

# North Barnes Children's Centre

Lowther Primary School, Stillingfleet Road, London, SW13 9AE

**Inspection date** 26–27 June 2013

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.

- The local authority does not know the centre's strengths and weaknesses because it does not monitor the centre's work closely enough. Information provided from the local authority does not enable leaders and managers to convincingly demonstrate that they are making a difference to families. The quality of services is poorly monitored by leaders and managers. As a result, the centre's own evaluation of its work is inaccurate and over generous.
- The local authority does not set any targets for the centre to meet. Leaders and managers do not identify all the families that would benefit from children's centre services and they are not sufficiently clear about what they are aiming to achieve. Leaders and managers are unable to account for how the centre helps to reduce inequalities. Too few families are engaged with the centre.
- The advisory board does not fully represent the wide range of agencies that work together to provide services for children and families. Parents are not routinely involved in the governance of the centre. The centre's joint planning is weak and uncoordinated and fails to fully take into account the views of parents.
- The local authority has not provided enough support or challenge for the acting leader of the centre. Temporary management arrangements over the last two years have not provided a secure foundation for the centre's development. The centre has only made contact with a minority of families living in the reach area.

### This children's centre has the following strengths:

- Despite inadequate support from the local authority, the acting manager has made a noticeable difference during her time in post. Under her leadership, the total number of families registered has increased by approximately 1,000. Parents, partners and staff are wholeheartedly positive about the support and advice that she provides. Many activities available to families are oversubscribed.
- The centre's staff and those partners engaged with the centre are passionate about their work, ambitious for families and are hard working. Partnerships with health visitors and midwives are developing very well and ensure that families receive effective advice and guidance.

## 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 additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with senior staff from the local authority; including an assistant director, strategic lead for children's centres, head of early years and a data officer. The lead inspector attended a locality meeting of the local authority services at the civic centre in Twickenham. Inspectors also met with two local headteachers, the head of early years at the co-located primary school and a representative from adult learning services. They listened to the views of parents and undertook a range of home visits with outreach workers.

The inspectors visited a wide range of activities including: 'Stay and Play' at the PowerStation; 'Communic8' at Lowther; 'Little Learners', a parenting programme; and 'Sparkle Time' at Windham. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. They looked in detail at a number of case files of children subject to child protection plans, those deemed to be children in need and others in receipt of outreach work, including those subject to Common Assessment Framework processes.

## Inspection team

Michael Blakey	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Linda Kaye	Additional Inspector
Sarah McDermott	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

North Barnes Children's Centre is managed by the local authority and covers the areas of Kew, Mortlake, Barnes and East Sheen to the south west of London. Services are delivered from shared sites with Lowther Primary School (URN 102892) and Windham Nursery (URN 102882). The centre is designated as a stand alone centre. These settings are subject to separate inspections and the reports can be found on the Ofsted website. Services are also delivered from Mortlake Hall, which has received significant investment from the local authority and the PowerStation. The Lowther site opened fully in September 2012, although some information technology (IT) facilities were not available until May 2013. The centre delivers the full core offer of children's centre services.

An advisory board has been in place since October 2012 and last met in January 2013. Management arrangements were temporary at the time of the inspection. The current acting leader, an experienced outreach worker, has held the post for approximately two years. She has very recently completed the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership.

There are approximately 3,641 children aged from birth to four years living in the area served by the centre. Of these, 214 children live in two of the top 30% most deprived areas in England. The remaining 27 areas covered by the centre are more affluent. The local authority estimates that 5.9% of children live in the more deprived areas.

There are approximately 2,759 families with children aged from birth to four years in the local area, and in 2011, 435 families were in receipt of out-of-work benefits. A large majority of families living in the reach area are of White British origin and a very small minority of families are of Asian or mixed heritage backgrounds. Children's skill levels on entry to early years provision are broadly in line with those expected for their age.

### What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- The local authority should immediately confirm the leadership and management arrangements for the centre and strengthen the governance arrangements by:
  - ensuring that self-evaluation processes are founded on accurate data
  - setting a small number of priorities on which the centre should focus, ensuring that specific and measurable targets are set and that data are collected and analysed robustly
  - sharing these priorities with all partners, including parents
  - providing effective and timely reviews of the centre's performance
  - strengthening the membership and function of the advisory board by recruiting more parents and other partners from the local community, so that the board can act as both a supportive and challenging critical friend to the centre manager
  - ensuring that parents are fully involved in the running and evaluation of the centre's work
  - implementing centre-based processes to robustly monitor the quality of services.
- Work with local health services to access live birth data so that almost all families are known to the children's centre and are encouraged to attend.
- Promote the centre so that most families in the reach area are registered and ensure that all identified target groups are well represented, benefit from services and attend regularly.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- Too few families are registered with the centre. Partnerships with local childcare providers are not well developed and health partners do not routinely provide the centre with relevant information such as when babies are born. Consequently, while leaders have identified which groups of families would most benefit from support, the centre's small outreach team are unable to encourage enough families to access services as they do not know where to find the majority of them.
- Too few families in most need of support and are known to the centre, attend activities. The late development of the main children's centre site, which became fully operational in June 2013, has contributed to the low numbers of families attending in the Barnes area. Activities such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Little Learners' which are delivered at other sites in the reach area are often oversubscribed.
- The centre monitors which families attend activities and ensures that some more vulnerable families are given priority access to some activities. However, leaders and managers do not always use this information to ensure that these families attend regularly so that they receive the help they need.
- Tracking systems show that almost all two-year-old children that are entitled to free nursery provision take this up at good or better providers.

### The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- The centre and its partners are not sufficiently clear about what they are aiming to achieve. Leaders do not routinely track the impact of services on improving the wellbeing of young children and their families or how well it contributes to narrowing the attainment gap between the lowest attaining children and their peers. As a result, the centre is not able to demonstrate the impact of its services.
- Not enough families are accessing good quality help and support. Some families, particularly those who are supported by the two outreach workers, receive effective support which makes a positive difference to their lives. One parent stated, 'I always feel safe and there is loads of support available.' The quality of advice and guidance that these parents receive is good and helps them to access better quality housing and benefits for example. However, overall too few families currently access this kind of support.
- The range of adult learning activities on offer and advice to parents about employment is limited and does not meet the needs of those in most need.

### The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- The centre is failing to meet the needs of a significant number of families because the local authority has provided ineffective support for the acting manager. These temporary arrangements have been in place for two years and, during this time, the acting manager has not been allowed to supervise or manage the small centre staff team. As a result, the centre manager has not monitored their work to ensure that the needs of vulnerable families are met. However, the outreach team receive good quality professional case work supervision from a senior outreach worker employed by the local authority.
- Leaders and managers in the local authority have failed to set priorities for the centre. As a result, staff and partners are not clear about what they are trying to achieve. Without these clear priorities the centre has not been able to set targets or monitor how well it is doing. The impact of this is made worse by an ineffective and often poorly attended advisory board.
- Day-to-day safeguarding practice is sound. All statutory requirements are met and children and families are safe. However, over twelve months ago the local authority undertook an audit of safeguarding and identified three areas at the centre that did not fully meet requirements, including essential training on safeguarding for the acting manager. Although the acting manager has successfully addressed all these issues, the plan was not reviewed by the local authority. This demonstrates the weak monitoring and quality assurance processes in place.

- Children who are subject to child protection plans, and those who are deemed to be children in need, are well supported by the centre's outreach workers. Staff working with families in their own homes receive appropriate and effective supervision from a qualified social worker on a regular basis. At the time of the inspection, the centre was aware of four children aged from birth to four years who were looked after. However, these children were not accessing children's centre services and the centre is therefore unable to contribute to improving their well-being.
- The centre engages with the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process and staff are trained to use the electronic CAF system. However, too many partners do not have access to this system and this hinders the work of the centre. The number of CAFs that are instigated by the centre and its partners is low, particularly when compared to other areas within the borough.
- The centre buys services with a budget that is devolved from the local authority to the advisory board. Many of the services are open to all, but some providers are not aware which families the centre expects them to work with. Consequently, services are not always sufficiently targeted at those families in most need.
- Leaders & managers responsible for managing performance have failed to develop effective systems to track the impact of children's centre services. Therefore, it is difficult for the centre to demonstrate that its resources are being used well to provide value for money.
- Children and families are not routinely engaged in the running or evaluation of the centre. There is currently no parents' forum. The centre manager has correctly identified the involvement of parents as a priority in the centre's action plan and is working to rectify this.

**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**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	20579
<b>Local authority</b>	London Borough of Richmond
<b>Inspection number</b>	427420
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	3,641
<b>Centre leader</b>	Katie Walsh
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 3021 1990
<b>Email address</b>	Katie.Walsh@richmond.gov.uk

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