

# Marlow Children's Centre

c/o The Marlow Day Nursery, Sandygate Lane, Marlow, Buckinghamshire SL7 3AZ

**Inspection date** 17–18 March 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b> Previous inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
		Not previously inspected	
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 are registered and attend the centre's services regularly.
- There are insufficient opportunities for adults to complete training courses and volunteering programmes in order to improve their employability and financial security.
- Systems to track the progress made by children and their parents when they access services run by the centre or its partners are underdeveloped. The longer-term learning and development of centre-supported children are not clear, due to shortfalls in the data provided by the local authority.
- Insufficient challenge in governance is provided by the advisory board and there is low attendance by some key partners.
- Managers' monitoring and quality assurance systems are not strong enough to measure the full impact of the centre's work in improving the outcomes for children and families, particularly from priority groups.

### This centre has the following strengths:

- Staff have steadily increased the number of families who register and attend the centre.
- Strong partnerships with social care provide effective support for children subject to child protection plans or early assessment of families in need.
- All two-year-old and most three- to four-year-old children take up their funded early years place.
- Health outcomes are positive, and improving, because of the centre's effective work with partners so families make well-informed choices about their diet and lifestyles.
- Parents participate in a range of programmes that help meet specific needs, such as how to build strong family bonds, and manage their child's behaviour and learning with confidence.
- Staff benefit from the many opportunities Barnardo's provides for them to undertake further training, qualifications and to share good practice.

### What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure most families are registered and regularly attend centre activities, particularly two-year-old children eligible for free education.
- Increase the number of adults completing courses and volunteering programmes as a first step back into training and employment.
- Develop systems to track the progress that targeted children make when they attend centre activities and when they transfer to pre-school or nursery. Work with the local authority to find out how many of these children achieve a good level of development by the time they are five.
- Improve the level of challenge and support provided by the advisory board and increase the attendance of key partners, so that they are confident in holding leaders to account.
- Strengthen monitoring systems by focusing managers' observations on the impact managers have had on improving the outcomes for children and families, particularly from priority groups.

### 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.

It was carried out at the same time as Stokenchurch and Hambleton Valley Children's Centre (URN 22940) with whom it works in collaboration. Some meetings with staff and partners were held jointly to avoid duplication.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, area manager, and representatives from the local authority and Barnardo's. They also met partners from health and early years education, parents, and representatives from the advisory board and parents' forum. The managers attended all meetings of the inspection team.

Visits to activities, such as Bumps and Babies, baby clinics, and Stay and Play, were undertaken. The inspectors looked at the centre's self-evaluation and action planning, a sample of case files, safeguarding practice, policies and procedures, and a range of other documentation, including evaluations of parents' views.

### Inspection team

David Scott, Lead Inspector

Additional Inspector

Sandra Teacher

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Marlow Children's Centre was designated in September 2007 as a stand-alone centre. It delivers a range of services including health, parenting classes, Stay and Play sessions, adult learning and family support. The centre's main building is located on the site of The Marlow Day Nursery (EY 116696) and Marlow Church of England Infant School (URN 110433). In addition, activities in the community are provided at a satellite centre which is located on the site of Foxes Piece School (URN 131523) and Stepping Stones Pre-school (EY 316669) and Red Fox Day Nursery (EY 116677). All these are subject to separate inspections and their reports can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

From June 2013, the centre has been managed by Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority. Governance is provided by the advisory board, which comprises parents and key partners. There is also a parents' forum.

A new centre coordinator was appointed in June 2014. The centre works in collaboration with Stokenchurch and Hambleden Valley Children's Centre (URN 22940), sharing leadership, resources, services and data.

The number of children under five years of age living in the area served by the centre is 900. The centre serves a community that is relatively affluent, with just under one in five children living in slightly less advantaged areas. Information shows that just under one in 10 children live in households where no adult is working. The majority of parents have been educated to university level.

Just over eight out of 10 families are of White British heritage, with one in seven being from minority ethnic groups. Children's skills and abilities on entry to early education are at the levels expected for their age.

The centre has identified young parents, disabled children, families in need of early help support and two-year-old children who are eligible for free education as its main priority groups.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

### Requires improvement

- Currently, registrations stand at 60% and have increased steadily during the last year. Most families from priority groups are now registered. However, only a minority of two-year-old children who are eligible for free education are registered.
- Overall, just under half of those registered attend the centre regularly and this requires improvement. From the priority groups, the large majority of disabled children and young parents regularly access the centre's services.
- All two-year-olds and most three- to four-year-olds are taking up their free education place. As a result, centre staff are actively helping to reduce inequalities for families in most need.
- The centre receives live birth information. Together with effective partnership working with midwives and health visitors, centre staff are kept up to date about new babies born each month. The regular baby clinics at the centre enable more families to access centre services and this has contributed to rising registrations, particularly for expectant and young parents.
- The centre supports families whose children are disabled by signposting them to outstanding specialist settings. Staff are trained effectively to work with families and partners to identify needs. For example, all staff have completed special sign language courses and training in autism. Centre staff support playgroup and respite sessions which provide opportunities for children and their parents to learn together in a safe and stimulating environment.

**The quality of practice and services****Requires improvement**

- The range of activities, both those open to everyone and those designed specifically to support priority groups, is appropriate to meet the needs of families. Increasing numbers of families, including those in need of early support, are benefiting from the services on offer. However, the number of children and families from priority groups attending activities is not high enough, and this requires improvement.
- Stay and Play sessions are popular and well attended. They offer a good range of activities based in the key areas of learning, which encourage strong interaction between mums and babies. For example, sessions observed included the use of sensory materials, such as cars and trucks, to encourage boys' engagement. Children also designed cards for St Patrick's Day, which further promoted their understanding of festivals and different cultures.
- Centre staff visit early years settings in the area. They are beginning to share ideas and look at how well children who have accessed, or who are currently accessing, children's centre services are getting on. Data on the achievement gap between Reception-age children from the least advantaged backgrounds and others have not been provided by the local authority since 2012. This is a missed opportunity to assist the centre in checking the longer term impact of its work.
- Only 10% of families are not in work. As a result, the promotion of adult learning, training and employment has not needed to be a priority. Last year, 54 parents successfully completed first aid courses, which raised awareness about their child's well-being. The volunteering programme has successfully supported a few individuals to become volunteers, in areas such as early years and office administration. However, overall, volunteering as a first step to employment or a career change is still developing. Tracking systems to record the participation and progress in adult learning are also underdeveloped. Centre staff have already identified this as an area for improvement.
- Parenting courses, designed to help families most in need, are well attended by priority groups. These courses help to show parents how to build strong family bonds, and manage their child's behaviour and learning with confidence. Staff work proactively to promote equalities and remove any barriers.
- Collaborative work with social care and family support professionals, and the sharing of detailed information about vulnerable children and families at six-weekly Family Forum meetings, assist the centre in keeping in close contact with families subject to early help procedures.
- Case files provide a full account of contact with families. They are well maintained and include planned actions for families, where outcomes have led to significant improvements for children and their families. These files are regularly audited by Barnardo's and the local authority.
- Strong partnerships with health services have ensured that breastfeeding and immunisation rates are above national averages. The healthy and tooth-friendly food and drink policy, together with healthy snacks and the teddy bears picnic, has given parents advice of how to live a healthy lifestyle, which has helped to ensure childhood obesity rates are lower than average.

**The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management****Requires improvement**

- Leadership, governance and management require improvement because not enough focus has been given to ensuring that most children and families are registered and attend centre activities regularly. Nevertheless, actions by managers are improving registrations and engagement rates. More families are taking up services and this is having an increasingly positive impact on improving the lives of those in most need.
- The advisory board members are drawn from a wide range of backgrounds and experience. Partners, including parents, know the community served by the centre well, and care deeply about its work. They know how staff performance is managed and are increasingly confident in analysing data about the centre's performance. The centre leader has provided helpful documentation and training about the role of the advisory board. However, attendance by some key partners over the past year has been low. As a result, this has reduced members' effectiveness in challenging leaders

and holding them to account.

- Over the last year, the centre has experienced a number of staffing changes. Currently, all Buckinghamshire's children's centres are undergoing a process of re-commissioning, the outcome of which will be known shortly. As a result, this has been an unsettling time for staff about their future.
- The recently-appointed, well-qualified centre coordinator has worked effectively to build a united staff team who shows good morale and is keen to play a full role in taking the centre forward. Appropriately qualified staff have benefited from the many opportunities Barnardo's provides for them to undertake training, gain further qualifications and to share good practice.
- Managers undertake a wide range of very useful professional supervision activities. However, these are not looking in sufficient detail at which families are taking up the centre's good quality services or what impact they are having on improving outcomes.
- The centre runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and there is efficiency in the sharing of resources between the two centres. However, at times, staffing levels are stretched and, as a result, this has impeded the speed at which new initiatives have been implemented.
- Barnardo's has ensured that safeguarding policies, practices and procedures are robust and regularly updated. Strong multi-agency partnerships, particularly with the social care team, have ensured that effective systems are in place for the early assessment of families in need. As a result, children who are looked after, subject to child protection plans and those deemed to be children in need, are well supported.
- The local authority provides effective support and challenge. Regular monitoring visits are undertaken, and information about which families are registered and using the services is provided. The report on the annual review of the centre's effectiveness received during the inspection rightly questioned the accuracy of the centre's self-evaluation.
- Parents are very supportive of the work of the centre. Through the parent forum and regular opportunities to give feedback on sessions, they are actively involved in shaping centre services. Typical comments include, 'Staff gave me praise when my confidence was rock bottom.' 'The centre has changed my life enormously.'

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	21937
<b>Local authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	453967
<b>Managed by</b>	Barnardo's, on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	900
<b>Centre leader</b>	Debby Morgan
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01628 472121
<b>Email address</b>	marlowcc@barnardos.org.uk

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