

New Forest West Children's Centre Group

The Phoenix, Culver Road, New Milton, BH25 6SY

Inspection dates	1–2 July 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected as a group

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not applicable	
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 children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The group is not certain it is reaching enough priority families. This is because leaders do not have an accurate baseline identifying the number of priority families who live in the area. This makes it difficult for them to measure whether enough priority families are benefiting from what is on offer.
- The assessment of the needs of families who receive one-to-one support and the evaluation of the impact of the intervention recorded in case files are inconsistent and do not always reflect the good quality of the centre's work. In some cases the 'Family outcome star' tool is used effectively to show how specific work with a family has made a difference to their child's life but not always.
- The monitoring of case files by centre leaders is inconsistent. It is not always clear how decisions have been made in respect of escalating or downgrading the level of support being provided.
- Arrangements for measuring how key areas of the group's work are helping children and families to make changes in their lives are developing. For example, a good range of courses is provided for adults, including literacy and numeracy, but it is not clear what difference these make over time, especially to priority families.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Leaders, staff and the partnership boards who provide governance have high aspirations for the centre group which is improving due to the actions they take. Leaders are supporting staff with the implementation of new systems to assess, monitor and measure the impact of their work.
- There is a good system in place between children's social care and the group to ensure that children subject to a child protection plan are known and where appropriate are benefiting from what the centres have to offer.
- Parents value a well-planned programme that raises their awareness of domestic abuse. They are supported well in making life-changing decisions that keep them and their families safe. One parent said, 'It has changed my life.'
- Local support for early years settings is robust and tackles underperformance, including working with those childminders whose effectiveness is not yet good.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Leaders, governors and managers should ensure that systems to monitor and evaluate the difference the group is making to the lives of children and families, especially those who are a priority, are embedded and used effectively, by:
 - identifying the number of priority families in the area to set a baseline for measuring more precisely how many access services
 - increasing access of the priority families by providing relevant services
 - recording and monitoring how many have engaged in services
 - tracking the progress of children and families to see how their circumstances improve following their use of the centres' services.
- Ensure that all of the group's work is focused on children's needs and on improving outcomes, especially for the most vulnerable, with case files consistently showing that managers' decisions reflect this.

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.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives from the commissioned provider, Action for Children, senior leaders from the local authority, health partners, adult education and Jobcentre Plus partners. They also met with early years partners, social care partners, parents and children, family outreach workers, other centre staff, volunteers and representatives from the three partnership boards.

The inspectors visited a range of services offered at the centres and at venues located in the community, including the children's centre mobile bus. They observed the centres' work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Wendy Ratcliff, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Deborah Barazetti-Scott	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jameel Hassan	Additional Inspector
Penny Mathers	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

New Forest West is a group of children's centres located in the New Forest in Hampshire, run by the charity, Action for Children, on behalf of the local authority. It is one of 13 groups run by Action for Children in Hampshire. The group is made up of three centres: Phoenix Children's Centre, The Bridges and Pathways Children's Centre, and All Seasons and Seedlings Children's Centre. There is a mobile children's centre bus which serves the more rural parts of the community. Action for Children has been responsible for running the group since April 2012. The leadership team consists of the children's services manager, the lead practitioner, a full-time centre coordinator and two part-time acting centre coordinators. There are three partnership boards, comprising key partners and parent representatives, which assist in the governance of the group.

The group offers a range of services for families and children under five years, including family support, health services, adult learning, parenting courses and a range of activity sessions. Sessions run from each of the centres, in community venues and from the children's centre bus.

The group serves a large geographical patch in a predominantly rural area. Public transport is poor and considered expensive. The area is mixed in terms of deprivation and includes New Milton and Pennington. These two areas have the highest level of child poverty within Hampshire. There is a mix of housing across the area with concentrated areas of social housing. There are Traveller communities, including settled communities, in the area. There are 4,331 children under five years living in the area. Most children are from White British backgrounds. Children's skills, knowledge and ability on entry to early education vary but generally are at the levels expected for their age.

Phoenix, the hub centre for the children's centre group, is based in a youth centre building in New Milton. New Milton is the highest area of deprivation in the locality. The centre is in walking distance of the town centre.

All Seasons and Seedlings is a purpose-built children's centre in the grounds of Pennington Junior School and next to Pennington Primary School. Pennington is the second highest area of deprivation in the locality.

The Bridges and Pathways Children's Centre covers a mainly rural location, which includes the small market towns of Ringwood and Fordingbridge. The Bridges is located in a modular building on the same site as Fordingbridge Infant and Junior Schools. Pathways operates from a small space in Ringwood Library.

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Priority families include: those who experience domestic abuse, families who have low or no qualifications, families for whom parenting is a challenge and families from Traveller, Romany and Gypsy communities (including settled Travellers).

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The group has used the full range of information available to look closely at the priority needs of children and families in the area to more precisely identify those who most need its support. Checks on the attendance of these families at the centres is underway but currently they do not provide an accurate picture. As a result, leaders and partnership boards do not know if enough families in greatest need are accessing services.
- At 72%, the large majority of children under five years are registered with the group and a majority have been seen at one of the centres in the last year. Leaders know the main trends of the area and are using this information to refine the services being offered so as to reach more families identified as in greatest need, including those who might not otherwise engage. As a result, an increasing number of families who experience domestic abuse and families from the Traveller community are accessing what is on offer.
- Almost all eligible three- and four-year-olds living in the most deprived areas of New Milton and Pennington access funded education places. At 74%, the large majority of children take up their entitlement to two-year-old funding at a good or better quality early years setting. The early years team monitors the take-up of places, which ensures that those who are considered the most vulnerable are accessing their entitlement.
- Assessment for individual families who require specific help is used sufficiently well to identify need and plan for individual family support. The 'Family outcome star' is being implemented by staff as an assessment and recording tool in order to ensure the needs of the child have been identified and whether support has had a positive impact.
- A good range of adult learning programmes is available that gives good routes for further education and employment but the numbers of families from priority groups, such as adults with low or no qualifications who benefit from these, are not consistently monitored. However, around 61% of families identified as in greatest need who are registered have accessed a parenting course in the last 12 months.
- Staff work productively with a range of professionals and organisations, such as health visitors, social care professionals and Homestart volunteers, to prioritise families most in need of support, including expectant parents. They work closely with partners to share appropriate information to support families identified as needing specific help, particularly to reduce the risk of harm to children.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Arrangements for tracking, evaluation and analysis of the outcomes of adult learning are developing. While there are some systems in place it is not easy for leaders to see the impact services are having in the long term on the lives of priority families.
- There are strong partnerships with health and health outcomes are generally better than found across Hampshire. There is good attendance at post-natal groups. Parents report increased mental well-being, with opportunities for social networking reducing the risk of isolation and improved confidence in their parenting skills resulting in 'happy children'.
- Sessions, such as 'PEEP', are helping parents to understand the learning needs of their child in order to help prepare them for the next stage in their learning. However, session planning does not always reflect a child's needs or interests and there is limited tracking from their starting points to show the progress they make. Play workers have recently begun to track the progress of a small group of children who attend the crèche while their parents attend a parenting course, but this is in its early stages.
- In 2013, 58% of children living in the reach area achieved good levels of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, which are above county and national averages. Children who are eligible for free schools meals did less well. The early years team looks carefully at these results and trends overtime to effectively adapt support and training for early years settings and schools to

ensure that weaker areas, such as mathematics and communication, are improved and any inequalities reduced. For example, in 2013, 100% of Irish Travellers achieved a good level of development.

- Staff provide effective one-to-one support for families who are identified as needing the most help. Staff gain parents' trust, including those who find parenting a challenge, through the specific courses to help them and by personalised activities in the home. This has resulted in families gaining confidence to attend universal activities and improve their childrens' behaviour.
- For some children, the risk of harm has been reduced because of more positive parenting and the need for social care involvement decreased or removed. However, case file recording is not always child focused or clearly shows how decisions have been made that determine the level of support being given, for example when needs are either downgraded or escalated.
- Staff are highly skilled at delivering the 'Freedom programme', which provides a wide range of positive outcomes for very vulnerable families, particularly those experiencing domestic abuse. Parents shared their experiences with inspectors through written statements and discussion. The impact of the programme, along with the care, guidance and support from staff, results in families' improved safety and well-being.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The local authority works well with centre leaders to ensure the right priorities are set to help the group improve further. For example, towards the end of 2013, they looked closely at all the information available to them to ensure that the group was focusing its work more precisely on the needs of families in the area. This resulted in the identification of specific priority groups. Leaders rightly recognise that more needs to be done to measure and monitor what proportion of priority families use the centres.
- Leaders, including the partnership boards, are aware that the impact of the centres' work is not always clear. Leaders are implementing improved systems to assess, plan and monitor the effectiveness of the group's work, which include embedding a tracking system to demonstrate the progress made by families who receive one-to-one support and those who access education, training and employment support.
- The monitoring of case files by centre leaders is not sharp enough. Some files show a lack of rationale for the decisions made by managers, including the intended purpose of support and reasons for escalating concerns to social care. Leaders have set targets to improve the monitoring of case files as well as introducing the 'Family star outcome' tool to help staff continually focus on the outcomes of the child.
- The safety and welfare of children and families underpins the group's work and staff have a secure understanding of how to protect children. All looked after children and children who are subject to a child protection plan are known because staff have effective relationships with health and social care professionals. They work closely together to ensure families get the support they need.
- Leaders are unclear why there seems to be a reducing number of Common Assessments being undertaken across the area and are proactively exploring the reason for this. They are working closely with key partners in developing the new integrated Early Help offer across the locality.
- Overall resources, including staff deployment, are used appropriately. All of the centres in the group are safe and welcoming and the programme of activities is planned to match the needs of families in the area. The mobile children's centre bus is an excellent resource to engage families in the rural parts of the area, but currently due to the availability of a driver it is only used two mornings a week.
- Staff use creative ideas to involve parents and children in services and activity sessions and ask their views about what to offer in the future. Social media is used well and themed events are successful in publicising the centres' work. For example, the 'virtual' parent forum is working well and enabling families to contribute their views, ideas and suggestions.

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 well-being 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	80365
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	442715
Managed by	Action for Children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	4,331
Centre leader	Tina Monaghan
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected as a group
Telephone number	01425 612113
Email address	Tina.monaghan@actionforchildren.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 23236 The Phoenix Children's Centre
- 23161 The Bridges and Pathways Children's Centre
- 20071 All Seasons and Seedlings Children's Centre

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