

Bolton - North Area 2 Children's Centre Group

Starkie Road, Tonge Moor, Tonge Moor, Bolton, Lancashire, BL2 2ED

Inspection date 16–17 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	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 children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The data available to managers and governors for performance measurement are not complete, not always recent enough and are in too wide a variety of formats for ease of analysis.
- There is insufficient analysis of families who do not engage with the group's services and the measurement of the impact of some partnership working is insufficiently established.
- The preparation of children for school, while improving, is not good enough in the Tonge and Bright Meadows areas. Some key health indicators, such as for breastfeeding and child obesity, are not improving quickly enough.
- The management arrangements of the group is new, developing and has not yet had sufficient time to demonstrate that it can improve the quality of services quickly enough.
- Governance arrangements through the advisory boards require strengthening in particular by improving representation of key partners and parents.
- The procedures to collect, analyse and respond to parental feedback are underdeveloped.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- The group has been successful in year-on-year improvement of the percentage of families and young children accessing its services. Overall, the large majority now benefit from the work of the children's centres.
- Outreach work is particularly effective at improving access, sustaining contact and improving outcomes with specific groups of targeted families.
- Opportunities for parents to improve their education, employability and money management are wide-ranging and well signposted by the children's centres.
- Staff are well supported, trained and supervised in their work.
- The policies, procedures and arrangements to keep families and young children safe are good.

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 Tonge Children's Centre, Bright Meadows Children's Centre and Bromley Cross Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with governors of two of the advisory boards, the lead for the Bolton Area North 2 centres, the senior leadership team, centre staff, engagement and support workers and officers from the local authority. They also met health, education and early years partners, representatives from Jobcentre Plus, Bolton at Home and Homestart. They looked at the self-evaluation reports and development plans of the three centres, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures and a range of other relevant documentation. Visits to activities were undertaken jointly with relevant members of staff which included discussions with parents. Senior staff also attended all the inspection team meetings.

Inspection team

Maxine Mayer	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Deborah Udakis	Her Majesty's Inspector
Michael White	Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Bolton – North Area 2 Children's Centre group operates across three centres, located just a few miles apart. The Tonge and Bright Meadows centres are based in local community venues and the Bromley Cross centre in the Bromley Cross library.

The strategic direction and day-to-day running of the group is the responsibility of the local authority. The centres, until April 2013, were operated on an individual basis. They were merged for management purposes to form the Bolton – North Area 2 group. Governance for the group is provided by three separate advisory boards representing each centre. Plans are at an advanced stage to appoint one board for the group.

The group serves three communities, Tonge and Bright Meadows are in areas ranked within the 10% most deprived areas nationally. The third area, Bromley Cross, serves a community of relative affluence. The residents in the reach area are predominantly White British but the proportion of families from minority ethnic groups is increasing and, at the time of the inspection, around 17% of children registered with the group are from minority ethnic heritage.

Unemployment rates, benefit claims and the proportion of adults working in elementary levels of jobs are high in the Tonge and Bright Meadows areas compared to both Bolton and national rates but much lower and below Bolton and national rates in the Bromley Cross area. Approximately half of the population in Tonge and Bright Meadows have no qualifications and just over a quarter in Bromley Cross.

Family support workers operate from all three sites. Health services are provided on-site at Tonge and Bright Meadows and at a venue close by to Bromley Cross. Most adult education and employment/benefit advice is provided by 'Bolton at Home' community venues.

Early years provision is provided through a number of early years settings, school nursery classes and local childminders. Children generally enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities that are below those expected for their age. The primary schools and early years settings in the locality were not part of this inspection as they are inspected separately. The reports are available on the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Further the development of the data available to managers by:
 - ensuring that performance data are current and up to date for all services offered, particularly in public health
 - ensuring data are presented in consistent formats for ease of analysis
 - making available, wherever possible, standardised data packs by the local authority on a quarterly basis.
- Ensure that the group can measure its impact on the lives of families and children under five for all of the practice and services that it offers. Particularly, undertaking a review and developing and implementing strategies for those families who do not engage with its services and working with partners to ensure that the impact of partnership working can be measured.
- Further improve the collection and analysis of parental feedback in order to improve services.
- Further improve breastfeeding rates and reduce child obesity in Reception Year at school by building on established key partnerships and raising awareness through further promotional activities.
- Improve further the readiness of children for school in the Tonge and Bright Meadows areas by:
 - ensuring that parent and child activities place a stronger emphasis on the development of children's learning
 - better promoting to parents the stages of development of children and the relationship between play and learning
 - ensuring that staff have better access to qualified Early Years Foundation Stage teaching practitioners in order to develop their practice
 - monitoring closely the impact of the new offer of nursery provision for two-year-olds.
- Strengthen governance arrangements by:
 - ensuring the new group advisory board has a wider representation of members particularly from partner organisations
 - increasing the participation of parents
 - ensuring that the outcomes of parental and child evaluations inform their discussions with group staff
 - enabling board members to have sufficient, easy-to-understand information to challenge dips in performance or services that are slow to improve.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The percentage of families and young children accessing services in the Bolton – North Area 2 children's centres group has improved year-on-year since 2009 but varies between centres. However, accurate and reliable data are not available for the area to accurately measure all access to services.
- The group is improving the sustained contact that it has with families after registration and overall the large majority of families regularly engage with services. The group works well with partners to identify those families in most need of its services. The work with the multi-agency risk assessment partnership is particularly effective at identifying families most in need of intervention and support.
- The effectiveness of outreach work of the children's centre group is improving the access to services of specific groups of targeted families. For example, the large majority of families from minority ethnic groups, teenage parents and lone parents access services.
- The group appropriately signposts parents to a range of services that improve their adult education, employability and enable access to benefits advice. This is predominantly to 'Bolton at Home'. However, the group has not yet established arrangements with this partner to measure the effectiveness of the referral process. Recent administrative staff training has enabled the group to improve its family information service and this has been well used by families in the last year.
- Overall data for the area identify that the group is improving health indicators but that health

initiatives require further improvement. For instance, breastfeeding rates are only slowly improving and are well-below Bolton and national rates. Child-obesity rates in Reception Year at school are well-above national rates. Data for families attending antenatal services and baby clinics show an increased level of families using these services but are not available in a format that is easily analysed.

- The take-up of the free entitlement to early education for three- and-four-year-olds is high. The group has analysed the requirement for families eligible for the two-year-old entitlement for 2013/14 and has identified a suitable range of good quality places.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The group provides a wide range of well-used services either at the centres or through signposting to partner organisations. Generally good quality early years provision is available across the group but, while children make good progress when they access these services, too few children are prepared well enough for school and teachers report there are too many instances of children starting school with underdeveloped language skills, still wearing nappies and using dummies. The group has not built on the lessons learnt from a pilot programme for free nursery places for two-year-olds.
- Well-regarded health services are provided on-site at Tonge and Bright Meadows and in a close-by community venue to Bromley Cross. However, health initiatives while improving immunisation and smoking cessation across the group have not sufficiently improved healthy lifestyles in Tonge and Bright Meadows.
- The group continually reviews the provision of services to ensure that these reflect the needs of the local communities. Services are targeted at providing activities that promote identified health issues and activities target families who are most in need. Good arrangements are made with Homestart to ensure that the work of the group is well supported by a well-trained and coordinated volunteer network.
- Outreach work is good. The group provides a three-tier support system and referrals to this support are high. Case-file reviews show that parents benefit from good quality early help to support them at times of difficulty. Records show that outcomes for these families are improving. Recent strategies to support families experiencing domestic violence have been highly effective in reducing the risk of harm to children.
- The quality of activities in the centres shows that relationships between staff and families are strong and trusting. Activities provided are highly enjoyable, suitable to the needs of children and outdoor play is a strong feature. However, too little attention is paid during these sessions to children's language and communication and parental understanding of child development and the relationship between play and learning.
- The range and availability of opportunities for parents to undertake courses of further education, training and personal development are good through the close working arrangements with 'Bolton at Home'. Training courses, information advice and guidance regarding job seeking and benefits advice are well promoted in the centres. However, managers and partners do not undertake sufficient analysis of the quality and impact of these services.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The local authority has a clear strategy in place for improving the lives of families living in Bolton and works well with partners to prioritise and plan the availability of services. The local authority has recently undertaken a major review of its children's centre services and some aspects relating to the merger and integration of the three children's centres in the reach area have been delayed while the outcomes of the review were known.
- Governance of the three children's centres is satisfactory. Board members meet frequently and have a good understanding of local needs and provide adequate challenge to centre and local authority staff. However, the advisory boards have a too narrow representation of services offered and

parents are also not well represented.

- Operational management is good. Staff are well supported, trained and supervised in their work in ensuring that the families most in need are well supported. The area works particularly well with a range of partners, including health and social care colleagues, in order to reduce the harm to children including those subject to child protection plans, looked after children and those who are most in need. Good use is made of the Common Assessment Framework in order to reduce harm and ensure that families have appropriate access to a range of services.
- Local working relationships with 'Bolton at Home' and Jobcentre Plus are well understood and provide good access to provision for families in order that they can improve their economic well-being. However, the group has not established how to effectively measure the impact of this joint work.
- Resources are well managed and allocated to the priorities of the local area. Complementary work of partners is used well to support the key challenges of the area, particularly to support homelessness, reduce unemployment and reduce the number of children at most risk of harm. However, the local authority took decisions not to provide access for staff to an Early Years Foundation Stage practitioner from 2011 and preparation of children for school in the Tonge and Bright Meadows centres has not improved from low levels.
- The collection and analysis of data are improving, particularly in the last year. However, the presentation of the data is confusing and is not always recent enough in order to provide sound evaluation. Action planning clearly identifies the priorities for the area and how these will be addressed but the target-setting within these plans are not specific enough or challenging enough in order to secure improvement particularly in activities which are persistently poorly performing.
- The views of parents using the centre are collected in order to secure improvements and parents consider that the group is responsive to their needs. While the procedures for collecting and analysing parental feedback have recently improved they remain underdeveloped.
- The policies, procedures and arrangements to keep families and young children safe are good. Staff are well trained and knowledgeable about how to assess risk and are reducing the risk of harm in families. The recent activities to promote the raising of awareness and reducing incidences of domestic violence are particularly effective.

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	80379
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	423334
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3360 children under five
Centre leader	Sue Yates
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	01204 336691
Email address	sue.yates@bolton.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- URN 23332, Tonge Children's Centre
- URN 20433, Bright Meadows Children's Centre
- URN 20462, Bromley Cross Children's Centre

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