

Nottinghamshire - Harworth and Bircotes/West Bassetlaw

c/o West Bassetlaw Children's Centre, School Road, Worksop, S81 9PX

Inspection date		23–24 October 2013	
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	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 is a children's centre group that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The centre group and its partners have not convinced enough local parents to use the free places for two- and three-year-old children at early years settings in West Bassetlaw and for three-year olds in Harworth and Bircotes. In addition, the local authority has not provided enough data to help centre leaders to monitor the take-up of these places.
- The local authority does not inform the centre group about every young child who has involvement with social care. As a result, the centres are not able to work with all families who may need support.
- Not enough links are in place with employment services. This means that support and advice about employment opportunities are too dependent upon centre staff.
- The rate of breastfeeding is not improving well, and obesity among Reception Year children is not declining enough.
- Links with schools are under-developed. As a result, gaps in the achievement of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in West Bassetlaw have widened over the past four years.
- There are some inconsistencies in the work of centre staff, including in case files, because not all checks by leaders are good enough.
- Not enough parents are involved in the local advisory group.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Most young children and families are registered with the centres and using services. This is particularly because of good links with colleagues from health services who provide support for pregnancy and parenting.
- Many registered early years settings are improving their work through links with both children's centres.
- Leaders and staff demonstrate a good knowledge of how to support individual families and have a clear understanding of the characteristics of local towns and villages. Consequently, staff work is focused mostly upon where community needs are greatest and services are gradually improving.
- Both centres celebrate the differences between people, making the premises feel very welcoming.

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 West Bassetlaw Children's Centre, and Harworth and Bircotes Children's Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with staff, leaders, partners, and representatives of the advisory board, Harworth and Bircotes Town Council, Nottinghamshire Children and Families Partnership and the local authority. The inspectors visited both centres. They observed the centres' work, spoke informally with parents and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Tim Vaughan	Her Majesty's Inspector
Maxine Mayer	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tara Street	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre group

Harworth and Bircotes/West Bassetlaw Children's Centre Group consists of two centres, located five miles apart that share one overall centre leader and one advisory board. Each centre has its own parents forum. Since June 2013, the local authority has commissioned the Nottinghamshire Children and Families Partnership to manage the centres. Centres provide a range of family support services, adult learning and health promotion activities, and they signpost families to other relevant services. Children start early education with a range of skills that are either below or broadly in line with those expected.

The centre group serves 1,021 children under five years of age, most of whom are White British. A very small number of families are from minority ethnic groups. The large majority of young children in West Bassetlaw live in areas which are among the poorest 30% in the country, and 28% of local children under the age of five live in households where no adult is working. In Harworth and Bircotes, almost all young children live in the poorest 30%, and 27% of children live in homes where no adult is working.

West Bassetlaw Children's Centre shares its premises with Pre-School Learning Alliance Bassetlaw Childcare and is adjacent to Langold Dyscarr Primary School. The centre was designated as a phase one centre in October 2005, having previously been a wave one Sure Start Local Programme. Neither the school nor the pre-school was inspected as part of this inspection; their reports are available at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Harworth and Bircotes Children's Centre is located within the new Town Hall. It is a phase two centre which was designated in December 2007.

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

- Increase the take-up of free early education places by two-year-olds in West Bassetlaw and three-year-olds there and in Harworth and Bircotes by:
 - planning more actions to help parents understand the benefits of enrolling their children in early years provision
 - ensuring the local authority provides better data to centre leaders to assist them in monitoring the levels of take-up.
- The local authority should establish a procedure to share information with children's centres about every young child who is being supported by social care.
- Increase links with employment services so that that local adults can access more employment opportunities and advice through the children's centre group.
- Work with all relevant partners to ensure:
 - an increased rate in breastfeeding babies at age six to eight weeks
 - a greater decrease in the level of obesity among Reception Year children
 - effective partnership with all schools in West Bassetlaw, leading to a narrowing of the gaps in achievement between children by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Improve leadership, governance and management by:
 - checking on the work of staff, including case files, more frequently and thoroughly
 - involving more parents as members of the local advisory group.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The local authority does not share information systematically with the children's centres about every young child who has social care involvement. Consequently, the centres are not able to support all families who may benefit from what they can offer.
- The centre group has not done enough to convince parents of the value of accessing free, funded early education places for their children. In addition, the local authority has not provided centre leaders with enough data with which to monitor the levels of take-up. Consequently, not enough two-year-old children are attending funded early education places in West Bassetlaw and not enough three-year-olds do so there and in Harworth and Bircotes.
- Through effective links with health colleagues at both centres, the level of registrations by local families is good. Most registered children have accessed at least one centre activity in the past year. The highest registration and access to services is at Harworth and Bircotes Children's Centre which benefits greatly from being located on the main shopping road in the new Town Hall. While the West Bassetlaw Children's Centre is located less centrally, staff make good use of other venues in the community, including local schools and churches, to reach families.
- Staff and leaders make effective use of their good knowledge of the local area and link well to other services and partners when identifying and supporting families who may be vulnerable. This means that services are accessible and planned on the basis of identified needs. For example, the centre has prioritised reaching families who live in the poorest parts of the area. As a result, 76% of this target group accessed services in 2012-13, which is 14% above the local authority average. Staff reach families through regular 'pavement play' sessions out in the community, and parents find the text messaging service particularly useful to remind them about special events at the centres, such as 'Dental Health' and 'Home Safety' sessions. Imagery used in displays throughout both centres reflects the commitment to equality and diversity and helps a wide range of people, for example, people with communication difficulties, to feel valued and respected.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Health indicators across both centres are not improving enough, particularly in breastfeeding and child obesity.
- Partnership with schools to improve the learning of all local young children is not developed to its full potential in West Bassetlaw. Consequently, the attainment gap between different groups of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in this centre's area has widened by 5.1 percentage points over the past four years. By contrast, the gap has narrowed by 5.9 percentage points in Harworth and Bircotes over the same period and partnership with registered early years settings is good across both centres.
- Opportunities for local people to access employment advice and support, for example, through drop-in sessions, have recently ceased due to cut-backs experienced by partner organisations. The gap in services has not been addressed sufficiently by the centre group, thereby placing too much emphasis upon community and family workers to make up the shortfall.
- The balance of universal and targeted services provided has been planned carefully by leaders and the activities provided are mostly good. Targeted adults participate well in courses of further education, training and parenting, and most are successful in achieving the planned outcomes of their programmes. Budgetary reductions have reduced the recent availability of English and mathematics programmes supported by crèche facilities. Nevertheless, leaders are not complacent and are already exploring ways to address this issue through talking to partners.
- Families receive good care, guidance and support from the children's centre group and its partners. Staff are very good role models and a typical parental comment was, 'It would be hard to cope without the help of the children's centre.' Community support and home visits are used particularly well in encouraging families to participate in activities and improve outcomes for families in crisis.
- The centre has a good programme to encourage and develop voluntary work. Volunteers engage

well in a range of opportunities, particularly in breastfeeding support groups and fund-raising.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- There are only three parent members of the local advisory group. This is too few to ensure that parents from both centres are involved fully in shaping the direction of the centre group and holding it to account. In spite of this weakness, parents do feel respected and listened to in both centres, particularly through the two parents' forums.
- While leaders review the evaluations and outcomes of centre activities carefully, formal monitoring of staff practice has not always been sufficiently detailed and regular. As a consequence, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of the work of the team, including in case files.
- Intervention and prevention work has improved recently and is good. Much attention has been given to developing practitioners' skills in the completion of Common Assessment Framework records with better action planning and target setting for parents. Whenever the centre becomes aware that children are looked after, in need or subject to a child protection plan, staff keep a close focus upon the needs of the family and will challenge other services where the children's centres believe that review is needed.
- Safeguarding procedures are clear, and staff expertise is supported well through access to a range of safeguarding training as well as team reviews and discussions. Supervision for family support workers enhances the work of staff in supporting families.
- Centre priorities are appropriate because data, staff knowledge of the local area, the knowledge of partners and the annual discussion with the local authority are used well in planning. The local authority monitors services adequately and has good networks of support in place to link the centre group to other children's centres in Bassetlaw. Clear new commissioning arrangements are in place, but it is too soon to judge the impact of these.
- The role of the local advisory group to support and challenge the centres has varied but leaders have taken effective steps to enhance the engagement and attendance of members at meetings, including greater discussion about data and performance. As a result, members have a good understanding of the work of the centres, and they are asking leaders more challenging questions about outcomes for families. Members are influencing the decisions made by centre leaders.
- Both centres share their buildings with other organisations and this arrangement is helping to give good value for the money spent on centre services. Staff expertise is deployed well and resources are generally sufficient, although recent reductions in the budgets of partner organisations continue to present challenges, such as in the maintenance of employment services for local people.
- Led calmly and persistently by the centre coordinator, staff know that their key challenge is to build upon the numbers of families registering and using the centres to achieve further improvements in child and family outcomes. Both centre teams are already focussing their work upon where the needs of children and families are greatest, and as a result, services are gradually improving.

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	80665
Local authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	432816
Managed by	Nottinghamshire Children and Families Partnership on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,021
Centre leader	Pip Beasant
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected as a group
Telephone number	01909 731269
Email address	pbeasant@nnc.ac.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- [21394] [Harworth and Bircotes Children's Centre]
- [23492] [West Bassetlaw Children's Centre]

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