

Chalfonts Children's Centre

Milton Court, Churchfield Road, Chalfont St Peter, Buckinghamshire SL9 9EN

Inspection date 22–23 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
		Inadequate	4
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 is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Despite a significantly improving trend in overall registration and participation rates, not enough target families are using the services, including priority groups such as lone parents and those who live in workless households.
- Health data are not yet provided to enable the centre to identify where all families with children under five years of age live.
- There have been significant improvements in services, but these only have happened since Barnardo's took over the running of the centre in June. As a result of the short timescale, they are not yet able to show the full impact of services they provide.
- Although clear planning is in place for children's activities, observation, assessment and tracking of children's progress is not yet established. They are not yet able to identify all children who are at risk of falling behind expected levels of development for their age.
- Partnerships at a strategic level are not working collaboratively to share information that would help the centre to drive improvements in the reach area. The local authority does not hold its strategic partners to account tenaciously enough where staff are not following agreed protocols for information sharing. As a result, the centre does not know when families are involved with social care, whether they have experienced domestic violence or are involved with other agencies, and are unable to deploy their resources to best effect. There is no named social worker for the centre.

This centre has the following strengths:

- The Barnardo's leadership team is highly committed, skilled, caring and approachable. They have made a very strong start by increasing registration and participation rates significantly in the four months they have been running the centre. They have worked with parents and partners to ensure their knowledge of the reach area is improved.
- Close partnership working with health workers, the teenage parent adviser and the early years Traveller worker has enabled leaders to identify their priorities and to start to work with those most in need of support. This provides a firm foundation that will help the centre to move forward rapidly once all staff are in place and building work is completed.

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. It was carried out at the same time as another children's centre which was The Ivers Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and managers in the local authority, the centre leader, the commissioned provider, partner agencies, parents, family support staff, volunteers and representatives of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited Chalfont St Peter Church Hall and Chalfont St Peter Community Centre.

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

Inspection team

Denise Blackwell	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Kenneth Jones	Her Majesty's Inspector
Catherine Kickham	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Chalfonts Children's Centre is a phase 2 stand-alone centre that became operational in 2007. The new centre building is on the ground floor of an office building, with refurbishment work due to finish in the next few weeks. The centre also runs activities in local community buildings in Chalfont St Peter and some of the smaller villages such as Seer Green. There are 1,161 children under five years of age in the reach area. Barnardo's were commissioned by the local authority to take over the management and running of the centre in June 2013. They have an advisory board made up of partner agencies and parents. It is still in the process of moving staff and some services to its current building, though some health sessions have been held in the building since September 2013. When work on the building is completed, health services and some of the smaller targeted activities such as 'bumps and babies' will be run from the centre.

The centre's reach area covers the six wards of Chalfont St Giles, Chalfont St Peter Central, Chalfont Common, Goldhill, Austenwood, Seer Green and Jordans. The majority of the reach area is quite affluent with homes at the higher end of the market. Residents are mostly classified as wealthy mature professionals with low levels of deprivation. However, there are seven small social housing estates with 8.5% of Chalfonts residents in social rented accommodation. There are also two established Travellers' sites within the reach. Just under 4% of under-fives in the reach area live within workless households, compared to the local authority average of 7.8%. Unemployment is low, accounting for 2.2% of the population.

The education profile is above average, with only 13% of all residents having no qualifications, and 44% of all residents qualified to degree level or higher. Children's levels on entry to early years provision are generally below those expected for their age. The number of children who attained 78 points on the Early Years Foundation Stage profile in 2012 was 63.7%, lower than the county average of 65%. The population comprises 86.4% White British, with 6.5% of residents from Irish, Irish Traveller and Gypsy heritage. A very small proportion of residents are from Black or Minority Ethnic backgrounds, with the largest group being of Indian heritage (2.9%).

What does the centre needs to do to improve further?

- Build on the successful early strategies used to increase the number of families from target groups that are using the centre by:
 - identifying and engaging with more lone parents and those in workless households
 - working with partners to support families who are experiencing domestic violence
 - continuing to use outreach work to identify families who would otherwise be unlikely to access centre services.
- Develop systems for the observation, assessment and tracking of children's progress to:
 - enable staff to better support children's development
 - identify whether children's development is typical for their age or whether they need additional support.
- The local authority needs to work with its strategic partners, including health representatives, to ensure:
 - staff from partner agencies share information as agreed, and that they are held to account when they do not, so that health data are accurate and consistently shared
 - the centre is aware of families in the reach area who are involved with other agencies, and whether there is anything they can do to support this work
 - work with families with children under five years of age is not duplicated and centre resources can be used to best effect.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre does not have a clear picture of whether families from target groups take up the free entitlement or which families have applied for two-year-old funding. Partnerships with early years providers are developing well and are helping to identify families who would benefit from additional support from the centre. However, they do not yet work with target families to support their access to high-quality early years provision.
- An increasing number of families are registered with the children's centre, with a significant rise in the numbers using services since June. Managers and staff have made concerted efforts to get to know the needs of the community well, including those who are expecting children. But there is more to do to engage those from some priority groups such as lone parents and workless households.
- Sessions such as 'Stay and Play' were moved to a local church hall after leaders identified the previous venue was not suitable. As a result, sessions have become so busy they are considering how to deliver two sessions a week to enable more families to access this universal service. This is helping parents to support their children's learning and development, and preparing them for school.
- Strenuous efforts are made to ensure that identified families with the highest levels of need are benefiting from services. For example, staff work closely with the teenage parent adviser and early years Traveller worker. This has resulted in over half the teenage mothers, and one young father, attending the most recent Tiny Toes session and engagement with 100% of Traveller families with young children.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Training to enable families to improve their qualifications and chances of employment is still developing. Partnership with the adult learning provider is at an early stage and programmes of training and support have yet to be finalised. As a result, adults who need help to improve their economic stability are not yet receiving the level of support they need.

- Centre leaders have initially concentrated on short, individual parenting programmes such as 'Holding Hands'. Parents spoken to by inspectors felt that their parenting skills and confidence had grown as a result of support from centre staff, and this had a positive impact on their family life.
- There are some examples of very effective individual work with families which reduces inequalities and makes significant improvements in their lives. Families told inspectors that they had seen significant improvements in services since June. Premises and activities were more suited to their needs and are contributing to their well-being. However, tracking systems are not yet in place to show the full impact of what is provided.
- Staff are good role models for parents, especially during play sessions, focusing on language and communication skills to support school readiness. They offer a friendly, professional environment where families feel welcomed and provide good-quality care, guidance and support. They help parents to access external support where appropriate and a number of parents gave examples of where centre staff had provided specific advice and guidance to help them overcome difficulties.
- The numbers of volunteers in the centre have increased since June. They receive useful and relevant training and induction to help them understand their roles. Volunteers say how this is helping them to plan for their future careers. One volunteer, who started at the centre in June, is due to start paid employment very soon as a Playleader at the children's centre itself.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Shared local knowledge, combined with the use of data, is helping the centre to identify where families live, especially those in need of support. The centre leader in particular sought out, and has been successful in, engaging relevant partners. As a result, in just a few months they have increased the number of families in receipt of family support from three to 12 families, but this work is hindered by the lack of specific information from health about all new births and those who are new to the area.
- The reformed advisory board has eagerly and quickly taken on the challenges faced by the centre. 'They have a "can do" attitude' was a regular comment from partners, '...you actually feel as though they listen to you and value what you have to offer.' However, they do not underestimate the challenges faced by the centre in identifying all their priority families. 'They have made an excellent start but we still have a long way to go,' stated advisory board members.
- Parents are eager to be involved in the centre. Many of those spoken to could give examples of where their ideas and suggestions had been acted on by the centre. The parents' forum is still in its early days but representatives have good ideas for how to get feedback from families about their needs.
- Action plans identify the initial priorities for the centre, dates for review or completion, and short- and medium-term targets for improvement. Targets are set by leaders alongside members of the advisory board and are challenging but realistic. Barnardo's have been successful in exceeding the targets for their key priorities of improving registration and participation rates of vulnerable families.
- There is a clearly understood and consistently implemented system for performance management. All staff receive regular supervision sessions, with additional supervision meetings when needed. Development needs are identified and training put in place to ensure all staff get opportunities to improve their knowledge of issues in the area and how to resolve them.
- Leaders value the support and challenge provided by the local authority. Data provided by them are combined with the knowledge of partners and parents to identify priority groups, although the centre does not yet receive precise enough data and information to target families and to demonstrate the impact of services across the reach area.
- A refurbished centre building that is bright, welcoming and accessible shows leaders' commitment to families in the area. They have worked closely with health to ensure the centre is suitable for the delivery of health services such as midwifery. As a result, there is a renewed energy and enthusiasm from parents and partners to make the centre a success.
- Safeguarding is given a high priority with effective policies and procedures in place. Leaders work well with social care and the family resilience team when they know of their involvement with

families. However, the lack of sharing of information about children on child protection plans and children in need plans means leaders are not always aware of children in the reach area who are at greatest risk of harm.

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	23168
Local authority	Buckinghamshire County Council
Inspection number	427526
Managed by	Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,161
Centre leader	Abigail Gibbs
Date of previous inspection	July 2012
Telephone number	01753 893210
Email address	abigail.gibbs@barnardos.org.uk

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