

BRE1 Larchwood Gardens Children's Centre

Larchwood Primary School, Larchwood Gardens, Brentwood, CM15 9NG

Inspection dates	6–7 November 2014
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Not applicable	3
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 all priority groups use the centre's services until their needs are met.
- Leaders, managers and those responsible for governance play an active role in helping the centre to improve. However, improvement planning lacks precision and monitoring and review of the centre's work are not thorough enough or used sufficiently well to help the centre improve at a rapid pace.
- The actions being taken by centre leaders to increase the proportion of two year-olds taking up their free early education are not yet showing good enough impact.
- Activities to promote adult learning, particularly for families who could benefit the most, are still in the early stages of development.
- Parents are regularly consulted about the centre's work but too few are represented on the advisory board and the parents' forum has lapsed.

It has the following strengths:

- Centre staff provide highly effective support and care to families which they greatly value.
- The centre's volunteering programme is well organised and provides good opportunities for parents to develop their skills and knowledge.
- The centre actively promotes equality. This is particularly evident from its successful work with members of the Traveller community who participate well in activities.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the numbers of families from all priority groups that access and use services so that at least the large majority participate in activities until their needs are met.
- Improve arrangements to monitor and review the centre's performance by:
 - making better use of data and of information about the centre's performance to ensure monitoring and measuring of the impact of the centre's work with all priority groups is accurate and complete
 - ensuring action plans contain sufficient detail to help staff plan activities that meet the needs of each priority group.
- Work with the local authority and families with two year-olds so that most if not all children access their free early years education place.
- Strengthen partnership work with adult learning providers to ensure courses are well planned to meet the needs of parents who could benefit the most from them. In addition ensure that parents receive good quality guidance about learning opportunities.
- Increase the representation of parents on the advisory board and re-establish the parents' forum.

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 three Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with Barnardo's managers and staff, local authority managers, representatives from partner organisations such as health, schools, charities and community organisations. They also met parents, volunteers and advisory board members.

The inspectors visited Cherry Tree and Sunshine centres. They observed the centre's work at Larchwood and observed activities such as 'Messy Play', 'Baby Massage' and an 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' session.

Inspectors also looked at a range of relevant documentation such as action plans and considered parents' views through analysing their evaluations and through interviews.

Inspection team

Priscilla McGuire, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Graham Sims	Additional inspector
Peter Towner	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

This centre is a stand alone centre in Brentwood, Essex that was formed from three other stand alone centres, one of which closed in March 2014. The centre is managed by Barnardo's charity on behalf of the local authority. Governance is supported by an advisory board. Services offered by the centre and its partners include family support, early years activities, adult learning, volunteering opportunities and health clinics. Services are delivered from the centre in Larchwood but also from centres at Cherry Trees and Sunshine. Larchwood Children's Centre shares its site with Larchwood Gardens Primary School which is separately inspected. A report for the school can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

There are currently around 3,795 children under five years of age living in the area. Day to day running of the centre is the responsibility of a team manager who is supported by a Barnardo's children's centre services manager. The centre is part of a sub-cluster and works closely with other children's centres in Billericay.

The area is generally affluent but has pockets of deprivation, one of which is the area immediately surrounding the centre. Most families are of White British heritage but an increasing number of families from Eastern Europe live in the area. There are also three Traveller sites within the centre's catchment area. Unemployment rates are generally low. About 13% of children live in households where workless benefits are claimed. Most children start early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities that are typical for their age.

The centre has identified the following as its priority groups: lone parents, teenage parents, families living in deprived areas, families with children subject to child protection plans or in need, families who speak English as an additional language, mothers with post-natal depression and mothers of children under five whose lives are affected by domestic abuse.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Although the engagement of teenage parents and families with children subject to child protection plans is good, not enough families from all other priority groups use the centre until their needs are met.
- As a result of the diligent work of centre staff, statistics show that over the last two years the proportion of families and those expecting children who use the centre, has improved significantly. The large majority of families are now registered.
- Most three year-old children access free early years education places. However, take up rates for two year-old places are too low. The local authority and the centre has recognised this as an area for improvement and are working together to implement plans to make improvement. However, it is too soon to see the impact of their actions.
- To help parents overcome barriers such as low levels of confidence or poor mental health that prevent them from accessing services at the centre, staff work very effectively with families in their own homes. They also provide services in different venues around the area such as the Cherry Trees and Sunshine centres.
- Through effective partnership work with health and education partners particularly, the centre

responds well to children's and families' needs. For example, in response to the significantly higher than average rate of multiple births in the area, the centre with help from health professionals has set up a 'Twins group'. The group provides good support to parents of twins.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The quality and impact of services requires improvement. This is because although the quality of services provided is good, not enough families from priority groups, benefit from them.
- An increasing number of parents are beginning to participate in adult learning courses such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and 'Coping with Stress'. However, the centre has not yet established strong enough relationships with adult learning providers. As a result, parents' learning needs are not fully assessed and they do not receive enough guidance and information about learning opportunities to assist their economic well-being.
- During initial home visits to families, including teenage and young parents, staff carry out detailed assessments of their needs. These needs are then matched to the most appropriate service that the centre provides itself or in conjunction with partners and expert professionals. As a result, families experiencing personal traumas in their lives such as domestic abuse are helped to overcome challenges and get back on track.
- Through activities such as 'Chatterbox' and speech and language support sessions, the centre works with children identified as needing help, to improve their communication skills. As a result, the centre makes a meaningful contribution to the high proportion of children who achieve a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The centre provides high quality support and care to families which they greatly value. As a result of the support they receive, parents, particularly those with the most needs, gain confidence, improve their parenting skills and are better equipped to support their children's learning and development.
- The volunteering programme offered by the centre is a key strength of its work. It is well organised and offers good opportunities for parents to develop their knowledge and skills, particularly those that increase their employability.
- Centre activities are supporting families improved well-being. Childhood obesity rates are broadly in line with national rates. However, the proportion of mothers breastfeeding their babies for six to eight weeks is not yet good but is strongly improving. The work of breastfeeding mentors contributes to this well.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have rightly recognised the need to improve the quality of the centre's work. For example, a 'quality improvement partner' has been appointed to work with the centre to strengthen its capacity to make improvements in going forward.
- The local authority makes good use of measureable targets to monitor and review some aspects of the centre's work. However, self-evaluation processes including the 'annual conversation' are not thorough enough and do not provide the centre with sufficient information to gain an accurate picture of its effectiveness or assist a rapid pace of positive change.
- Governance arrangements are well established. The advisory board includes a good range of partners from different organisations such as health, schools, early years providers and charities

represented. Board members provide good support to the centre but also challenge it to improve.

- Leaders and managers use data well to plan some services and to monitor some aspects of the centre's work. For example, data on registration rates are checked regularly. However, the consistent use of data to plan more precisely which particular services will meet the needs of each priority group, to monitor impact of all aspects of the centre's work and to monitor trends over time, requires improvement.
- Safeguarding is well promoted and safer recruitment arrangements meet requirements. Staff have a good understanding of safeguarding procedures and work very effectively with social care teams to meet the needs of children subject to child protection plans and children in need. Detailed assessments by agencies who work in close partnership with the centre ensure that children and families receive effective early help. Centre staff consult with parents through surveys and informally through discussions. However, not enough parents are represented on the advisory board and the parents' forum has lapsed. As a result, too few families are routinely involved in decision making about the centre's work and future development.
- The centre's promotion of equality and diversity is good. As a result, inequalities are being reduced. For example, centre staff have been particularly successful in their work with the local Traveller community. Participation of members of this community in centre activities is good and continually increasing. In addition, sessions such as 'REACH' help develop parents' understanding and awareness of different cultures.
- Resources to meet the needs of families are adequate. The centre has had to deal with significant cuts in funding over the last two years. However, through the diligent and skilful work of leaders and managers, staffing levels have been maintained and resources used appropriately to meet local priorities and provide appropriate services for families.

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	20407
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	452148
Managed by	Barnardo's charity on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3,795
Centre leader	Caroline Goodwin
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
Telephone number	01277 374912
Email address	caroline.goodwin@barnardos.org.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

This template is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130186.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 130186