

COL11 Little Hands Children's Centre

Stanway Fiveways Primary School, Winstree Road, Colchester, CO3 0QG

Inspection dates	13–14 May 2015
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		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:

- The large majority of priority families are not yet engaged with the centre, particularly in the Marks Tey area.
- Not enough families of two-year-old children have taken up their free entitlement to a pre-school place. The centre is still working with the local authority to expand and extend local access.
- Work to assess and track children's progress and development from ages two to five is in its infancy.
- Some systems for assessing the impact of the centre's work in helping measure just how well children and adults make progress in their learning and development are relatively new. The centre is not yet able to show the full impact of its work in the longer term.
- The centre's locality board was only set up in November 2014. It still lacks a Chairperson and at present there are no parents involved to help monitor the centre's work.
- Opportunities for parents, particularly from workless households, to enhance their employability through training, literacy, numeracy and preparation for work courses are not yet fully developed.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Staff provide a 'human' touch to their work with families and make time to listen and talk with them; this enables families to gain in self-confidence and self-esteem.
- The quality of the centre's approach to casework and the monitoring and support for families is good.
- Partnerships with other agencies to support its work with children and families are effective; for example early support for new mothers through ante-natal services in partnership with midwives.
- Programmes to help adults to develop their parenting skills are good quality.
- Staff have been increasingly successful at engaging with teenage parents and those in temporary housing accommodation.
- The support provided to enable families using the centre to develop more healthy lifestyles is effective.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve the access to services by:
 - ensuring more families with two-year-old children take up their free pre-school places
 - increasing the numbers of families engaged with the centre, particularly those from the Marks Tey area, so that at least the large majority are enabled to use the centre's services more regularly.
- Make more effective use of systems for assessing the impact of the centre's work by:
 - measuring more effectively the impact of its work in helping children and adults make progress during their engagement with centre-led activities
 - keeping a track of how well families do when they take up other services
 - working with pre-school and other education partners to enhance the centre's work with families by developing children's learning journeys and using these to measure learning and development.
- Strengthen the governance of the centre by:
 - ensuring that a Chair is appointed to the centre's own locality board before the end of September 2015
 - extending parents' involvement in the governance of the centre by ensuring their representation on the centre's locality board.
- Widen the opportunities for more parents, particularly those from workless homes, to enhance their employability by:
 - increasing the number of adults who access literacy and numeracy courses
 - extending the links with training providers and Jobcentre Plus advisers
 - following up how well adults make progress when they access courses or programmes
 - using the information gathered to inform the planning of future services.
- Work with the local authority to embed and extend partnerships and initiatives to ensure the quality and impact of practice is at least good by:
 - expanding and extend the two-year-old offer more widely across the area by October 2015
 - implementing the assessment and tracking of children's progress and development from ages two to five
 - ensuring the sharing of information about children's learning and development aged two to five years is gathered across pre-school providers, children's centres and schools.

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 various meetings with the centre's leaders, staff, local authority officers, representatives of Barnardo's, various health, social care and other partners (including Jobcentre Plus, breastfeeding support, midwifery, and a local temporary housing organisation), volunteers, parents and members of the local and district locality/advisory boards.

The inspectors visited activities held at the Little Hands Children's Centre and its Discovery Children's Centre delivery point. These activities and services included a baby clinic and 'drop-in'; a meeting of the local 'Learning Community' (involving children's centre, local school and pre-school setting staff); Stay and Play and Baby Beginnings activities. Case files were scrutinised as were case audits in partnership with centre staff. Senior centre and Barnardo's staff attended all team meetings.

Inspectors observed the centres' work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Michael Miller, Lead Inspector	Additional inspector
Qaisra Shahraz	Additional inspector
Tara Street	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The Little Hands Children's Centre is a stand-alone centre, but in April 2014 it also took charge of the premises of the Discovery Children's Centre as its satellite / outreach delivery point. The reach areas were combined and Little Hands is the main hub.

Barnardo's manages the centre on behalf of the county council. There is a Little Hands locality / advisory board, which oversees its governance, and a district locality board which oversees all the children's centres in the Colchester and Tendring area. The centre manager is part-time and leads the centre group's team of two part-time and four full-time staff.

The centre delivers a range of services including early years experiences, family support, child and family health, parenting courses and volunteering. Services are delivered from a range of venues including local premises based in supported housing, health centres, village halls, libraries and pre-school and toddler groups.

Little Hands Children's Centre is co-located with Stanway Fiveways Primary School. The Stanway Pre-School operates from a room at Little Hands Children's Centre. Both of these settings are subject to separate inspection arrangements. The reports can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

There are 1,390 children under the age of five years living in the area. The group serves a mainly affluent area, which has pockets of deprivation and some rural areas isolated by limited public transport links. Both children's centres are located in areas comprising mainly privately owned homes but with some social and supported housing. The proportion of children assessed as living in poverty is below average across the centre's area, but rises to 27% in the Collingwood and Marks Tey areas, and up to 88% in some local neighbourhoods of the Prettygate area. Most families are White British. When they start school, children have skills and abilities that are broadly typical for their age.

Priority target groups defined by the centre group are: lone parents living in workless households; families living in temporary accommodation; teenage parents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Although the large majority of families, and most children aged 0-5 years are registered with the centre, their level of actual and sustained engagement with the centre over time has proved inconsistent, particularly for those from the key priority groups. Engagement with the centre's services has proved patchy in the recent past. It remains so, particularly in the Marks Tey area.
- Over the past few months, the centre manager, together with Barnardo's children's services manager, have been working together to analyse need and make more effective use of data, and local knowledge, to target services. This is now starting to have impact, but has yet to be tested fully over time. Improving the centre's reach to families, and ensuring that at least the large majority are engaged with its services is the first priority of the centre's current development plan.
- The centre has had good success in ensuring most three and four year old children have access to funded pre-school education. However, it has not proved as successful in ensuring that all two-year-olds entitled to this do so; currently only a majority overall take up the offer. This is partly an issue for the local authority in ensuring that there are more funded places for two-year-olds. Nevertheless, centre staff do monitor regularly all those taking up these funded pre-school places in order to ensure that they are making good progress in their learning and development.
- Access to parenting programmes at the centre, and courses about safeguarding children in the

home, is good. However, the centre is still building its partnerships to ensure access to a sufficiently wide range of adult learning courses, particularly for literacy, numeracy, preparation for work and employability for those from workless homes.

- The centre has had some good successes. In particular it has been working hard with partners and a local housing trust to reach teenage parents and those families living in temporary accommodation. Most of these families are accessing, and benefitting from, the centre's services.
- There is especially good access for expectant parents to ante-natal and midwifery services through regular weekly clinics held in the dedicated health room at Little Hands. This is playing an important part in helping the centre to reach new families in the area and to introduce them to its services.
- Since the incorporation into Little Hands of the Discovery Children's Centre just over a year ago, there has been a positive focus on improving access to the centre's services for families. In some respects this has been hindered by the fact that it was not fully staffed until January 2015; resolving this was not always under the direct control of the centre. Improving access for families is a key focus for the centre.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre delivers an appropriate balance of activities and services, some of which are open to all and others are appropriately targeted towards priority families.
- Although the centre is making important differences to families' lives, some of its tracking systems for monitoring its work with children and adults are relatively new and have yet to show the full impact of the centre's work. Nevertheless, approaches with families using 'evaluation wheels' are appreciated by families for giving a visual and accessible view of their progress.
- In 2014, the proportion of children in the centre's own area reaching a good level of development by the end of the Reception year was above average, both nationally and for the local authority. The achievement gap for the lowest achieving children is closing significantly. However, nobody is quite sure where the credit for this lies, and the full part the centre plays in this. It is uncertain whether children from the centre's target groups make equally good progress as others.
- 'Learning Journeys', which provide a record of a child's development, have only recently been introduced by the centre. Leaders appreciate the important role these can play in helping parents recognise and understand their child's learning and progress up to the age of five.
- The centre does good work in promoting healthy lifestyles with the families it engages with; this is supported positively through the strong working relationships it has developed with health partners. Levels of childhood obesity have been falling and centre data shows this is now below average for its families. There is also good promotion of breastfeeding, and rates six-to-eight weeks are above average due to the work and impact of an effective weekly breastfeeding support group.
- Staff are well-trained and vigilant in supporting families who are suffering from domestic violence. As one parent said: 'I would be lost without this centre. I learnt about how to cope with bad relationships. I am now so strong and more aware of things. This has been a turning point in my life. I don't feel so alone or lost now as a single parent.'
- There is good use of the Shared Family Assessment to ensure that there is timely contact with the most vulnerable children and families. There is particularly good work with children subject to child protection plans and for children in need. The centre staff work well with their partners from other

agencies to ensure that support for families is matched effectively to their specific needs. This includes those children and families known to have disabilities or special educational needs.

- A key strength of the centre is the way in which case files are completed and maintained. These provide very informative and comprehensive records on families. This enables the proper targeting of support. Cases are monitored and reviewed regularly.
- The centre's programme for volunteers is well-developed. Volunteers are supported effectively in developing their workplace experience and personal skills. A number move on successfully into paid work.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The centre lacks a Chairperson for its own locality board, which oversees its immediate governance, and parents are not yet represented on this board. There are plans in place to resolve this important aspect, which requires improvement.
- Over the past few months a very positive working partnership has developed between the centre manager and her line manager, the Barnardo's children's services manager. Together with the board and local authority they have reviewed the centre's work effectively honestly and their own evaluation is that the centre requires improvement.
- The centre's planning for development and improvement is progressing well. It has identified its key priority groups correctly, and introduced priority themes in its action planning to ensure that its key targets are met. Data on families and the centre's work is starting to be used increasingly effectively. The centre manager is developing a more strategic approach to the centre's work. In all this the centre staff are showing good capacity for further improvement. This is also reflected well in the team's determination to ensure equality of opportunity for its families by increasing its reach and engagement levels, and to ensure no discrimination in provision.
- The centre runs smoothly, and the staff are all appropriately qualified. Since January they have gelled well as a team, and this is recognised by parents. Practical systems for supervision, performance management and the continuous development of staff are all firmly in place and working well. The centre's resources are used effectively to support families' needs.
- Safeguarding arrangements and policies meet requirements; families say they feel safe when they access the centre's services. Staff and volunteers are safely recruited, checked and are trained well. Staff understand the wider issues around safeguarding children and families. The ways the centre's team monitors and records their work in support of families, particularly those who may be more vulnerable, is a strength of the centre's work.
- A major strength of the centre is the way in which the staff team provide a real 'human' touch to their work with families and make time to listen to and talk with them. This enables parents to gain self-confidence and self-esteem; which benefits their children and family relationships.

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	20782
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	455045
Managed by	Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1390
Centre manager	Mandy Day
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
Telephone number	01206 216240
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