

Warwickshire - South West Warwickshire Group

c/o Stratford Children's Centre, Drayton Avenue, Stratford upon Avon, CV37 9PB

Inspection dates	10–12 December 2014
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

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		Inadequate	4
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group is inadequate.

- An extended period of uncertainty during the re-commissioning process, staff changes, and financial cuts to services have contributed significantly to the group's inadequate effectiveness.
- At 36%, a minority of children living in the areas surrounding the Stratford Children's Centre engage with services overall. Likewise, a minority of 0-2 year olds living in the Stratford and Clopton areas sustain contact, at 34% and 37% respectively.
- A minority of families from priority areas have regular contact with the group. In the Maybird area, the most disadvantaged community, a small minority sustain contact (28%) with the centre.
- The systems in place to monitor which families attend services do not enable leaders to produce reliable reports. The inclusion of routine home visits by health visitors complicates the picture further. As a result, those responsible for governance and leadership do not have an accurate picture of the level of engagement of some priority groups. This inhibits their ability to evaluate and plan improvements.
- Leaders and managers do not assure the quality the work of the centre group effectively. This leads to weak practice going unchecked, such as that concerning family case file recording. Supervision of some early years family workers is not taking place in a timely and effective manner.
- The centre group does not have a coordinated approach to tracking children's progress. This means that leaders cannot demonstrate the impact of the group's work on children's readiness for school, particularly those from priority families.
- There is a conflict of interest because the advisory board is chaired by a centre leader and there is a lack of clarity between the roles of the advisory board and the board of trustees. Parents are not sufficiently represented on the advisory board.
- Safeguarding is compromised because the local authority does not fully share important information pertaining to all vulnerable children, including those subject to a child protection plan.
- There is a lack of precision in the targets set by the local authority concerning children's achievement and parents' well-being. Improvement plans are not sufficiently focused on narrowing inequalities and improving the outcomes for priority children and families.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve access to services by priority children and families so that the large majority living in the wider Stratford area, especially those in the most socially excluded communities, use the centres regularly.
- Improve the collection and analysis of information to identify clearly, and monitor the engagement of, children and families, particularly from priority groups. Closely check the impact of services on the progress that priority children and adults make in terms of their learning and well-being.
- Ensure that all front line staff working with families receive regular supervision at which individual cases are discussed and decisions pertaining to the safety and well-being of families are recorded rigorously.
- Ensure that the quality of services is consistently good by undertaking regular observations of activities, sessions and case files, providing feedback and appropriate training to continuously improve the quality of provision.
- Work with the local authority to ensure that information about:
 - vulnerable children under five years of age who are known to social care is shared and that minutes of meetings that are led by social care, and attended by children's centre staff, are provided in a swift manner and before the next meeting takes place
 - children's achievement in the area served by the group is provided in a timely manner so that leaders can identify which children are at risk of underachieving and can more sharply focus appropriate support.
- Tighten development planning so that priorities are clear, targets are specific, measurable, achievable and realistic and sufficiently based on narrowing inequalities for children and families.
- Ensure that the advisory board is well attended by trained and relevant partners; involves parents, and is chaired by an independent person. Make sure that the roles and responsibilities of this board and the board of trustees are clear to everyone.

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 four Additional inspectors.

The inspection covered the following centres: Stratford; Alcester and District; Clopton and District, formerly known as Stratford 2; and Studley and District.

The inspectors held meetings with the newly appointed children's centre coordinator; the four children's centre managers; members of the advisory board, board of trustees; a local authority representative; and a range of partners. Inspectors also met with parents and undertook additional telephone interviews with partners, including the district lead for children's social care.

The chief executive officer, who was the main contact throughout the inspection, and the children's centre coordinator were involved in all the inspection team meetings. The local authority joined the final team meeting.

The inspectors spent time in each of the four children's centres and jointly observed four sessions with the centre leaders: 'Little Stars' in Alcester; 'Chatter Matters' in Stratford; 'Messy Play' in Studley; and 'Meet and Play' in Clopton. They also observed 'Baby Blues' in Alcester.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. The inspectors looked a range of case files held at all four centres.

Inspection team

Michael Blakey, Lead Inspector	Additional inspector
Karen Cooper	Additional inspector
Debbie Sanders	Additional inspector
Mary Dudley	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The South West Warwickshire Group consists of four children's centres, two of which cover Stratford upon Avon and one in each of the towns of Studley and Alcester. The centres came together as a group in July 2013, shortly before the local authority began a consultation and re-commissioning process. As a result of this process, The Parenting Project, a local charity, secured the contract to continue to manage this children's centre group on behalf of the local authority in July 2014, together with an additional four children's centres in the wider district. The Parenting Project is governed by a Board of Trustees. An advisory board currently comprising a small number of partners is in place. During the re-commissioning process there was a freeze on the recruitment of new staff and many changes to the management and delivery of services.

Stratford Children's Centre was previously inspected in April 2011 and judged to be good. None of the other three centres have been inspected. Some of the centres are co-located with schools, but do not share any leadership or management. The group does not provide any childcare, other than the non-regulated crèches for adult learning. The report of the school inspections are available at www.GOV.UK/ofstedA children's centre coordinator now oversees the group, and each children's centre also has a dedicated part-time children's centre manager, a team of part time early years family workers and an administrator. Only a few staff work across the four children's centres. The group delivers or facilitates access to a range of services including activities to promote children's health and early learning; family support; and programmes to support adults' learning and parenting skills.

The group serves a large geographical area including rural villages between the main towns. None of the areas served are in the top 30% most deprived in England; however, the centres have identified five distinct geographical areas where families face relatively high levels of social exclusion.

There are approximately 2,978 children under five years of age living in the area served by the group. Most families are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of children living in poverty is lower than that seen nationally. Children generally start school with skills and abilities typical for their age.

The group has identified children living in the following five geographic areas as those most likely to need additional support: Maybird (Stratford Town and New Town Ward); Stratford Mount Pleasant (Stratford Mount Pleasant Ward); Alcester North and Conway (Alcester Ward); Henley East and Beaudesert (Henley Ward); and Studley South (Studley Ward). In addition, families subject to domestic abuse and those experiencing emotional and mental health issues are prioritised as needing additional support.

The local authority has also recently set targets around the engagement of additional priority groups: fathers; Traveller families; children from minority ethnic backgrounds; disabled children and children of disabled parents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- The centre group does not have effective systems in place to track the attendance of all priority children and families, including those with emotional or mental health issues. It is not doing enough to encourage the attendance of priority families who are less likely to access services.
- The information that is available does not always present an accurate picture to enable effective monitoring. The inclusion of home visits by health professionals is skewing the picture further. This is because these visits are not attributed to actual children on the system used by leaders. As a result they do not know how well their assessed priority groups are engaged in children's centre services.
- In the geographic areas in which leaders have correctly identified that families may face high levels of social isolation, only a minority of children sustain contact with the centre group.
- Access is especially low in the Stratford area where only slightly over a third of two year-old children have used the centre group more than once over the last twelve months. This is in contrast to Alcester, where the majority of these very young children are in regular contact.
- Although the local authority has identified that the centres should be working with a wider range of priority groups, including families from minority ethnic backgrounds, Traveller families and disabled children, no baselines are established or targets for improvement set. The group's development plan identifies children living in workless households as a priority group, but these children are not effectively identified or tracked at present.
- The number of families affected by domestic abuse with whom the group is working is very much lower than the number that leaders have estimated. More recently, the children's centre coordinator has joined the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) to better identify more of these vulnerable families. However, once these families, and those experiencing emotional and mental health issues, are in contact with the centres they remain engaged.
- Good partnership working with health visitors ensures the large majority of families with new babies are registered and have access to services. Expectant parents have good access to antenatal services.
- Most children living in the area served by the centre group are registered, including those living in the most disadvantaged areas. However, registration rates are notably lower in the Stratford area, where about a quarter of the children are not yet known.
- The centre works in partnership to ensure that most eligible two-, three- and four-year old children take up their free entitlement to early education.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- The quality of practice and services is inadequate because not enough children and families, particularly from priority groups, use them often enough. Too few children and families living in the most socially excluded areas access services. This impedes the group's work to help families understand their responsibilities for their children's learning and safety.
- Leaders and those responsible for governance have not effectively assured the quality of the case files held on families, for at least twelve months. As a result, significant weaknesses in case recording and case file management across all four centres have not been identified and tackled.

- The quality of assessments, which are undertaken when families are referred to services, is highly variable. Common Assessment Framework assessments are rigorous. However it is not clear in the files seen at all of the centres in the group what outcomes are expected for families as a result of staff actions. The centre group does not effectively measure and evaluate the impact of family support work, other than through the occasional case study. The centre group's work with children living in the area who are subject to child protection plans and those deemed to be in need lacks consistency.
- The sessions such as 'Chatter Matters' observed by inspectors were of good quality. Leaders accurately judged quality during their paired work with inspectors. However, they do not routinely monitor and record their findings about the quality of practice and services. As a result, they do not have a comprehensive view of strengths and weaknesses across the group.
- Not all of the information that the group needs to target services effectively is being routinely made available to it. For example, it does not receive data to help it to identify which children are at risk of underachieving, whether any achievement gaps are evident or if they are narrowing. In the absence of this data, the local authority is not able to set targets related to children's readiness for school, a key aspect of the centres' work. Leaders are not clear if inequalities are reducing, especially for those children most in need of support.
- Systems to track the progress of children are not effective. As a result, leaders are not clear about what difference the centres make in the prime areas of children's learning or their development during the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The range of services, including those delivered at outreach venues is good and an appropriate balance between universal activities and targeted support has been maintained despite significant budget cuts.
- The 'Family Matters' meetings ensure that health visitors and children's centre staff discuss individual families on a fortnightly basis, although in Studley these meetings have not taken place so frequently over recent weeks. As a result of these meetings, key staff are aware of the needs of families and this aspect of information sharing is effective.
- Some parents who have volunteered at the centres are now employed by the group. However, the number of volunteers currently supporting the delivery of services is very low. The quality of adult learning is good, but tracking is not effective and does not demonstrate the difference services make, particularly over time.
- Breastfeeding rates at six-to-eight weeks are broadly in line with national levels, and obesity rates are good overall. However, the local authority and centres have identified areas where the obesity rates are relatively higher and set appropriate targets to help to drive further improvements in children's health and well-being.
- The centre makes a discernible difference to some families, particularly through its one to one support work. For example, a parent described her journey from being in an abusive relationship to undertaking a level two counselling course to help others with support from the centres.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- Leadership, management and governance are inadequate. Progress towards addressing some key recommendations made at the time of the Stratford Children's Centre inspection in 2011 has been slow. For example, the ineffective use of data to show the impact of services remains an on-going issue, which now impacts on the wider group. In addition, the advisory board is still not able to

challenge effectively and is currently without an independent chairperson.

- Senior leaders have not effectively monitored the quality of services and performance, as highlighted by the lack of casework supervision and current poor case file practice. There is no parents' forum and parents are not routinely engaged in the effective design, delivery and evaluation of services.
- Information sharing with children's social care rightly causes serious concerns for centre staff and leaders and compromises safeguarding policy and practice. The minutes of 'child in need' meetings are often delayed, and sometimes not provided before the next meeting takes place.
- The centres do not have access to information on all of the vulnerable children, including those subject to child protection plans, in the area, as this is not shared with the group by social care managers. This is despite the centre group leaders making it clear that learning from multiple serious case reviews has identified that failing to share information leaves families potentially at risk of serious harm, as partners do not have the full picture of what is going on in the family.
- Supervision of staff, especially of the family work they undertake, has sometimes been ad-hoc. Some staff have not received effective case file supervision for a few months and the impact of this is evident in the quality of their files and recording of decisions. The risks associated with this are partly mitigated by the regular 'family matters' meetings and effective information sharing at team meetings.
- Staff and volunteers are safely recruited and safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and reviewed. Staff undertake appropriate training, including that relating to safeguarding, to undertake their roles effectively. Receptionists contribute to children's safety by reminding visitors of their responsibility to report any concerns relating to children's well-being.
- Self-evaluation processes are improving. However, the group's development plan is based on the tender submission for the contract to deliver services and lacks clarity about what specifically needs to be improved. There is an absence of targets based on improving access to services by key priority groups and outcomes for these families, which everyone understands.
- The governance provided by the trustees and advisory board is not sufficiently joined up and roles are not clearly defined. The advisory board, although regularly attended by a few very keen and committed partners, does not yet have appropriate representation from some key partners or enough parents. The board is currently chaired by one of the centre leaders or senior managers and as a result is not able to challenge the leadership team effectively from an independent perspective.
- The monitoring of the group's performance by the local authority has not been good enough so far. However, the targets set very recently on access, are clear and more focused. The local authority recognises that there is much more rigour required to assure the quality of the group's services and practice and to ensure that it makes a good contribution to narrowing inequalities.
- The leaders are committed to making sure the group improves rapidly. Together, they have created a team of staff who are determined to make a positive difference to priority families. By carefully restructuring the number of hours staff work, leaders have used their available resources efficiently to create a sound foundation on which to build for the future.

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	80335
Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	442740
Managed by	The Parenting Project on behalf of the local authority.

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,978
Centre leader	Caroline Loveridge
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
Telephone number	01789 264741
Email address	Caroline.Loveridge@parentingproject.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20051 Alcester and District
- 20764 Clopton and District (formerly known as Stratford 2)
- 22957 Stratford
- 22968 Studley and District

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