

Tonbridge and Malling 2

Burham Children's Centre, Bell Lane, Burham, Kent ME1 3SY

Inspection date 30 October – 1 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:		
Access to services by young children and families		Inadequate	4
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 children's centre group is inadequate. It is not good because:

- Too few families living in the area are registered with the children's centres in the group. Staff and partners are not making the most of available opportunities to advertise the group's services and register families. The registration form is a barrier as it is too long and time consuming.
- The group is not able to clearly demonstrate that its work is making a positive difference to families' lives in all areas of their work; for example, the progress of the low numbers of parents engaged in adult learning is not being tracked. New ways to monitor and evaluate the services the group delivers are being introduced.
- The new district advisory board is at an early stage of development. The group is working with the local authority engagement officer to make sure there is a wide enough range of partners and parents involved to increase the level of challenge provided.
- There have been too few opportunities for staff to undertake training to support them in their new roles. The supervision of community involvement workers, who are undertaking direct family support work with families, takes place regularly, but community involvement workers do not have regular access to supervision, advice and guidance from a qualified social worker.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- The new management team that has been in post since January 2013 has identified what needs to be done and its work is already clearly driving improvements. Newly appointed staff teams show an enthusiastic commitment to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable families. Parents and carers that spoke to inspectors were positive regarding the play experiences they attended.
- Young parents are benefiting from the group's joint work with the local Beat Project.
- Good quality group and direct work with families is being delivered by both community involvement workers and early years practitioners, which is developing parents' confidence, knowledge and understanding of their children's development.

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 part of this children's centre group are Burham, Larkfield, Snodland and South Tonbridge.

This inspection was carried out by an inspection team consisting of two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with managers including the children's centre network coordinator, the district manager responsible for children's centres in Tonbridge and Malling district, and the head of integrated children's services in the local authority. Interviews and meetings were held with partners from health, adult education, voluntary agencies, Jobcentre Plus and children's social care. Interviews with early years practitioners, community involvement workers, early help partners, parents, children's centre staff and representatives from commissioned services also took place.

The inspectors visited Burham, Larkfield, Snodland and South Tonbridge centres and activities held in Larkfield Library, Woodlands Children's Centre and Burham Village Hall.

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

Inspection team

Penny Fisher	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Christine Davies	Her Majesty's Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Additional Inspector
Graham Saltmarsh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Children's centres in Kent are currently under review and a consultation has recently closed, with the results expected early next year. Tonbridge and Malling District Children's Centres are part of an area model which also includes Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone. In January 2013 a model of working district wide was introduced, whereas, previously, centres had been working independently of each other. Within Tonbridge and Malling District there are currently eight children's centres; these have recently (April 2013) been reconfigured as two groups of children's centres. One group of four centres, Tonbridge and Malling 2, is the subject of this inspection. The group consists of two phase two and two phase three centres. There is no registered on-site childcare provision. The centres are directly led and managed by the local authority, with governance through a district advisory board.

The group is meeting its core purpose through the delivery of a range of services including early and adult education, health services and family support. Burham centre shares the site of the local primary school and consists of a reception, office and one large room. Larkfield centre is one room in Brookfield Primary School, which is shared with the school. The Snodland centre shares space within a health clinic. The South Tonbridge centre is based in the community Teen and Twenty Building. Several of the venues used for activities require resources to be set up and packed away each time they are used. Snodland Children's Centre was previously inspected in March 2011 and was judged satisfactory. The other centres have not been previously inspected.

Tonbridge and Malling has a population of 120,805. Situated in West Kent, it is about 25 miles from London. The very large majority of the population is White British and there is a growing, but comparatively small, Polish community. Tonbridge and Malling is a relatively affluent district; however, there are a number of pockets of deprivation, such as Snodland East. The percentage of children under 16 years living in poverty in the district is 13.1%, which is lower than the Kent and national average. Kent County Council (KCC) figures (December 2012) show 3,624 children aged under five living within the locality served by this group of centres. Levels of worklessness and the number of families in receipt of benefits are below average for the county. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development in 2012 is good, with all areas performing above national and Kent averages. The group's self-evaluation identifies teenage parents, fathers, children and adults with disabilities, lone parents and workless households as their priority target groups.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Continue to build more effective working relationships with partners to ensure most families in the locality are registered and the large majority are engaging with the centres in the group, including children and families from identified target groups.
- Work with the local authority and partners to improve the quality and accessibility of the data available to the centre in order to ensure the centre can accurately plan and target services and measure the impact they are having on families' lives, including the tracking of all children's and adults' progress.
- Fully implement plans to establish the district advisory board in order to:
 - fully inform partners of the vision and priorities for the group
 - provide effective challenge and support to the group and drive its further improvement
 - ensure parents have the opportunity to be formally involved in the development and design of services.
- Ensure that community involvement workers receive further training, as required, to support them in their transition into their new family support role and have regular, improved access to supervision, advice and guidance from a qualified social worker.
- In partnership with adult learning providers and Jobcentre Plus, extend the opportunities for adult learning through the children's centres so that more parents have access to courses to develop their skills, gain qualifications and improve their employability.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- Despite some improvement this year, the latest data for September 2013 show the children's centres in Burham and Larkfield have only registered a minority of children under five, while Snodland and South Tonbridge have registered the majority. Children's centre group staff and partners are not making the best use of opportunities, such as community events and health clinics, to ensure that more families and children are registered. The lengthy registration form is an unnecessary barrier to increasing registrations for both families and staff.
- Too few families from the centres' target groups, such as disabled children, disabled parents and lone parent families, are registered and using services. The group has worked in partnership with a local school to engage the local settled Traveller population, but this has proved unsuccessful and the group has identified a need for outreach work delivered on the Traveller sites. However, the number of children under five on the sites is not known.
- The centres' access data show the number of children reached as a proportion of the number of children registered rather than as a proportion of children known to live in the locality. This means that figures do not clearly reflect a true picture of the group's performance. For example, the latest data at the Larkfield centre show a figure of 50% of children under five being reached by the centre. However, the centre has only reached 180 children out of approximately 788 children living in the locality.
- Low numbers of families in the locality have taken up their entitlement to free early education for vulnerable two-year-olds. The group has identified this issue and an appropriate action plan is in place. The group is currently identifying the availability of good quality places in the locality. The proportion of three- and four-year-olds taking up the free entitlement in the locality is not known.
- There are systems in place to monitor attendance at activities, but these are not capturing all relevant information, such as those attending the health clinics in South Tonbridge that are supported by the group's early years practitioners. Signposting, advice and guidance provided to parents are only now beginning to be captured and have not yet been collated.

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

- The early years practitioners have developed links with local schools, early years providers and community groups in order to raise awareness of the group's work, enhance the quality of provision and improve school readiness. The number of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is better than found nationally and across Kent as a whole. However, as yet, the group is not tracking all children's progress.
- Opportunities for adult learning, for example for literacy and numeracy to improve employability, are limited. The group is not ensuring that enough parents are accessing courses or tracking the progress of those that do. However, the young parents accessing the group run in conjunction with the Beat Project are positive regarding the course and the support they receive, which is improving their confidence and parenting skills.
- Data show that education and health outcomes for some families are improving, especially in the Burham area. However, there has been a significant increase in the number of emergency admissions to hospital of children in the Larkfield, Snodland and South Tonbridge areas. The data have informed the group's action planning; services to address the issues are being introduced, such as home safety visits. However, it is too soon to measure their impact on outcomes.
- The newly introduced district structure of planning for children's centre sessions assists early years practitioners to work collaboratively across the district. The quality of direct work with children and parents is good overall and inspectors saw some outstanding practice, such as the half term 'Bear Hunt' outreach activity at a local library.
- The group routinely receives good information about the needs of families that are allocated for individual family support through the established Common Assessment Framework, children's services assessment or early intervention team pathways. Inspectors saw some examples of intensive interventions leading to excellent outcomes for families.
- The quality of common assessment action planning has improved through systematic quality assurance. The most recent examples seen showed a reasonable standard of planning, with specific objectives in place.

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

- The new, well qualified management team is pivotal to the improvements that can be seen since January 2013. Following a period of turbulence and inadequate performance management, much work to bring about improvements has begun, which has included the development of an ambitious new vision; the restructuring, employing and building of new teams; and the introduction of new, appropriate systems for monitoring and evaluation.
- The group's performance is now being routinely monitored by the district manager through the annual conversation and regular meetings with senior managers. Detailed quarterly performance reports are scrutinised and have informed centre and district plans. Appropriate priorities have been identified and targets set, although they are not sufficiently precise.
- The teams are growing into their new roles and staff are committed and feel well supported. They are sharing professional expertise. However, community involvement workers are keen to undertake more training, particularly with regard to the family support work they are now undertaking. Resources are generally well managed and much work is being done to avoid duplication of services and to increase community capacity across the group.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are all in place. A named social worker has been recently allocated to the group. The single central record clearly shows that all workers have up to date checks in order to safeguard children. Three newly appointed volunteers are being asked to complete checks before they begin work at the centre, in accordance with policy. Premises are safe and secure and regular risk assessments are conducted.
- Children's centre staff work closely with social workers in child protection and child in need cases and appropriately take the lead for some families where a common assessment is in place. If

concerns escalate, community involvement workers ensure, through persistence and diligence, that cases are referred and re-referred appropriately and promptly.

- Staff working with the most vulnerable families are routinely supervised and have opportunities to discuss safeguarding concerns with their manager, in core groups or in Common Assessment Framework planning and review meetings. However, they do not yet have regular access to supervision, advice and guidance from a qualified social worker across the full range of their work.
- The balance of universal, specialist and targeted services has changed, with a greater focus on delivering specialist services for those most in need, which is an appropriate use of resources. The new district timetable, introduced in September 2013, with a loss of some universal sessions, has caused some consternation among some parents and professionals. The group has built in a system of consultation and review to ensure parents have the opportunity to share their views and be fully informed about any future changes.
- The accessibility and depth of data provided by Kent County Council has improved, but are not always accurate or timely. New birth data are about eight weeks out of date by the time they arrive at the centres and no information is shared by the midwifery service. This limits the group's ability to identify and inform parents and parents-to-be at the earliest opportunity.
- The refocused district advisory board has recently begun to monitor the performance of the children's centres, but this is not yet well established. New partners, including headteachers and housing agencies, have been identified and approached in order to ensure that a broader range of agencies is represented on the board. Parents have opportunities to express their views through regular parent forum weeks, but their formal involvement in the governance of the centre is an identified area for further development.
- Managers and staff are working hard to build capacity through forming effective partnerships with other agencies. Partnerships with health visitors, children's social care and some community groups are developing well. However, partnerships remain under developed with some agencies, notably adult learning providers and Jobcentre Plus.

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 group details

Unique reference number	80193
Local authority	Kent County Council
Inspection number	433039
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3624
Centre leader	Jane Higgins
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	01634 686472
Email address	Jane.Higgins@kent.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- Burham
- Larkfield
- Snodland
- South Tonbridge

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