

Bath East Group

150 Frome Road, Odd Down, Bath, BA2 5RE

Inspection date 19–20 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Most families in target groups within the area are registered with the centres and a large majority of targeted families have sustained contact. Nevertheless, the Bath East Group is well-aware that the proportion of these families and the amount of sustained engagement with them need to be further increased.
- Paper-based supervisory and case files are not of a high quality. Modern technology is not used frequently enough to maximise resources or to provide the best value for money. Staff spend far too much time recording on paper. This causes duplication of records, increases the possibility of errors when transferring to electronic formats, and reduces the speed that information can be shared within the group and its partners.
- Evaluation and monitoring of commissioned and voluntary services groups who use the Bath East Group's facilities show positive outcomes for families over time. However, the centre leaders do not have a good enough understanding about the progress that families make over each session. Also, leaders of these groups sometimes forget to apply the Bath East Group policies and procedures in their daily practice.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- The Bath East Group is successfully reaching and engaging families who have not previously used children's centre services. Combined training and dovetailed partnership work, particularly with health services, engage parents very effectively. This combination reduces the risk of children's learning delay and helps to keep families safe and protected. Perceptive intervention and additional support are provided by skilled children's centre and outreach staff.
- The centres are at the heart of their local community. Parents indicated their respect and appreciation for the work that the East Bath Group does. They were adamant about the 'life-changing' and 'life-supporting' difference that staff and the services provided have made. Parents reported improvements in their parenting skills.
- Leaders are fully focused on meeting the needs of target groups within the community. They use all of the information available to them, and target resources where they are most needed. Family needs are accurately assessed. Children's readiness for school is supported effectively.

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 Parkside Children's Centre, St Martin's Garden Children's Centre and Weston Children's Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the Service Manager, the centre coordinators and the Chair of the Advisory Board. They met with representatives from the local authority, including the leaders for children's centres, commissioning, health commissioning, and the clinical leaders for health visiting. Conversations were held with other staff that work in the centres, including nursery staff, outreach workers, senior early years practitioners, a social worker, a qualified teacher, the volunteer coordinator, early years consultants, early years advisory teachers and the special educational needs coordinator. The inspectors also met with representatives from community learning, St Loyes, the citizen advice bureau, health promotion services, and the family information outreach service. There were discussions with parents, childminders and volunteers at different times during the inspection.

The inspectors visited the three centres as well as the satellite and outreach services. The inspectors observed the work of staff in the centres, plus a volunteer-led group.

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

Inspection team

Steffi Penny	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Joy Law	Her Majesty's Inspector
Patricia Collis	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Bath East Group is a cluster of three children's centres, with a satellite site at Foxhill Community Centre and an outreach venue at Snowhill. The group has been established since 2010 and the centres are phase one, two and three. The group delivers services for children and families in three locality areas: St Martin's Garden Children's Centre, covering Odd Down and Foxhill wards; Parkside Children's Centre, covering central Bath and Abbey ward; and Weston Children's Centre, which covers the north side of Bath. Services are shared across all of the children's centres. The centres are open five days each week, along with some evenings and weekends. A primary school is situated on the same site as the St Martin's Garden Children's Centre. This and the co-located nursery are inspected separately; their reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The local authority manages all of the centres in the group. There is a single advisory board, comprising key partners, which assists in the governance of the group. The advisory board works to a term of reference and the chair is selected by its members annually. The Service Manager is responsible for the Bath East Group and the Keynsham and Chew Valley Children's Centre's Group. The centre coordinators manage the daily running of each centre.

There are approximately 3,237 children under five years of age living in the Bath East Area. The children's attainment on entry to early years provision varies across the group. Most of the families in the reach area are of White British heritage, with a varied ethnic community whose outcomes are broadly equal to the general population, except for a specific group of Bengali families who are at risk of poor outcomes. Levels of deprivation vary from some of the most affluent families in the country to some of the poorest families. There are very specific target areas with a fairly high need. Around 670 children living in the locality area are from workless households and there are specific small areas where obesity and accident levels are high and the skills levels of adults poor.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of vulnerable families reached and the amount of continued involvement that targeted families have with the Bath East Group.
- Ensure that there is a consistent application of the policies and procedures for safeguarding, equalities and referral by all those who use the facilities provided by the Bath East Group.
- Improve the centre leaders' knowledge and accuracy of recording about the progress families make by formalising the monitoring and evaluation of all those who use children's centre facilities.
- Improve the recording in staff supervision files and case files to the highest quality by ensuring that:
 - they only contain relevant information
 - they have clear action planning with timescales
 - staff supervision files have up-to-date training records that match those held centrally
 - that case files have an independent evaluation and sign off
 - that case files mirror those of social services to enable ease of information sharing
 - if there is more than one child in a family, that any separate case files can also be read together.
- Significantly increase the value for money, speed and quality of information that is shared within the Bath East Group, local authority and partnerships by:
 - improving the access, especially for staff when they are not working at a designated children's centre office, or 'in-the-field', to modern communication technology.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The access to early childhood services by families, including those expecting children and those in target groups, is good. Nevertheless, the group is aware that it needs to continue to reach more of the targeted families within the area. It has been successful in establishing and maintaining contact with families of Bengali heritage.
- There are effective strategies to encourage families to participate in relevant activities to support their needs. A wide range of universal and targeted activities are available for families who are supported successfully to attend. Highly effective outreach working enables families that are not ready, or who are unable, to access the centres activities, providing good individualised programmes for families.
- Partnership working is a strength. Overall, it enables early and timely identification of families who need support, but this is not always the case when courses are run by voluntary groups. Highly focused allocation meetings and the co-location of health teams within children's centres facilitate detailed multi-agency identification of family needs. This results in sharply directed support for those identified as most in need.
- The monitoring of partners and the centrally commissioned work with families are, in the main, informal. Information from these partners about families following courses is not shared speedily or frequently enough with the group in order that the centre staff can record successes accurately.
- Settings and childminders taking two-year-old funded children have accessed training on using new assessment and tracking systems. The summaries of learning are written in simple language with a common format being used across settings and schools. The 'Cohort Overview', that is used to track the development of children, clearly shows the impact of what each setting provides. As a consequence, the local authority has a clear picture of all children's progress and target groups. This gives it and the group a good awareness of emerging needs, and therefore they know what is needed, along with when and where to provide intervention and support.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Partnership working between professional agencies, private, voluntary and independent early years providers, childminders and schools, is a strength. This helps children's centre staff identify children's difficulties early in knowing when and how to involve other specialist services. Consequently, outcomes for some of the most vulnerable families are improving and are sustained.
- Information is shared effectively through partnership working and helps children's smooth transitions on to school. Almost all families (98%) eligible for free funding for three- and four-years-old children take up the offer. Over 90% of eligible two-year-olds take up entitlement to free early education.
- There is a good range of programmes for parents to support their child's development, well-being and learning in the early years. For example, a key focus of the Flying Start Plus Programme is to support children's transition into funded day care and keeping parents engaged.
- Parents identified as needing to improve and extend their parenting skills are supported in accessing appropriate programmes. As a result, parents develop confidence in themselves and ably support their children's learning. Parents also acquire a better understanding of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding.
- Children's centre staff and outreach workers are good role models for parents within sessions and through the activities they plan and deliver. The majority of activities are planned so they can be replicated easily and in a cost effective way at home. Analysis through the 'Cohort Overview' means that staff effectively plan sessions that meet the needs of vulnerable children. Good consideration is given when planning sessions for parents and children to ensure continuity, maximising and consolidating learning. Subsequently, health and well-being outcomes are

improving for families.

- The centres are the hub for the community. Peer support is encouraged and a small proportion of parents engage in volunteering activities. The Bath East Group is very supportive of the work of the volunteers, particularly regarding the use of the provision and resources. Hence, the Movers and Shakers sessions are well attended and enjoyed by children and parents.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- There are appropriate arrangements, policies, and procedures in place to help keep children and vulnerable adults safe and protected. There are some good examples of the promotion of equalities; for example, the inclusion of singing nursery rhymes in different languages, and the welcome and provision for those in same sex relationships. However, not all of those who lead activities using the children's centre facilities pay good enough attention to all the group's policies in practice. Sometimes they do not sufficiently risk assess the environment before and during each session they are leading, or ensure that families are referred to centre staff.
- Safeguarding is only adequate overall. This is because the paper-based case files are not well documented or maintained to the highest standard. The auditing of them is not strongly robust. Also, the files do not follow a consistent format or align with those of social care; this and their paper format hinder the accuracy and speed of sharing information.
- The Bath East Group provides particularly good care, guidance and support for families who are referred to the centres. The centres act as the nucleus for work with other organisations to assess the needs of the most vulnerable children. Excellent liaison with health and children's social work colleagues reduces the harm to children, including those subject to child protection plans, looked after children and those who are most in need. Good use is made of the Common Assessment Framework in order to reduce harm and ensure that families have appropriate access to a range of services.
- The recruitment and vetting of staff follow government guidelines. Training for staff is completed with lead partners and is at the appropriate level for their role. The paper copies of staff files lack a common format, often contain information that is not needed, with training records not as up to date as those held on central electronic systems. This hinders supervisory staff having a holistic view of the staff who report to them.
- The local authority leader, advisory board, and Service Manager meet their legal duties. Financial management is secure and the resources available are appropriately deployed and utilised. Leaders are well aware of the strengths and areas for development within the group and work very creatively to improve outcomes for families. They learn from the mistakes of others in the past and are proactive at seeking and developing provision from examples of best practice.
- Parents and partners are fully involved with governance of the Bath East Group. They have representatives on the advisory board and regularly challenge the work of the group.
- Those parents, carers and childminders who spoke with inspectors said they feel listened to, that changes are quickly made based on their views and that they are kept well informed. They also felt that the work done by the group has been a lifeline, particularly at times of their greatest need.

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.

Select details

Unique reference number	80400
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	424723
Managed by	Bath and North East Somerset

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3,240
Centre leader	Julia Finney
Telephone number	01225 396 662
Email address	julia_finney@bathnes.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- Parkside Children's Centre
- St Martin's Garden Children's Centre
- Weston Children's Centre

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