

Nottinghamshire – The Arnold Group of Children Centres

Home Close, Bestwood Lodge Drive, Arnold, NG5 8NE

Inspection dates	24–25 September 2014
Previous inspection date	Not applicable

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Good	2
		Not applicable	
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		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a good centre.

- Leaders and managers have successfully improved the centres' impact on the identified priority families, most of whom are registered with the group. The number of priority families meaningfully engaged with services is increasing rapidly.
- Most children take up their funded nursery education places, including the large majority of eligible two-year-olds, almost all of whom are in settings judged to be good or better.
- The effective volunteering programme enables the centres to deliver open-access activities, which helps volunteers develop the skills and confidence to support their journey into paid work.
- Children access very good speech and language provision, underpinned by effective systems to track their progress and ensure support remains tailored to their needs.
- Case files are well-written, take families' views into account and show clear evidence of management oversight of decision-making and of the progress made by families.
- Parents are genuinely involved in making decisions about the development of services.
- The coordinator has forged an effective, highly enthusiastic team committed to improving the life chances of the families they work with. Any underperformance is tackled swiftly.

It is not outstanding because:

- Although the local authority generally challenges the group of centres well, in the last year it did not evaluate the group's work accurately, or agree clearly understood, manageable targets.
- Leaders do not know what difference they are making to children's readiness for school.
- Not enough families overall are engaged with services.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve governance, leadership and management by:
 - improving the accuracy with which the local authority evaluates the effectiveness of the group’s work
 - working with the coordinator to agree more manageable improvement targets to ensure that development planning incorporates both the local authority targets and locally agreed targets.

- Improve the overall tracking of children’s achievement and progress, in order to better demonstrate the contribution the centre group is making to both the children’s levels on entry to school-based provision, and to their Early Years Foundation Stage Profile outcomes.

- Continue to increase the numbers of families in the overall community who are registered and actively engaged with all three centres.

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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre group coordinator, representatives of the local authority and the Nottinghamshire Children and Family Partnership, representatives of the Local Advisory Group, parents, staff and partner agencies.

The inspection covered the following centres: Arnbrook, Arnold and Killisick and inspectors visited all three centres and observed activities delivered on the centre sites and in the community.

They observed the centre’s work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including records of consultation with parents using the centres.

Inspection team

Linda McLarty, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Helen Cawston

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Michael Miller

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Nottinghamshire - Arnold Group of Children's Centres comprises Arnbrook, Arnold and Killisick centres. The centres share a joint Local Advisory Group and are led by a single coordinator. Governance is provided by the local authority, and since June 2013 this has been delegated to the Nottinghamshire Children and Families Partnership (NCFP). The main core staff team are employed by Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust.

The Arnold Group works together to deliver targeted services and family support outreach work. The Arnold centre operates as a delivery point for services from within Arnold library, organised and administered from the Arnbrook centre, which is the main centre in the group. Services delivered include family support, a range of early years care and education sessions, speech and language support, infant massage, health checks, baby clinics and 'Baby Grows' group, adult learning sessions and the 'Parent Child Game' and 'Theraplay' sessions. Some activities, such as a domestic violence programme, are delivered in partnership with other agencies.

Arnbrook Children's Centre is co-located with Arnbrook Primary School. The school was not part of this inspection and its report is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Killisick Children's Centre leases rooms from the local community centre.

There are 2233 children aged from birth to four years living in the reach areas of the three centres. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to school-based, early years provision are below those usually seen in children of their age.

The main target groups for the centre group are identified as families of minority ethnic backgrounds, with a focus on the Polish community, pregnant teenagers and young parents, disabled children, and children living in households which have experienced domestic abuse.

The Arnold and Killisick centres serve communities ranked within the top 70% of deprivation nationally. The Arnbrook centre serves a community ranked within the top 30% of deprivation. Across the group, the centres serve areas in which 18% of the birth to four-year-old population are of minority ethnic backgrounds, with 27% of these families having Eastern European heritage.

Unemployment across the reach areas varies. Across the group there are approximately 24% of families with children under five years of age who are in receipt of benefits.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families **Good**

- Parents report feeling 'welcomed and relaxed at the centres' and the centre group has significantly increased registration and engagement levels over the last few years, especially of the target groups.

- Good information sharing with midwives and health visitors enable staff to contact families from pregnancy onwards. As a result the centres have registered most of their priority families and almost the large majority are involved with centre services.
- Staff effectively focus their outreach work on those families who are less likely to attend the centres, on priority families and on those living in areas with fewer services. Consequently the Polish community, pregnant teenagers and young parents, families with disabled children, and children living in households experiencing domestic abuse are accessing the services well.
- Leaders and those with governance responsibilities monitor registration and participation very closely and have set an ongoing target to improve access to services further. They recognise that not enough of the overall population are registered and engaged with centre group services.
- Most three and four-year-old children, and the large majority of eligible two-year-olds, take up their entitlement to free nursery education and care. The progress of the very few children placed in settings not yet judged be good is monitored very closely by the Early Years Support Teacher.
- The two-year-old progress check is used well to ensure that almost all children identified as needing early intervention through this process receive help to access the support they need.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The group provides a wide range of activities to support children's learning and development, and to help parents understand how to support their children's learning.
- Staff work hard to counter the perceived stigma attached to children's centres in their area by providing a good blend of universal and targeted services for both children and adults. All proposed activities are assessed against the overall targets and the identified needs in the areas to make sure provision can be justified in terms of need.
- Across schools in all three centres' reach areas, more children reach a good level of development than is seen nationally, and this is improving year-on-year. However, leaders have set an ongoing target to improve the tracking of children because tracking in general is not robust enough and does not show the difference that services are making to either children's levels on entry to school-based provision, or to their Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores.
- The centre is effectively promoting healthy lifestyles and more children enter Reception Year at a healthy weight than is the case nationally. The group has set itself an ongoing improvement target to increase the numbers of mothers who continue to breastfeed at six-to-eight weeks.
- Most of the adults considered to need support to access learning or training and gain qualifications are encouraged to complete courses which enhance their employability.

- Some parents learn to improve their parenting skills through accredited programmes, and say that this improves their well-being overall, and helps them to keep their families safe and healthy. They participate in assessment and track their own progress in 'star' diagrams against a number of emotional, social and skill indicators, which roots their increasing self-esteem securely in genuine and measurable achievements.
- Volunteers are trained well, and gain useful opportunities to put their new knowledge and skills into practice. They gain confidence and the skills and attitudes necessary for paid work, while at the same time releasing the staff team to deliver a wider range of targeted services. Volunteers are regularly monitored to check the quality and impact of their work, which is deemed invaluable and regularly celebrated.
- Care, guidance and support is very strong, and arises from a whole-team commitment to breakdown barriers to accessing services, in order to increase equality of opportunity, especially for families from priority groups, and those who are less likely to access services. Parents report excellent relationships, strong encouragement and significant support from the staff team.
- Case files show that prompt and well-focussed outreach work is helping some highly vulnerable families to make progress in improving their lives. Records are completed well, are up to date and show close management oversight. Staff are confident in raising safeguarding concerns through the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub and work collaboratively with their professional colleagues to reduce the risk of harm to children and vulnerable adults.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Governance and leadership, including that of the Nottinghamshire Children and Family Partnership, is strong and holds the management effectively to account for the quality and impact of the centre group's work. However, the local authority recognises they were too generous in their evaluation of the group in their last annual challenge conversation. They have now put support and moderation arrangements in place help newly appointed staff to monitor children's centres more accurately.
- The group's improvement plan is not explicitly linked to the local authority's wider improvement priorities and the authority has already identified that they could do more to improve target setting. The local authority's willingness to evaluate their governance so honestly indicates a good capacity to support and challenge the coordinator in the future.
- The local advisory group challenges and supports the coordinator well and has very good representation and attendance by a wide range of partners. They regularly hold the group to account for the numbers accessing provision and for the quality and impact of services for target families. They seek, value and act on the views of parents, garnered through the highly influential parent forums and through constant consultation.
- Some supervision and performance management meeting records are variable in terms of the quality and usefulness of developmental feedback logged. However, staff report that

they are line-managed regularly and that performance management is firmly concentrated on their contribution to the centre group's improvement priorities. Staff show a clear and enduring focus on narrowing the gap in long-term outcomes for those at risk of falling behind.

- Very good partnership working helps managers use their resources efficiently to extend their range of high-quality universal and targeted services. This is helping to equalise the life-chances of some highly vulnerable families. For example, staff support families experiencing domestic abuse and violence well, delivering courses in partnership with the local authority and with the Women's Aid Integrated Services.
- Safeguarding the welfare of children and vulnerable adults is strong, with good systems in place to ensure the initial and continual suitability of staff and regular opportunities to update their training. The Common Assessment Framework is used increasingly well to trigger early help, thus often pre-empting the need for higher-level social care involvement. Staff are clear about their responsibilities and have a good awareness of the wider safeguarding agenda, including domestic abuse, female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation.
- There is good risk assessment for vulnerable children including those in the care of the local authority, or subject to a child protection or child in need plan. Referrals for services are discussed every two weeks at a multi-agency Single Point of Access meeting and allocated to staff with the appropriate skills and experience to support the family. Staff are confident to challenge decisions made by their social care colleagues, for example, to remove a child from a child in need plan if they feel the family still needs that level of support.

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.

Group details

Unique reference number	80656
Local authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	447650
Managed by	The Nottinghamshire Children and Families Partnership on behalf of the local authority.

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2232
Centre leader	Kathy Wilkins
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	0115 9165010
Email address	kathy.wilkins@nottshc.nhs.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20112 Arnbrook Children's Centre
- 20113 Arnold Children's Centre
- 21667 Killisick Children's Centre

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