

The Bridge Children's Centre

Hayesdown First School, Wyville Road, Frome BA11 2BN

Inspection dates 29–30 January 2014

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 centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Not enough families from the centre's reach area take up the services offered. While the centre engages with many families most in need, staff do not have a clear picture of whether or not they are reaching all groups of families. This is because the information and data that leaders receive are not always accurate.
- Staff are not tracking the progress of families rigorously enough to be able to evaluate precisely if the work they are doing is making a difference to the lives of all families. There is limited information about the progress adults make in volunteering, training opportunities and employment.
- Leaders, managers and the advisory board do not monitor the quality of the centre's work sharply enough because information, from the local authority, is not always presented clearly and concisely so that centre leaders know precisely where they need to focus their efforts in improving the numbers of families accessing services.
- Written evaluations of the centre's performance are too descriptive and not underpinned by clear evidence of what is working well and what needs to be done. Action plans lack the key steps to success at timely intervals, so that the advisory board and partners know exactly what needs to be achieved and by when.

This children's centre has the following strengths:

- Significantly more families than previously seen are now registered with the centre. The centre is successfully engaging with an increasing number of families who most need help and support. Families who access services trust staff, feel welcomed and well supported, and say that the 'centre is an important part of their lives'.
- A high proportion of families take up funded places in early education in local settings. Children are well prepared for school. The centre's very strong partnerships with schools support the good outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Families receive good care, guidance and support. In times of crisis they feel confident to turn to the centre for help and advice. Strong relationships with families underpin this, including the support given to teenage parents. Very effective support is given to families who may feel isolated or at risk of developing mental health problems.

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 the inspection of The Key Centre for Children and the Community.

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

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, managers in the local authority and centre staff. They met health, education and social care partners, parents, volunteers and representatives of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited services run at The Bridge Children's Centre main site and the Key Centre for Children and the Community.

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

Inspection team

Jane Neech	Her Majesty's Inspector Lead inspector
Jane Burchall	Her Majesty's Inspector
Patricia Collis	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The Bridge Children's Centre opened in 2010 and is a phase two children's centre located in the market town of Frome, Somerset. The centre works in collaboration with The Key Centre for Children and the Community, and is situated a short distance away, also in Frome. The Bridge Children's Centre is managed directly by the local authority and has its own advisory board, which is shared with The Key Centre for Children and the Community. Both centres are part of the group of East Mendip Children's Centres, which includes two other centres. The local authority is the early stages of consulting on a new model of children's centre delivery.

The purpose-built children's centre building is on the site of Hayesdown First School (URN 123676) and includes a landscaped garden, covered buggy parking area and gently sloping ramp to the main entrance. The centre is led by the Lead Centre Officer who has a combined manager role. The school is subject to separate inspection arrangements and its report can be found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>.

The centre offers a range of activities and services to meet its core purpose, including family support, outreach work, stay and play groups, breastfeeding support, child health clinics, outdoor activities, parents' support groups and parenting programmes, particularly for young mothers. A range of partners provide specialist advice, guidance or services to further support the work of the centre. These partners include community learning providers and Jobcentre Plus.

There are a total of 984 children under five living in the area served by the centre. Families are mainly White British with a small number of families from minority ethnic groups. Some families identified across the reach area are from workless households, are lone parents or have disabled children. There are also a number of teenage parents. The take-up of housing is a mixture of rented and owner occupied housing. The area contains pockets of deprivation alongside areas which are more affluent.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase participation rates by working with the local authority and partners to improve the accuracy of data and information, so that the centre is better able to identify how effectively it is engaging with all of the families who most need help and support.
- Carefully check and evaluate the difference the centre is making to:
 - adults' learning and their pathways to further training and work
 - the lives of families, particularly those most in need
- Strengthen leadership, governance and management by:
 - judging and recording more rigorously how well the centre is doing
 - ensuring that the targets set are challenging, clearly identify what is to be achieved, by when and by whom, and are sharply focused on the priorities for the centre

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The overall registration and access rates of families who use services at The Bridge Children's Centre is mixed. While the large majority of families living in the communities served by the centre are registered, only a minority of families from some groups, such as lone parents, minority ethnic groups and families from workless households, engage with services. However, a high number of teenage parents enjoy services designed specifically for them, as do disabled children.
- Work to engage with families who do not use the centre services has not improved quickly

enough. Information on the different groups of families in the centre's reach area is not always accurate, and often slow in being produced by the local authority. This makes the task for the centre leaders, in improving the total number of families who engage with the services and activities, difficult.

- Staff work with a range of professionals to identify families who may benefit from early help, including those expecting children, young mothers, and families with disabled children and those with special educational needs. They know that there has been an increase in the number of teenage mothers, and the work of the family support team ensures that young parents receive high quality support. In this way the centre promotes equal opportunity for some families with the greatest needs, by offering relevant services and activities.
- Parents are aware of how the services offered at The Key Centre for Children and the Community as well as at The Bridge Children's Centre can benefit them. Family support workers signpost families to the relevant activities. This work is slowly beginning to increase the number of all target groups engaging with all the services offered.
- Most children in the area start early years provision with skills broadly in line with those expected for their age, although communication and language skills are often weaker.
- The take-up of funded early years education for two-, three- and four-year-olds across the locality is strong. The close working relationships between health professionals, early years settings and centre staff ensure that families needing additional support receive quick access to early practical help and guidance. It is this early identification and follow-up actions that contribute to the closing of the achievement gap as children learn and develop.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre's monitoring of how well families are doing is not fully established. This means that the progress of all families, including adults who volunteer, or take up training or opportunities for returning to work, is not checked and evaluated as well as it could be.
- The provision for parents to gain qualifications is mixed. Some parents gain qualifications in literacy and numeracy over time. A few go on to study for qualifications in childcare, leading to employment. However, the centre does not yet monitor the progress of parents who are intent on a new career or returning to work.
- Parents, especially those not in employment, appreciate the short courses offered by community learning partners, such as information about family management, form filling, housing and financial advice. Staff know, through the day-to-day work they do with families, how this support helps families develop their confidence. These courses, and the crèche facilities provided, promote equality of opportunity, for those families who attend.
- The shared partnerships by the two centres with a range of other professionals, such as health and social services, promote an effective, integrated approach to meeting the needs of individual families and children, including the early identification and support for disabled children and those with special educational needs. In this way children are more ready for school, inequalities are reducing and gaps in achievement are narrowing well.
- Parents say they are highly satisfied with the quality of services available to them and value the positive relationships they have with centre staff. Parents who become volunteers at the centre say that they welcome the opportunity, as it gives them responsibility and helps them to develop their confidence, especially in their reading, writing and speaking skills.
- Children make good progress from their starting points. Stay and play activities are planned with children's communication skills and school readiness in mind. The majority of children reach a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, because activities offered at the centre stimulate children's curiosity and develop adults' parenting skills well.
- The centre uses information available to it to identify where children may benefit from extra support. Support for those on child protection plans, children in need and those supported through the Common Assessment Framework is good and caters for a wide range of needs. In this way the centre's care, guidance and support effectively help families.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The way leaders and managers check the impact that services have on the lives of families is not sharp enough. Consequently, leaders do not have a full picture of the quality of services and the difference they make. Not all information and data are accurate enough to ensure that the centre leaders and staff know precisely that they are reaching all families who would benefit from services.
- The local authority monitors the effectiveness of the children's centre's work through an annual review, where priorities and areas for improvement are identified. Some targets for improvement are measurable, such as improving the number of registrations at the centre from families in the area. However, it is not always clear to staff and partners when targets are to be achieved and by whom.
- The centre receives too much statistical information from the local authority, which is not always helpful to centre leaders in either seeing the 'big picture' or drilling down to the essential information required. This is because information provided is either too complex or not always accurate. Written self-evaluation records by the centre are not always helpful in evaluating what is working well and what not so well, because records are too descriptive and not based on accurate data or examples of impact.
- The partnership board includes a good range of expertise and offers some challenge to the centre's work. Local school leaders on the partnership board are a very effective link between the work of the centre and how well children are prepared for school. The impact of this partnership can be seen in children's good achievement in their first year at school.
- Parents' views are listened to by centre leaders. The views of families are captured through feedback and evaluations, including feedback about individual sessions.
- Suitable policies and procedures strengthen the clear safeguarding arrangements. Staff benefit from training according to their role and have a good understanding of what to do, should they have a concern about a child or another member of staff.
- Appropriate recruitment procedures ensure the suitability of staff appointed. Clear records identify previous employment and the take up of references. Staff receive regular supervision, which guides them in their work with families, including the completion of Common Assessment Framework assessments for children subject to a child protection plan, children in need and those who are looked after.

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.

Centre details

Unique reference number	23159
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	430171
Managed by	The Advisory Board on behalf of Somerset County Council

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	964
Centre leader	Ciaron Johnson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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