

Gloucester North Locality Children's Centre Group

Sinope Street, Gloucester GL1 4AW

Inspection dates 11–13 February 2014

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 group of centres requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Not enough families use centre services, particularly in from the catchment areas of Kingsholm and Elmbridge.
- Parents do not formally contribute to how the centre is run or participate in advisory board meetings.
- Systems of evaluation and monitoring used to check the centre's work are not good enough to ensure all services are effective and useful.
- The centre's work to help families live healthily is not good enough, and too many children are obese, especially in the Bartongate and Finlay and Tredworth areas.
- Some children do not do well in their learning and development, which means they are not fully ready for school.

The children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Leaders have accurate information about the needs of families who live in their catchment areas and they use this to identify where and how to plan services.
- Sessions for parents and children, such as 'Play and Learn' or baby massage classes, are of good quality, and those who attend enjoy their time at the centres.
- There is a suitable range of services to help adults who are looking for further education and employment.
- Staff work well with health and social care colleagues to give good individual support to those families most in need.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the group's strengths and weaknesses, and have put suitable steps in place to make improvements.

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with leaders, managers, and staff. They spoke with parents and centre volunteers, as well as representatives from the local authority, the charity 4Children, and a number of partner organisations. They met with the Chairperson and members of the Partnership Advisory Board. Inspectors visited each of the four centres and observed a range of their work, including play, health and adult education sessions. They accompanied centre staff on two outreach visits and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

The inspection covered the following centres:

Bartongate Children's Centre
Finlay and Tredworth Children's Centre
Kingsholm Children's Centre
Elmbridge Children's Centre.

Inspection team

Susan Mann, Lead Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Steffi Penny

Her Majesty's Inspector

Megan Dauksta

Additional Inspector

Georgina Beasley

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

In April 2013, Gloucestershire reorganised its children's centre provision, grouping some centres together. Gloucestershire North Locality Children's Centre Group consists of four main centres. These are Bartongate, Finlay and Tredworth, Kingsholm, and Elmbridge Children's Centres. The local authority has overall responsibility for the delivery of children's centre services, and the charity 4Children has directly managed the group of centres on the local authority's behalf since April 2013. Bartongate and Finlay and Tredworth Children's Centres were established in phase one of children's centre development and Kingsholm and Elmbridge in phase two. The children's centre group delivers a range of services to meet the core purpose, including early years childcare provision and health services. A number of private, voluntary and independent providers deliver childcare for local families as well as onsite Early Education Centres: these early years settings have their own individual inspections and reports.

There are 2375 eligible children aged under five years living in the locality's catchment area. Overall in the group's reach area, most families are of White British origin. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of families from Eastern European background who live in the catchment area. Most recent data available to the group indicate that a few (8.6%) families come from Black and Ethnic groups. There is a high level of mobility within some areas, notably the Bartongate area, with large numbers of families moving in or out of the area. Within the group's catchment area, just over one fifth of children under the age of five are from workless households. There are some variations within the individual centre areas. All catchment areas except that of Elmbridge are located in areas defined as the most 30% economically deprived nationally, with Elmbridge defined as in the 70% least deprived. Children's levels of learning and development are variable when they enter early years provision, but generally these are below expected levels.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of families who use centre services so that at least a large majority of those most in need regularly use and benefit from them.
- Work with partners, including local schools, to:
 - help the large majority of children from families in most need make good progress in their learning and development so they are ready for school
 - develop systems to track how well children do once at school, to establish the long-term effects of their use of centre services.
- Work in partnership with health services to reduce the proportion of childhood obesity by providing effective support and useful sessions that are well attended.
- Improve systems used to monitor the group's effectiveness by:
 - rigorously supervising of all aspects of staff's work, including case files and session and course evaluations, so all services are of a consistently high quality
 - refining existing systems used to measure the difference services make to families and using this information to monitor their usefulness
 - sharpening delivery and development plans to show clear targets so staff know exactly what they must strive for, and know when the aims have been achieved.
- Develop leadership arrangements so parents have formal channels to contribute to governance of the group.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Leaders and staff know the catchment area well, but do not yet work with enough families in need to be judged good. The centres have done well to increase levels of overall attendance in recent

years so that a large majority of all local families use services. However, only half of families identified by the centres as priority families use them and so many of those most in need do not benefit from what centres have to offer.

- The use of services by families in need varies between each centre and type of need. The group successfully works with the large majority of families living in some of the poorest areas in the catchment, and with the large majority of identified households in Finlay and Tredworth, for example. A number of families with Eastern European backgrounds attend regularly. However, the group works with only the majority of workless households in Bartongate; in Kingsholm and Elmbridge areas, fewer families attend centre services.
- The information about the local area provided by the local authority helps pinpoint families who are in most need of support, such as those from workless households and lone parents. Therefore, leaders are well informed about which families would benefit from using services. However, information about families from Black and Ethnic groups is not specific to each catchment area and is further complicated by high numbers of families who move in and out of some areas, which limits leaders' comprehensive understanding of the area.
- Staff know the most vulnerable local families, including those most difficult to reach, through working closely together with health and social care colleagues. They share information, advice and planning to ensure these families receive sustained and regular support. This leads to productive and useful home visits and individual work that helps these families live safer and healthier lives.
- Access to good quality early years provision for two-year-old children eligible for free places is not yet good, and only the large majority take their place. In some areas, there is not enough provision and places are over-subscribed. Most three-year-old children take up their funded early years places, which supports improved learning and development.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Services are planned to meet families' needs and there is a broad range of appropriate sessions and activities available, including health sessions, parenting courses and play-based groups, such as the midwife clinic and 'Let's Talk'. However, it is not always clear how effective services are in helping families to show they are good. The impact of the centre's services is not yet good because not enough families who are most in need attend sessions regularly.
- Emotional care and practical help are given to families needing high levels of individual support. However, recording of services, what the aims and results are, and how well parents are involved in the process are not routinely carried out with sufficient detail to provide accurate case file records. Staff have good knowledge of cases and share information, but records do not reflect practice well enough to make sure services for families are wholly efficient and effective.
- Families develop generally healthier lifestyles through attending the centres: many attend onsite baby clinics and sessions such as baby massage and 'Bumps to Babies'. However, the work done with health staff and sessions held to promote healthy eating, including family breakfast and lunch clubs, has not made enough difference. The number of children classed as obese is above county levels in all areas, and well above national levels in the Bartongate and Finlay and Tredworth areas.
- The quality of sessions for all families and for those most in need is generally good. Parenting sessions are well attended. Staff are good role models and teach parents how to make the most of play-based activities in sessions such as 'Play and Learn', although there are few resources available that reflect the different languages and cultures represented by families attending. Staff and parents spend time reflecting on the benefit of sessions, but evaluations are not reliable to show the improvements made during time spent at the centre.
- Most children are given sound support to be ready for school. However, their progress is not routinely tracked by centres to show improvements and gaps in their learning.
- Work with the speech and language therapist team and other providers such as the Child Development Centre helps children who are disabled and those with special educational needs to be well prepared for school. Parents and schools have a good understanding of children's needs. This ensures a successful start to school life for these children.

- The group works well with a number of partner organisations to deliver a broad range of adult learning and welfare advice opportunities that help families improve their own circumstances. Many of these services and sessions, such as budgeting, debt advice and support in seeking employment, have only started within the last six months, and so the successes of these activities is only just beginning to show. Several adults benefit from the developing volunteer programme: they gain valuable experience and a few have moved into paid employment in administration and childcare, for example..

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership, governance and management require improvement to be good because some processes are not fully operational, and some are too new to judge their effectiveness, following the reorganisation of centres last year.
- The local authority and 4Children provide effective governance and have a sound overview of the group's strengths and challenges. Improvements are already evident, such as increased numbers of families who use centre services. Delivery plans show appropriate objectives for improvement, but some points lack detail to show exactly what needs to be achieved.
- The partnership advisory board is in the early stages of development, having been set up last year. It has good attendance from a large number of partner organisations and is starting to perform its role well, although parent participation is not yet fully included. Informal parent views influence advisory board discussions, and parent forums are just beginning, but as yet there is no formal route for parents to influence governance directly.
- Systems to measure the positive difference services make, such as target wheels, are not yet working well. The progress made by adults and by children as a result of their use of services is not tracked often enough or with sufficient accuracy. This means the group cannot reliably demonstrate improvements to show the success of all services.
- Performance management arrangements are in place to help staff deliver good quality provision. However, checking of some systems, including case files and session evaluations, is not sufficiently thorough. Practice is inconsistent and some is of poor quality. Managers have not identified or addressed the areas for improvement.
- Arrangements for safeguarding and welfare are generally robust. Staff are trained and procedures prioritise the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable adults. Social care colleagues describe centre staff as 'vital' partners in their work and, as a result, children with child protection plans and those in need make good progress and are helped to stay safe. Early intervention is successful at limiting risks to children, and assessment processes ensure required services are put in place. Provision for those suffering the effects of domestic abuse is good, with individual support and group sessions that help adults identify and positively manage their circumstances.
- Partnership working is developing well. The centres have developed a number of fruitful partnerships with key partner agencies such as health, social care and adult learning services. They work closely with early years providers and some schools, but do not yet have clearly defined measures of how well prepared children are when they start school to ensure their services fully meet families' needs.
- Premises are of good quality, with enough space for a suitable range of daily sessions to meet local families' needs. There are sufficient services and resources to meet the needs of families and young children. Parents speak highly of the group's services and staff, and appreciate the safe and welcoming surroundings. For those families who use the centre, they have an enjoyable and positive experience.

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	80128
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	430092
Managed by	4Children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2375
Centre leader	Mary Welsh
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01452 417593
Email address	mary.welsh@4children.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20196 Bartongate Children's Centre
- 21170 Finlay and Tredworth Children's Centre
- 21849 Elmbridge Children's Centre
- 21695 Kingsholm Children's Centre

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

This template is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130186.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 130186

© Crown copyright 2014

