

Avonmouth Children's Centre

Catherine Street, Avonmouth, Bristol, BS11 9LG

Inspection date		4–5 November 2014	
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Inadequate	4
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 is inadequate

- Only a small minority of children from priority groups are engaging with the centre's services.
- There is infrequent access to services by workless parents to improve their learning, skills and economic well-being.
- A third of eligible two-year-old children are not yet taking up their free education place. Not enough is being done to find out why.
- Session planning is too general, and the limited checks on children's learning mean that the centre cannot demonstrate that they make good progress.
- Leaders make insufficient use of information to monitor access, service use or its impact on reducing inequalities.
- Self-evaluation lacks rigour, and governors are not checking on the centre's performance closely enough. Few parents from the community the centre serves are on the locality advisory board.

This centre has the following strengths:

- There is high commitment from leaders, governors and the hardworking staff team to move the centre forward. Well-conceived priorities have recently been set to help drive improvement.
- Strong partnerships are enhancing the centre's effectiveness in meeting local needs.
- Good care, support and advice are provided for children and families most in need.
- Parents' confidence and parenting skills are nurtured well.
- Families who use the centre have high levels of satisfaction in the quality of services they receive.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the large majority of children and families from priority groups engage in a good range of appropriate centre services.
- Extend the range of services available to workless parents to better support their life choices and chances. Ensure that the number accessing them regularly increases significantly.
- Work with partners to ensure that most eligible two-year-olds take up their free education place.
- Use the range of information about access and participation to track which children and families are using centre services. Follow up those who are not, and set precise targets to support a good increase.
- Sharpen the planning of sessions so that learning outcomes are clear, and establish systems to track how well children make progress during activities.
- Enhance self-evaluation by monitoring closely the impact of services in improving the outcomes for priority families, and use this to inform future provision.
- Devise and implement a robust centre-specific action plan that includes measurable targets and precise deadlines to drive rapid improvement.
- Strengthen governance by ensuring that governors are clear about their role to support leaders and to challenge the centre's performance rigorously.
- Encourage more parents, including those from priority groups, to serve on the advisory board and support the centre's governance.

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 Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with centre leaders, staff, local authority officers, partners, volunteers, parents, governors of Avonmouth CofE Primary School and members of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited activities held in the centre, including the 'Nurturing Programme' and 'PEEPs', and undertook a paired sampling of case files with the centre leader.

Inspectors took into account parents' views as expressed directly to them during the inspection, as well as through their recorded evaluations about the centre's work.

Inspectors also looked at a wide range of documentation.

Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead Inspector

Additional Inspector

Heather Hartmann

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Avonmouth Children's Centre opened in March 2009. Until April 2014, it formed part of the four Villages Children's Centre Group which also included Long Cross and Sea Mills children's Centres. The consultation period to disband the group commenced in 2012. During this time, Avonmouth was the dedicated centre for family support work. It has only been working as a standalone centre to deliver the full core offer of services over the past six months.

The governing body of Avonmouth Church of England Primary School has been contracted by Bristol City Council local authority to oversee the centre's leadership, management and governance. The centre shares its building alongside a 12-place day care for eligible two-year-olds. Both the school and childcare provision are subject to separate inspection arrangements. The centre leader, appointed six months ago, is also responsible for the day care provision. She manages a small staff team who are mostly new to their roles. A cluster advisory board, which is shared with two neighbouring children's centres, meets termly to support governance.

The centre serves a community that has 638 children under the age of five years. The area is mixed socially and economically. Three of the six communities served by the centre are amongst the least advantaged areas seen nationally. Overall, just under a quarter of children live in out-of-work households. The large majority of families are of White British heritage. Children generally enter early years education at levels below those expected for their age.

The priority groups identified by the centre are: teenage mothers, lone parents, children living in workless households, children from minority ethnic families, children and parents with disabilities, children assessed as in need, and families affected by domestic violence.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- Access to services is inadequate because not enough children and families use the centre. Only the small minority of most priority groups, including lone parents, children living in workless homes, children from minority ethnic families, children and parents with disabilities, are seen. Very few of the children and families from these groups who do attend activities sustain their contact with the centre.
- About a third of eligible two-year-olds are not taking up the 15 hours of free education available. Not enough work is being done to find out why two-year-olds in most need are not accessing their entitlement.
- Only a small number of parents for priority groups, particularly those who are workless, participate in centre services. There is too little regard being paid to planning appropriate services to meet their needs and improve qualifications, employability skills and financial security.
- Information available is not being used to track which children and families are using centre services. Also, it is not being used to follow up those who are less likely to attend, or to set precise targets to support a good increase.
- Registrations across the community the centre serves, including those who live in the most deprived neighbourhoods, are rising. As a result, just over three quarters are registered with the centre. Half of all children living in the area have been in contact with the centre at some point. Effective partnership with health visitors helps staff make early contact with new mothers and young children; all four teenage mothers regularly attend centre services.
- There is good take-up of free education by three- and four-year-olds. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year is above the local and national average.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The range and relevance of services requires improvement because not enough children and families from priority groups are using them regularly enough. Staff have worked hard to maintain services during a period of significant change. They recognise that a balanced programme between services available to everyone and those specifically linked to meeting the needs of priority groups is still required.
- The planning of children's activities does not take sufficient account of individual needs. In addition, evaluations tend to focus on what the children have been doing rather than what they are learning. Progress reviews with parents of two-year-olds who attend the on-site day care help them to support their children's development. However, this is not the practice in the children's centre.
- A few parents access sessions on cooking, first aid and food safety while others are signposted to courses to enhance their employment prospects. Information shared by partners shows that two parents have accessed paid work following centre-based training and two have become volunteers. Work to extend the volunteering programme with neighbouring children's centres is ongoing.
- Some parents benefit from attending the Nurturing Programme and identify how much it helps strengthen family bonds and supports their positive parenting. Parents attending the 'PEEPs' group to help children prepare for nursery thoroughly enjoyed the messy creative play with their children as they made sand and glitter pictures together. The well-attended 'Baby Massage' group is led in turn by centre staff and the community nurse. This enables the expertise of both to be readily available to young and new parents.
- Strong links with the early help team and social care underpins the effective work to reduce the risk of harm to children. Family support work makes a positive difference to the lives of families, including those who are experiencing domestic abuse. Staff have good relationships with children, parents and carers who attend sessions, and work effectively with families most in need in their home.
- All parents who spoke to inspectors feel that they receive a high level of care and support. The centre is friendly and welcoming. Parents' feedback identifies that children from different backgrounds or with special needs are well integrated into the centre activities. A recent 'Polish day' held in partnership with the community centre was much appreciated by everyone.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The last six months have proved challenging for new leaders and staff in retaining community confidence following the protracted consultation period while the centre group re-formed. The development of the day care has been the priority and leaders recognise that to some extent this has affected the pace of development of the children's centre. Very recently, centre-specific priorities have been identified and resources allocated to ensure that the centre's effectiveness improves rapidly.
- General evaluations of the centre's performance are undertaken by leaders, but the process does not use data well enough or involve the staff, partners or governors in any depth. The local authority has so far given regular support to getting the 'new' centre off the ground. They have a firm grasp on strengths and weaknesses and the next step is to agree specific improvement targets.
- Governance arrangements are clear and supportive. However, the governing body's checks on the centre's performance have not been rigorous enough to hold leaders to account.
- Strong partnerships cultivated successfully by the centre leader, coupled with effective service level agreements, are helping meet the diverse needs of the centre. The locality advisory board has 30 partners on board and a remit to help shape services. Currently there is limited involvement of Avonmouth parents; one serves on the board.
- Supervision and arrangements for setting targets for staff, support their training and development needs well. Both procedures have recently been upgraded by the new headteacher to give better support to the centre leader.

- Safeguarding arrangements meet current requirements. The referral system is rigorous and the centre receives timely information from partners about all children subject to a child protection plan, in need or who are looked after. Regular meetings enable the ongoing sharing of information and integrated support between agencies.
- The parents' forum is representative of the community the centre serves. Regular meetings enable views to be shared and requests made to leaders. For example, parents wanted to develop the centre garden. Resources were given to the Sunday dads' group to make a 'bug hotel' to raise environmental awareness, and to foster children's curiosity.

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.

Children's centre details

Unique reference number	20146
Local authority	Bristol
Inspection number	452682
Managed by	The governing body of Avonmouth CofE Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	638
Centre leader	Jenny Coughlan
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0117 9030271
Email address	jenny.coughlan@bristol.gov.uk

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