

# Oldham District - East Oldham Cluster

Leamington Street, Littlemoor, Oldham, Lancashire OL4 2RN

**Inspection date** 18–20 September 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b> Previous inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
		Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
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:

- Not enough children gain a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The achievement gap of the lowest performing 20% of children is not narrowing fast enough.
- Recording is insufficiently detailed in some children's files.
- Processes are insufficiently formalised to capture and use parents' feedback to inform quality improvement.
- Targets set by leaders, governance and the local authority are insufficiently challenging or specific to drive forward a rapid pace of improvement.

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

- Good partnership working to identify and register the young children and families within the area.
- Overall, the large majority of families and young children in the communities served benefit from the work of the children's centres.
- The contribution it makes towards reducing unemployment in the Oldham East district.
- The district advisory board's clear focus on challenging and supporting the centre's work.
- Well-qualified staff with a good range of experience and expertise to support families' and children's needs.

## 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 Spring Meadows Children's Centre, Beaver Children's Centre and St James' Children's Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with governors of the advisory board, the lead for the Oldham District - East Oldham Cluster, 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 and representatives from Jobcentre Plus. They looked at the self-evaluation report and development plan, a sample of case files, safeguarding procedures and a range of other relevant documentation. The inspectors visited the three main children's centre sites and some visits to activities were undertaken jointly with relevant members of the staff. Senior staff also attended all the inspection team meetings.

## Inspection team

Michael White	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Linda McLarty	Her Majesty's Inspector
Philip Ellwand	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

Oldham District – East Oldham Cluster Children’s Centre group operates across three centres, approximately three miles apart. All three centres are located on school sites. Spring Meadows Children’s Centre is on the site of Littlemoor Primary School, Beaver Children’s Centre is located on the site of Beaver Primary School and St James’ Children’s Centre is based at St Thomas (Moorside) Primary School.

The day-to-day running of the East Oldham Cluster is the responsibility of Action for Children as part of a commissioning arrangement with the local authority that has been in place since April 2012. Prior to this, each centre was managed by the governing body of the individual school where they are based. The local authority officially transferred to a district model for children’s centre service delivery in April 2013. The district lead for the East Oldham Cluster is line-managed by Action for Children. A single district advisory board has been in place since April 2013.

The group serves three communities, which are predominantly areas ranked within the 30% most deprived areas nationally. There are 3,200 children aged from birth-to-four-years living in the reach area. East Oldham has a relatively high level of worklessness and families claiming benefits compared to Oldham overall. In two of the three communities a high proportion of people do not have any qualifications. The proportions of families representing minority ethnic groups varies significantly in the communities served, from almost 50% in one community to less than 5% in one other.

Early years provision is provided through a number of early years settings, school nursery classes and childminders within the locality. Spring Meadows and Beaver Children’s Centres have on-site childcare provision managed by the local authority. Children generally enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities that are below those expected for their age, especially in communication and language and personal, social and emotional development. The primary schools and nearby early years settings were not part of this inspection as they are inspected separately. The reports are available on the Ofsted website at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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

- Working with the local authority, improve the readiness of a greater proportion of children for school by continuing to improve the quality of early years provision across all sectors.
- Improve the quality of recording in case files so that they provide an accurate record of decision-making, with clearly described roles and responsibilities, reference to case supervision arrangements and provide more precise targets against which progress can be measured.
- Increase families’ contributions to shaping and improving services and activities by:
  - increasing family representation on the district advisory board
  - implementing more formal and systematic processes for getting and using families’ feedback as part of quality-improvement activity.
- Ensure targets at all levels are sufficiently challenging and specific to promote rapid improvements.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

**Good**

- The centres work well with the local authority and other partner agencies to identify the young children in their areas and those in the most need of support. This good local knowledge is further extended through active collaboration with local community groups and the good work of volunteers from the centres. The centres register most families residing within their communities and establish good contact during antenatal and baby clinic sessions at the centres, introducing families to a wide range of relevant services.
- Overall, the children's centres have sustained contact with the large majority of young children. Centre staff are working hard to increase participation in those pockets where the proportion actively engaged is lower. The centres use a range of approaches to maintain contact, and re-engage, with families who do not regularly use their services, by using telephone calls and door knocking where necessary.
- The home visits made at set stages in children's lives enable better assessments and discussions with families so that they can be better guided to the services they need. As an example, the increase in visits to targeted families to explore their entitlement to free early education has identified families where early support for additional needs has improved their ability to make progress.
- The large majority of three- and four-year-old children take up their entitlement to free early years education. Although the capacity to provide the free entitlement for two-year-old children is currently sufficient the centres recognise the need, and have a clear strategy in place, to further increase the capacity to meet increased future demand.

### The quality of practice and services

**Requires improvement**

- The centre staff and Early Years team know the quality of provision in the area well and have precisely targeted plans to bring about improvement in the weaker settings, through on-going support and annual monitoring visits. A number of recent initiatives have improved the quality of provision in the private, voluntary and independent sectors, and improved the quality of provider understanding, although there is still a need for further training on child development in some of the weaker settings.
- The already strong partnership working has recently been formalised with the introduction of the family panel, a group firmly focused on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded families in the community, providing a prompt, integrated response to their needs. The panel aims to hold each partner to account, and expects each partner agency to provide measurable evidence of impact of their contribution to improving outcomes for the families in the target groups.
- Unemployment and low levels of qualifications are key challenges for adults in the communities served by the centres. Partnerships with local adult education providers are well developed and provide good opportunities for personal development. Most adults who seek to gain their first ever qualifications do so successfully. The centres contribute well to borough-wide initiatives resulting in a significant decrease in unemployment in the East Oldham District.
- Only a small minority of children in the East Oldham area gain a good level of development by the end of their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage, although there was a steady rise in achievement from 2009 to 2012. However, the centres provided convincing evidence that recent initiatives have helped children in East Oldham to make rapid progress in the prime areas of learning and in literacy.
- The achievement gap by the end of Reception Year is narrowing for Oldham overall, but is still wider than national proportions. The proportion of children in the areas served by the centres who are in the lowest 20% of performers is reducing slightly, but in St. James' ward this number is rising.
- The centres' data suggest that they will meet the health targets set for 2013 by the end of the reporting year. However, the centres were not set health targets last year so cannot demonstrate their impact on health outcomes over time.

- The good quality of the centres' early intervention and support for the families whose circumstances make them most vulnerable is not always reflected in the quality of case files and records. Targets and intended outcomes sometimes lack sufficient detail, making it difficult to measure what progress has been made. In some files, there is too little detail to explain the decision-making process, and a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities.

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

### **Requires improvement**

- The local authority has a clear vision and strategy to develop a fully integrated structure to meet the needs of the children aged from birth-to-four years and their families in Oldham. Children's centres are central to this strategy and the East District Cluster is already benefitting from having local authority staff now located in their centres thereby increasing both the efficiency and effectiveness of their deployment.
- Since April 2013, the district lead has worked hard, and rapidly moved the three centres to work together as a group. A single self-evaluation report and quality improvement plan provide a clear steer for the development of the group as a whole. Staff are benefitting from more use of common processes and the sharing of practice and expertise between centres. This helps to ensure that families using the children's centres' services have a common quality of experience.
- The district advisory board is very clear about its role and is already providing a good level of challenge and support to the work of the centres. It is chaired by a parent and has representatives from across the key partners. However, it does not have wider representation of families from across the centres. The Chair is very clear that to be effective it needs to have a hands-on approach. Although early in its implementation, he has already introduced unannounced visits to centres to observe practice and hold meetings with families and staff, resulting in reports on the quality of provision.
- The self-evaluation report provides an accurate view of the provision's strengths and areas for improvement, although some grades are overly optimistic. The quality improvement plan identifies appropriate actions and senior staff frequently meet to monitor the progress being made. However, the targets are not always sufficiently challenging or specific. Parents feel that their views are actively sought and opinions are taken seriously. However, this is overly reliant on informal discussion and more formalised methods for getting feedback for quality improvement are not sufficiently developed.
- Action for Children has strong policies, practices and procedures for keeping children and families safe. Close partnership working with services such as social services and health contributes to keeping children subject to child protection plans, looked after children and others whose circumstances make them most vulnerable, safe from harm. However this strong practice is not always reflected in the quality of the records maintained in children's files. Training to address this has taken place and additional work is planned to further embed improved recording practice.
- Staff are well qualified and have a wide range of expertise and experience that is used well to support colleagues. Staff benefit from good continuous professional development, ensuring they are ready to meet changing user-needs. Accommodation is welcoming and resourced well, which is appreciated by the users. As recognised by the centres, greater delivery in the home and through community-based venues to better meet users' needs has led to some under-utilisation of centre accommodation.

**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.

**Children's centre group details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	80031
<b>Local authority</b>	Oldham
<b>Inspection number</b>	424805
<b>Managed by</b>	Action for Children on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	3,200
<b>Group manager</b>	Julie Hayes
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	No previous group inspection
<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 770 8800
<b>Email address</b>	julie.hayes@actionforchildren.org.uk

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

- URN 22817 Spring Meadows Children's Centre
- URN 20253 Beever Children's Centre
- URN 22894 St James' Children's Centre

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