

Bolton – South Area 1

Shaw Street, Bolton, Greater Manchester, BL3 6HU

Inspection date 22–23 October 2013

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

- While a majority of families from the target groups within the group's community are registered, only a minority of these are engaged in using centre services.
- There are not enough sessions within centres providing universal services to engage with and meet the needs of families who may need lower-level support.
- The progress of those adults signposted to adult education or training is insufficiently tracked to measure the impact and effectiveness of those services.
- Self-evaluation is overly descriptive and does not clearly identify strengths or areas for improvement and is not a key process in driving forward improvement.
- The targets set by leaders, managers and the local authority are not sufficiently challenging or measurable and milestones for their achievement are not clearly identified.
- Parents are not sufficiently involved in shaping and planning future services to meet their needs.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- The good use of consultation, referrals and outreach work to target those families identified as most in need.
- Children access good quality childcare provision.
- The strong partnerships with social care and health visitors.
- The effective improvement of children's development of communication and language skills by the centre leader for the group, by supporting the early year's settings within the reach.

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. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Great Lever Children's Centre, Harvey Children's Centre and Orchards Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with group leaders, representatives from the local authority and advisory board, centre staff, partner agency representatives, parents and centre users. The inspectors visited the three main children's centre sites and Newbury Community Centre, a provider of adult education and training. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation such as self-evaluation and development plans, safeguarding policies and procedures, a sample of case files and cases studies. Senior staff attended all the inspection team meetings.

Inspection team

Michael White, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kathryn Gethin	Her Majesty's Inspector
Parm Sansoyer	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Bolton – South Area 1 Children's Centre group was formed in April 2013 from the Harvey, Great Lever and Orchards Children's Centres, located approximately two-and-a-half miles apart. The strategic direction and day-to-day running of the group is the responsibility of the local authority with a shared leadership team across the group managed by a head of centre. Governance for the group is provided by the local authority with a single advisory board serving the group.

Harvey and Great Lever Children's Centres are based in communities ranked within the top 20% for deprivation nationally, and the Orchards Children's Centre is based in a community within the 70% most deprived areas nationally. The residents across the reach area are predominantly of minority ethnic heritage with Pakistani and Indian groups accounting for approximately 40% of the residents. Unemployment rates, families on benefits and the proportion of residents without any qualifications are high compared to both Bolton and national rates.

'Children and Families' workers are based at each centre. Harvey and Orchard centres both have midwifery teams based in each centre with Harvey Children's Centre also having a health-visiting team based within it. Most adult education and employment advice is provided by 'Bolton at Home' community venues.

There are 3317 children aged under five years living in the area. Children enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities below those typically expected for their age. Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the area is provided by a mixture of local childminders, early years private and voluntary settings and school-based provision. Great Lever Children's Centre has a privately managed on-site nursery provision and Harvey Children's Centre has a local authority on-site nursery provision. These settings were not part of this inspection as they are inspected separately. The reports are available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Work with partners, parents and other stakeholders to develop innovative ways of delivering provision to ensure an appropriate balance of universal and targeted services and increase the number of families benefitting from these services.
- Work with partners to develop effective processes to closely monitor those adults signposted to education, training and employability services to ensure the effectiveness of the arrangements in improving English, mathematics and other employability skills.
- Ensure that self-evaluation and local authority performance management are fully effective as the key drivers for quality improvement with clear and measurable targets and close monitoring of progress towards achievement.
- Provide the advisory board with timely and appropriate performance data, and train them in their analysis, to enable the board to fulfil its function of providing rigorous support and challenge.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- As a result of local authority strategic decisions and service reviews, centres' services are strongly focused on meeting the needs of targeted families and children. This has resulted in an imbalance between the provision of universal and targeted services and lower participation and attendance levels across the group.
- Using the detailed data provided by the local authority, and through good partnership working, the proportion of those families registered by the group's centres has improved year on year with a large majority currently registered.
- Overall, only a minority of families is engaged in services. Across the target groups, a large majority is registered and engaged. The engagement with pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers is very effective, although only a minority of lone parents and fathers is engaged.
- Consultation, referral and outreach work are used well to target those families who are identified as most in need, such as those subject to a child protection plan and looked after children.
- Systems for monitoring access to services, attendance and participation are appropriate. However, leaders are not effectively measuring the impact of all services to ensure their efficiency and value for money. For example, the effectiveness of café provision in each of the centres on increasing the usage of other services.
- Most children of families from targeted groups take up the three- and four-year-old free entitlement to nursery education through the centre's own provision or through the centre helping families to find other good-quality provision. Following a slow start within Bolton, just under half of two year olds are now benefitting from their entitlement to free nursery provision. The centres have worked with partners to further increase nursery provision to meet the increased demand for two-year-old children.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Partnership working is strong and work has taken place to avoid any duplication of service and to provide a seamless approach to supporting families and children. Effective multi-agency working ensures the early identification of families and children's needs and the arrangement of the most appropriate type of support. Centre staff provide effective support for those families who need the most help. However, the impact of some of the key work done with families is not yet being sufficiently measured, including universal and targeted services.
- The quality of the early years provision in the area is good and providers are well supported. Although the gap between the 20% lowest achievers and the rest has slightly narrowed, only a small minority of children are working within age-related expectations when they start school. To address this, a communication and language initiative has been implemented and is already proving successful, with children making significant progress in their learning and development. Investment in staff training has enabled 'Communication Champions' to be established.
- The 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' provision is well attended. Parents clearly benefit from the experience, developing a much better understanding of health issues and how to keep their children safe.
- Assessment of need, case files and records are maintained to a good standard and are up to date. Records clearly show the short time period between the group receiving the referral and contact being made which improves life chances and reduces inequalities.
- Currently, there is an adequate range of activities that promote healthy lifestyles. Although the group does not have specific health targets, frequent multi-agency information sharing and planning meetings are used to plan and monitor centres' contributions to health campaigns and meeting identified needs in the area. Health data generally show the reach areas to be in-line with Bolton averages and obesity and breastfeeding are rightly identified as priority areas.
- Unemployment and low levels of qualifications are key challenges for adults within the communities

served. Partnerships with local providers provide appropriate signposting to education, training and employability opportunities within community venues. However, the centres are not able to measure the impact of these arrangements as participation and outcomes data are not sufficiently shared.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The children's centre group has recently gone through a period of significant change as a result of service reviews by the local authority leading to a reduction in the number of staff. This has impacted on the range of services the centres are able to offer and, in particular, the balance of universal and targeted services provided. Leadership and management are currently identifying and evaluating different ways of delivering the services to maintain an appropriate offer, although this has not yet been formulated into a coherent strategy.
- A joint advisory board has very recently been established. Board members have a good understanding of the challenges facing the children's centre group and are clear about their responsibilities for both supporting and challenging group performance. However, they are not routinely provided with sufficient data about all aspects of the centres' work to enable sufficient challenge to drive forward improvement.
- The group rapidly moved to producing a single self-evaluation and quality improvement plan following the group's formation in April 2013. However, the self-evaluation does not sufficiently reflect the management's good understanding of its strengths, areas for improvement and actions to be taken to address these. The report is overly descriptive and judgements are not clear. The quality improvement plan's targets are not consistently specific and measurable and longer-term actions lack clear milestones to measure progress towards their achievement.
- Staff supervision is carried out frequently and staff appreciate the opportunity to share information on caseloads and seek support where necessary. Local authority performance management of the centres' head has been less effective and not sufficiently rigorous. This process has recently been changed but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the new arrangements.
- Appropriate systems are in place to find out if families are satisfied with the centres. Until recently, parents' forums have been active in contributing to the range of activities delivered within centres. However, these have been less effective in recent months and parents feel they have had less involvement in the changes to services following the recent local authority service review.
- Staff are appropriately qualified and have a good range of expertise and experience that is used well to support colleagues. Accommodation provides a welcoming environment for families and is appropriately resourced. However, as recognised by the centres, the recently reduced services delivered within centres has led to some under-utilisation of centres' accommodation.
- Suitable safeguarding policies and procedures are in place including the use of mobile telephones and e-safety. The local authority provides a good range of mandatory and optional training and staff have a good working knowledge of safeguarding procedures. Close partnership working with services, such as social services and health, contributes to keeping children subject to a child protection plan, looked after children and others whose circumstances make them vulnerable, safe from harm.

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	80146
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	424734
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3317
Centre leader	Jayne Brazil
Date of previous inspection	Not previous inspected
Telephone number	01204 337390
Email address	jayne.brazil@bolton.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 21298 Great Lever Children's Centre
- 21393 Harvey Children's Centre
- 23230 The Orchard's Children's Centre

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