national indicators are effectively monitored and evaluated.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The majority of users are developing a secure understanding of how to keep themselves and their families healthy through regular support and advice from the centre. This includes free access to fresh fruit and water, breastfeeding support, contraceptive advice and a weekly baby clinic. Early Years Foundation Stage children particularly enjoy the 'active start' sessions led by highly enthusiastic and supportive providers. Teenage parents enjoy relaxed weekly meetings with the family support team who provide good support for them during and after their pregnancies. Health visitors, speech and language therapists and community nurses are based at the centre and can provide a raft of support and guidance. However, centre staff have very little data to demonstrate the impact of all these services.

The safety and welfare of all the centre's users, including those who are most vulnerable, is a high priority for the manager, who ensures they are well informed about potential dangers; for example, the fire service visited recently to talk about firework safety. Risk assessments are completed but some are fairly basic and staff do not always manage potential risks as they arise. For example, no one checked to see if the outdoor balancing 'sleepers' were too slippery for children to use on a cold, icy morning.

The centre knows the families it works with very well. Consequently, their early identification of need and prevention of potential difficulties play a key role in the work of the centre to reduce harm to children. All members of the family support team are trained in Common Assessment Framework processes and diligently complete detailed assessments. Inspection observations indicate that children who attend day and sessional care activities are making satisfactory progress. All children have a key worker who welcomes them in the morning and keeps a close eye on them during the day. The absence of Eastern European bilingual support means that some children look lost and confused at times. The centre’s catering assistant who is Polish, provides very good language support and reassurance to children and families but this is clearly not an ideal situation as she has other responsibilities. There is very limited information as to children’s individual starting points or progress made by different groups of children. Staff are completing children’s ‘Learning Journals’ which provide a record of the activities covered but do not indicate progress in relation to age-related expectations in the areas of learning.

Parents have satisfactory opportunities to improve their economic stability and academic skills. Jobcentre Plus and local authority services run regular sessions to support parents into employment. Adults attending a numeracy class were effusive in praise of their tutors. One user commented, ‘I look forward to coming here every week and the teachers are brilliant!’ Literacy and numeracy classes are particularly popular and their success has led to a small number of parents accessing further training to improve their employment opportunities.

The centre has very limited collated or co-ordinated evidence to clearly demonstrate how it is making a difference across the five Every Child Matters areas, particularly in relation to how it is matching or improving on national indicator data and this slows their ability to see their impact on the lives of children and their families and so make improvements.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

All parents and carers who spoke to inspectors were positive about the centre and the positive impact different services have had on their families. They were particularly complimentary about the care, support and guidance they received from all the staff. For example, the centre hosts sessions run by Relate counsellors, and health visitors and midwives provide useful advice. Work with the most vulnerable families is good and parents typically report that, 'staff go out of their way to support families.' The centre promotes purposeful learning for the small proportion of users who access the satisfactory range of courses on offer. Individual case studies for a few users indicate good levels of success. Partnerships between professionals, agencies and outreach organisations are sound and securely support the most vulnerable families based on effective assessment of their needs. However, as there are limited opportunities for users to identify their needs and wishes, there is scope for the centre to expand its engagement with more groups of users from the wider community. For example, there are no activities on offer to engage fathers or working parents. Although the services offered by the centre are well received by parents, take-up rates are limited. For example, there are currently only twelve children attending full day care provision.

Provision to promote purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage varies between the Widden and the Hatherley sites. At the Hatherley site, there is a strong focus on different areas of learning. Staff act as enthusiastic play partners and children are clearly learning and making good progress. The accommodation is cosier than at Widden and staff have clearly defined roles. At Widden, this was not so evident. Senior staff were not supporting or modelling effective practice for less experienced staff. Assessment procedures are at an early stage of development. The centre knows some individual families well and is providing appropriate services to meet their needs. However, there are no robust systems and procedures in place to support staff in measuring outcomes for all users.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

It is evident that the centre has been through turbulent times since it began in 2006. Difficulties in recruiting and retaining an effective manager and full-time staff have resulted in many procedures not always been embedded sufficiently well. The new manager has considerable expertise and experience in running centres and very quickly identified that some processes require sharper organisation, rigour and implementation. Wasting no time, she instantly realised that the single central register did not contain all the necessary information, and weaknesses were addressed. Consequently the centre's child protection policy and guidelines are now robust and all staff have been trained at the appropriate levels in child protection procedures. Protocols and practices for referrals are well known and a high priority across the work of the centre. Staff now diligently record CRB and List 99 checks undertaken by partner agencies working at the centre. Staff are committed to promoting the equality and inclusion of all families within the reach area. The centre manager has effective plans to gather information pertinent to different user groups and to evaluate their engagement. She has also rapidly established regular meetings to ensure closer links and more effective practice between all the various partners based at the centre. These include health visitors, speech and language therapists, midwives, a psychotherapist and the family support team.

The centre runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and the well-being of all users is a tangible priority. Staff are keen and committed to improving the work of the centre, although there is very limited evidence of middle managers' impact on improving provision. For example a local authority review identified that boys in the Early Years Foundation Stage were not doing as well as girls and yet there were very few examples of activities planned to engage and interest boys evident during the inspection.

Resources are satisfactory and support satisfactory outcomes for users. New toys and equipment for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is a priority when finances allow. The centre provides satisfactory value for money and is constantly looking for new sponsors. For example, staff and users are very grateful for the recent donation of £4,000 from an adjacent superstore.

Members of the management committee are fully committed to improving outcomes for children and families and clearly articulate their high expectations for the centre. They have a crystal clear understanding of the part they can play in improving outcomes, strengthening partnerships and holding the centre to account. However, any data are currently held in a variety of forms and locations, which makes analysis challenging. The contribution that governors and users make to the strategic work of the centre is currently satisfactory but limited as systems to monitor and evaluate the work and for demonstrating the impact they have on users' outcomes with regard to national indicators are at an early stage of development.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

An inspection of the childcare and education arrangements across the Early Years Foundation Stage was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The children's centre lead inspector liaised closely with the Section 5 inspection team. All inspectors agreed that the Early Years Foundation Stage provision and outcomes are satisfactory in the children's centre.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Bartongate children's centre on 24-25 November 2010. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for making us feel welcome and for contributing to the inspection by sharing your experience of your children's centre.

Many of you told us that the staff at the centre are friendly. We could see that children and parents and carers enjoy many of the activities on offer. The centre is particularly good at ensuring staff have a good understanding of procedures for protecting children. The family support team and other services work together well to help families who come to the centre during particularly difficult times.

The centre staff work satisfactorily with a range of partners such as health and social care to support children's development and help the adults who use the centre to learn new skills. Children make satisfactory progress in all areas of learning. We feel that children and families from Eastern Europe would settle more easily and feel more welcome and make more progress if they had bilingual support.

A group of parents and users we spoke to reported that they are mostly happy with the centre and have seen improvements in the children's learning and development. However, they told us that they did not feel that the centre seeks parents' views and opinions very often. We would agree that staff could do this much more regularly and that you should have more chances to say what types of activities you would like at your centre. Several of the parents work shifts and so cannot use the training courses on offer. Fathers felt they would like to be more involved if courses were available at weekends. One user was unaware that speech and language support was available at the centre as she had concerns about her child's speech, which had not been noted by her child's key worker.

There is a written plan which identifies targets for improving the centre's work. We have asked the manager and the management committee to make sure the targets set are measurable so that they can check how well the centre is doing. The new manager knows there is much more to do if the centre is to fully meet the needs of the community. We have asked the manager and governors to develop ways in which they can ensure everyone in the Bartongate area who needs the centre's help receives it. We have asked the local authority and the management committee to help the centre understand how well it is doing in improving the lives of children and parents and carers. We feel improvements need to be made for children attending the day and sessional care in terms of carefully recording the progress they make whilst attending the centre. Some of the Widden staff also require training in the best ways to talk and play with young children. We would like to wish you, your children and families who live in the Bartongate area the very best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.