

# Slough Children's Centres

Cambridge Education working with Slough Borough Council, 2nd Floor West, St Martin's Place, Bath Road, Slough SL1 3UF

**Inspection date** 25–28 March 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>4</b>
	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.

- The local authority and partners are not providing children's centres with good enough information about the children and families who they should be targeting. As a result, centres are not reaching enough families in their local areas and they do not know how many families from priority groups are regularly engaging with centre services.
- Governance is weak. Members of the advisory boards, known as forums, do not understand their roles sufficiently. Parents are underrepresented.
- Local authority arrangements to monitor the performance of the children's centre group are ineffective. Systems to evaluate the impact of the centres' work are underdeveloped.
- A significant number of staff vacancies within the family services team hinder the effective delivery of services. Insufficient work is done to reach out to families to promote services and increase registrations. The focus on work with target families and lack of universal services leads to some parents perceiving centres as places where only troubled or 'difficult' families go.
- There are weaknesses in case recording. Case files do not clearly 'tell the story' of the family. Important information about the family is too often difficult to find. Analysis of risk and decision making is not always recorded clearly.
- Some case files do not show evidence of anyone checking on the quality of case work. When this is the case, some case notes are muddled. Too often, opportunities for staff to discuss difficult cases with their line manager are not formally recorded.

### This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- The head of service and her senior leadership team know the area well and understand what needs to improve.
- There are committed staff teams working in all of the children's centres. The quality of support provided for the individual families who attend centres, including those in crisis, is generally effective.
- A high proportion of eligible two-year-olds have taken up funded early education places.

## Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. The centres that form this children's centre group are: Monksfield Way Children's Centre; Orchard Avenue Children's Centre; St. Andrew's Way Children's Centre; Penn Road Children's Centre; Wexham Road Children's Centre; Chalvey Grove Children's Centre; Elliman Avenue Children's Centre; Romsey Close Children's Centre; Vicarage Way Children's Centre; and Yew Tree Road Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of service and members of her senior leadership team; local authority representatives; a senior manager from Mott Macdonald; health workers and senior health representatives; headteachers; the speech and language therapy service; children's social care representatives; adult and community learning representatives; family services workers and assistants; early years workers; the Citizens Advice Bureau; members of the children's centre forums and parents.

The inspectors visited: Orchard Avenue Children's Centre; St. Andrew's Way Children's Centre; Penn Road Children's Centre; Wexham Road Children's Centre; Chalvey Grove Children's Centre; Elliman Avenue Children's Centre; Romsey Close Children's Centre; Vicarage Way Children's Centre; Yew Tree Road Children's Centre; Britwell Community Centre; Slough and Eton Satellite Site; and Westfield Hall.

They observed each centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Inspection team

Denise Blackwell, Lead Inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Penny Fisher, Assistant Lead Inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Deborah Udakis	Her Majesty's Inspector
Joy Law	Her Majesty's Inspector
Graham Saltmarsh	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

Slough children's centre group consists of 10 children's centres serving 12,777 children aged under five years. On 30 September 2013, the children's centre group was outsourced to Mott Macdonald (trading as Cambridge Education) to manage on behalf of the local authority. The group has a central management team consisting of the head of service and four senior coordinators. Following the move to Mott Macdonald, the centres were re-organised into four clusters. Each cluster has an early years operational manager. There is a deputy early years operational manager in each centre. There are four teams of family service workers and assistants, with one team allocated to each of the four clusters.

Vicarage Way is the only centre that is not located on a school site. Each of the centres has registered early years provision managed by each children's centre. There are five full-service centres which offer full day care for children from birth to five years of age. The five graduated-service centres offer term-time sessional care for two-, three- and four-year olds. The full-day care on the Wexham Road site (full-service centre) is provided by a private provider. There is also sessional care provided by the centre on the Wexham Road site. The early years provision is inspected separately from the centres. Their reports can be found on the Ofsted website - [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). Children's skills and knowledge on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision are generally below those expected for their age.

Each of the centres has a children's centre forum that acts as the advisory board. The forums are mainly made up of partners. In a small number of centres, parents are also represented. Services are delivered in centre buildings and local community venues. There are health visitor clinics delivered from all 10 centres. Speech and language therapy services and family and community learning services are delivered in some of the centres, depending on local needs. During the inspection, Monksfield Way Children's Centre was closed for refurbishment work. During the period of refurbishment work, most services have been delivered in community venues and the early years provision has been delivered from the Penn Road Children's Centre site.

Slough has significant disadvantage in a number of areas, particularly around central Slough. There are significant pockets of disadvantage in all children's centre areas, except St Andrew's Way. The percentage of workless households in Slough is in line with the national average. Slough has a highly diverse community with over 50% of the population from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, with an increasing number of Polish families in the borough. Chalvey Grove, Elliman Avenue and Yew Tree Road have a number of families where no-one in the family speaks English. There are also small populations of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families within the borough.

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

- The local authority must improve the robustness of its collection, analysis and distribution of information and data, and the effectiveness of partnerships so that:
  - information and data are provided to the group by the local authority that are helpful, relevant and timely
  - partner agencies are sharing information and contributing towards the work of the children's centres
  - the group has robust performance measures and relevant targets based on an accurate picture of the number of children and families that fall into priority groups
  - children's social care effectively share information with the children's centres to ensure that families receive seamless support
  - the children's centre group can provide robust evidence of the effectiveness and impact of services they deliver.
- Ensure sufficient staffing levels so that the children's centre group can:
  - increase the registration and engagement rates of all families, especially those who are in target groups
  - develop outreach work that will enable families to gain a clear understanding of what centres have to offer
  - ensure there is an appropriate balance of both universal and target services preventing the centres from being seen as places where only troubled families go.
- Improve the effectiveness of governance arrangements at all levels to ensure:
  - there is sufficient challenge based on clear priorities and an understanding of the core purpose of children's centres
  - monitoring is based on effective tracking of impact, accurate performance measures and relevant targets
  - parents' views are included and considered by every forum.
- Improve the clarity and consistency of recording on case files by:
  - ensuring information about a family can be found in one place
  - clearly recording analysis of risk and decisions and the date on which referrals are received
  - sharing the good practice in case recording that is evident in some case files
  - ensuring that supervision always takes place within required timescales and informal opportunities to discuss cases are recorded
  - formalising the opportunities for staff to discuss different cases with their supervisor
  - ensuring all staff are held to account for the quality of their notes.
- Continue to develop effective systems that will allow leaders to:
  - gather useful information about attendance and engagement rates at centre activities and services and keep this information up to date
  - collate information from monitoring and evaluations, enabling them to demonstrate the impact of their work.

### Inspection judgements

#### Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- The local authority and partners are not ensuring that the group has the information it needs to accurately identify priority families within the Slough area. For example, health services are not sharing important information about children at risk of low birth weight, breast feeding rates and accidents involving children.
- The group is not able to identify accurately how many families from priority groups are regularly engaging with the centres' services. Where there are figures available, these show only a minority of

some priority groups are using services, for example Polish speaking boys at Orchard Avenue and children that speak minority languages at Chalvey Grove. The group has not met its own engagement targets for 2013–2014 for many priority groups. New systems have been introduced to improve the collection of information, but the database is not yet reliable.

- Partnerships with primary schools in the area are patchy and in most cases underdeveloped. Schools are not routinely sharing Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data or progress information. The group has worked hard to identify meaningful priority groups from Early Years Foundation Stage Profile outcomes. However, the lack of data sharing means they are unable to accurately identify the size of the priority groups or set precise engagement targets.
- Although staff vacancies have reduced since October 2013, there are currently 34 vacancies across the group, over half of which are being covered by temporary staff. The vacancies in the family services team in particular have impacted negatively on work in the community to improve registration rates, recruit volunteers and inform families about the kind of services the children's centres can offer.
- Increasing numbers of families have registered with the group since October 2013, although some centres are under used. Participation at some activities such as the 'walk and talk' session at Vicarage Way Children's Centre are particularly low.
- Family support workers are not supporting enough families known to social care professionals. This is because social workers are not routinely considering how children's centre services can complement their work with these families who might need extra help and support. However, children from these priority groups are attending the nursery provision and the centres provide safe and secure venues for contact visits.
- There are no ante-natal services delivered from centres and joint working with midwifery services is only just beginning. Because of the high numbers of families served by individual health visitors, they do not carry out pre-birth visits and have little time available on new birth visits to actively promote registration or explain centre services. As a result, the children centres are not reaching enough families who are expecting children and parents often do not find out about centres unless they attend a health visitor clinic or when their children start school.
- Where partners engage with the centres, understand their importance and value their knowledge, there are some positive outcomes. For example, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Roma outreach team acknowledges the part played by the children's centres in addressing some social issues regarding the Roma community in Slough.
- The speech and language therapy service delivers sessions from centres and sees them as essential to removing barriers to access for families by providing a local and child-friendly environment. It can clearly show how, by working with the centres, they are reaching increasingly greater numbers of families, with 191 attendances at these sessions between September and December 2013.
- Where home visits take place they are proving effective at targeting support for families in most need, such as those in temporary accommodation. There is good access to satellite library services situated in centres, with increasing interest and usage by parents and children. The high take up of two-year-old funded early education places is ensuring some of the most disadvantaged children are accessing the help they need.

### The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- Systems to monitor the quality and impact of services are ineffective. Some parents are asked to complete evaluations of courses, programmes and services. However, these are not carried out routinely across all services and are not collated to provide an overview of the overall effectiveness of what the group provides. As a result, the group does not know whether all services and programmes are beneficial in making a positive difference to families' lives and reducing inequalities.
- Staff are not routinely using the systems that are in place to track and measure the impact of the group's family service work on outcomes for families that need additional support. Consequently, the group does not have robust information to demonstrate the overall effectiveness of its work with these families. However, some positive outcomes for individual families who are supported by family

service workers were seen in case files.

- The lack of information sharing between health services and the group means resources are not always used well to reach more families. For example, children's centres were not given relevant local information regarding children attending hospital accident and emergency services as a result of parents' lack of awareness around keeping children safe. This means the opportunity to provide a coordinated effort to inform parents about how to keep their children safe was lost.
- Children's social care services are not routinely sharing relevant information with the group to ensure that families experience seamless transitions and ongoing support between services. Procedures for children who step down from child protection plans are not yet secure and the group does not yet ensure that centre staff are proactive in gathering all the information needed to support families effectively.
- The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) holds regular advice surgeries across the centres, providing professional support in a range of legal, financial and housing-related matters. Support for families who have been unable to access benefits to which they are entitled is highly effective. However, the CAB does not routinely share information with centre leaders regarding the numbers of individuals seen and the impact of their work with families.
- Audits of family service case files, based on those carried out within the children's social care service, have been introduced, which is good. The group's audits found weaknesses in case recording and inspectors agree with these findings. In some cases, important information about the family is not all in one place. As a result, case files do not clearly tell the whole story of the family, in chronological order. For example, the date of referral, families' attendance at services, analysis of risk and evidence of decision making are not always clearly recorded.
- Leaders analyse children's attainment information at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, they do not routinely or systematically monitor or evaluate across all settings the rate of progress of children or groups of children, such as those with a disability or special educational need across the area. Consequently, leaders are not fully aware of the potential and actual underachievement of some priority groups of children.
- The increasingly consistent teaching of communication and language across all early years settings is having a positive impact on the achievement of children over time. Programmes provide targeted support and an increasingly effective focus on preparing children for school. As a result, many children who begin their time in early years settings with poor language and reading, writing and speaking skills have caught up with their peers by the time they start school.
- The parenting programmes delivered in the centres are helping parents gain significant confidence in their abilities and skills as parents. Parents told inspectors how attending courses had helped them to change their own behaviours and impacted positively on their child's enjoyment, learning and well-being. Courses are adapted quickly to meet emerging needs, for example a paediatric first aid course was delivered after an incident during a parenting course which had raised parents' anxieties about coping in an emergency.
- There is a wide range of adult and family learning opportunities provided across the centres, which are being accessed by an increasing number of learners. Much of the adult learning is aimed at developing skills in English and classes are popular. However, there is no systematic tracking of adults as they progress in their learning or of their journeys towards further education or employment.

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

Inadequate

- Governance is weak. The local authority does not have clear arrangements to monitor the group's performance. The process for setting targets for centre services is poor. These targets do not focus sufficiently on how well centres are delivering services that will improve outcomes for young children and their families, nor do they sufficiently consider the impact of centres in reducing inequalities. Current arrangements do not provide sufficient challenge or show a clear understanding of the performance of the group.

- Most members of the children's centre forums do not understand their governance role. As a result, they are not providing the monitoring and challenge needed to drive improvement across the centres. However, the forums do provide regular opportunities for partners to exchange information about local services and initiatives, gather information and share good practice. The number of parents attending forum meetings is very low so their views are inadequately represented.
- One forum member, who spoke to inspectors, expressed frustration at not having the necessary information available to drive improvement. The forum member explained, 'There is a perception that children's centre forums provide partners with things such as data and information. There is not a corresponding transfer of information the other way. Some people and agencies are protective of their information and there are individual people who feel that the children's centres do not deserve their information.'
- The lack of staff resources and the high number of vacancies continue to be an issue for the centres. These issues have impacted on the collection and collation of data, the number of families registered and the provision of services across the group. Leaders and managers have rightly prioritised service delivery. However, the under-occupancy of some centres has resulted in too strong a focus on targeted and specialist services, so that centres are seen by some parents as places where only troubled or 'difficult' families go.
- The local authority has not sufficiently developed strategic partnerships and information sharing with health services, including midwifery services. Other partnerships are also underdeveloped, including those with children's social care, adult learning, Jobcentre Plus and some primary schools. As a result, centres do not receive useful information and data to help them assess needs across the community. This inhibits the centres' work with the most vulnerable children and families, including those who are subject to child protection plans.
- Partners value the group's provision highly. For example, both the Citizens Advice Bureau and East Berkshire and South Buckinghamshire Women's Aid use rooms within the children's centres to deliver services, and these are provided at no cost. However, partnerships are not effective as partners do not contribute towards the work of the children's centres in return, or routinely share information about families with centre leaders.
- The head of service is experienced and has an understanding of how to bring about the necessary improvement. She is supported by a credible management team and committed staff. There are some well-thought-through initiatives in place, such as the development of a database and the bespoke packages of adult and family learning. However the group development plan does not pull together the key priorities for the centres, and accurate performance measures and relevant targets have not been set.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures, including safer recruitment, are comprehensive and well understood and implemented across the centres. Staff have a good knowledge of their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding children and appropriate safeguarding training is attended regularly by all workers and managers.
- Discussions about individual families between managers and family service workers are not always taking place frequently enough. When there are opportunities to discuss cases, these are not being recorded systematically.
- Joint observations conducted with centre leaders were positive and highlighted their effective observational skills, along with their ability to assess performance and impact accurately. Regular observations of performance are carried out in the linked early years provision and the outcomes of these observations are discussed with staff, to help them improve their practice.

**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.

**Select details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	80341
<b>Local authority</b>	Slough Borough Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	424828
<b>Managed by</b>	Mott Macdonald (trading as Cambridge Education) on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	12,777
<b>Head of service</b>	Jean Cameron
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01753 476566
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:Childrens.centres@slough.gov.uk">Childrens.centres@slough.gov.uk</a>

**This group consists of the following children's centres:**

- Monksfield Way
- Orchard Avenue
- St. Andrew's Way
- Penn Road
- Wexham Road
- Chalvey Grove
- Elliman Avenue
- Romsey Close
- Vicarage Way
- Yew Tree Road

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