

Worcestershire - Bromsgrove Group

c/o Sunny Fields Children's Centre, Charford First School, Littleton Avenue, Charford, Bromsgrove, B60 3FG

Inspection dates	10–12 June 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected as a group

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not applicable	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This group of centres is good.

- Nearly three quarters of young children from the reach area, including a high proportion of particularly vulnerable families living in the most disadvantaged communities, access the group's services.
- Family support work is well targeted at those who most need early help, and the strong network between professionals results in good quality, well-integrated and timely services being provided.
- Children benefit from the group's good quality practice and well-planned services such as 'Sing and Move' and 'Talking Tots' which helps build confident communication skills and prepare well for school.
- A high number of parents gain from programmes such as 'Family Links' which enhance their parenting skills.
- Partnership work, especially with health professionals, is well developed and reflected positively in children's and families' good health outcomes.
- Those responsible for leadership and governance know the group well as a result of their close monitoring of its performance. Together they are ensuring that families receive 'business as usual' services during the final two months of the current contract.

It is not outstanding because:

- Only a minority of workless families are using the group, and the services available to enhance their employability are too narrow.
- Systems to track the impact of centre services on vulnerable children's learning and development in the short and longer term are not fully effective.
- Some case files are rather disorganised and do not reflect the good quality of family support.

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

- Establish a strategy to increase the number of workless families who take up appropriate opportunities that enhance their skills, employability and economic well-being, and track the progress they make in achieving personal goals.
- Set up a rigorous monitoring system to measure the impact of the group's services on improving the learning and development of target children who attend centre activities and keep a check on how well they achieve relative to their peers by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Strengthen case files by ensuring that all are of the best quality and show clearly that any actions flagged for improvement are followed up.

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 four Additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the group's managers, staff, local authority officers, social care, health, speech and language, housing and education professionals, partner agencies, outreach workers, early years practitioners, volunteers and representatives from the advisory board.

The inspectors visited all five children's centres in the group to observe a range of activities and also attended sessions held in clinics, libraries and at outreach venues located at Belbroughton and The Ark, Alvechurch.

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

Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Nina Bee	Additional inspector
Karen Cooper	Additional inspector
Maureen Deary	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre group

Worcestershire - Bromsgrove Group consists of five centres, four of which (Tulip Tree, Sunny Fields, Conkers and Pear Tree) have a base from which services are directly delivered. The remaining centre (Cottonwood) covers a more rural area, has an office based at a local library and runs outreach services to the surrounding community. The reach area spans 217 square kilometres and this leads to children and families using whichever centre service suits them best rather than the one to which they are linked due to where they live.

The group has been managed by Action for Children since April 2013. The centres have separate local advisory board meetings to gather parents and partner views. There were many changes last year to the staffing and structure, the implementation of some of which is still on-going. The group is now moving forward into the transition of services to the local authority's 0-19 Early Help model of delivery, and the contract will be managed by Redditch Borough Council, commencing from 1 August, 2014.

Sunny Fields opened in 2006 and serves the most disadvantaged community within the group. Pear Tree opened in 2008. A high number of families with children under five years of age living in its reach area experience social and economic disadvantage. Tulip Tree opened in 2010 and serves a mixed area in terms of social and economic disadvantage. These three centres are each based two miles from each other and between them cover the most deprived areas in the Bromsgrove locality.

Conkers opened in 2010. It is six miles north of Tulip Tree and serves a largely affluent area with small pockets of deprivation. Cottonwood opened in July 2010. Action for Children decided to base the staff in Wythall library when they took up the contract as this building is located in an area of highest disadvantage.

The group offers a range of services for families and children under five years, including family support, adult learning and health services. These are run from the centres and a number of community venues including clinics, libraries and schools. Outreach work within families' homes is a key feature of the group's work.

There are 4,822 children under five years of age living in the group's reach area. Most children are from White British backgrounds, although the number of minority ethnic families across the district is increasing each year. At nine per cent the level of childhood poverty is below the county and national averages. Children's skills, knowledge and ability on entry to early education vary but generally are at the levels expected for their age.

Target groups include: children living in the most disadvantaged communities; vulnerable children; children living in workless homes; children from minority ethnic backgrounds; lone parents; fathers, pregnant teenagers and teenage parents and breastfeeding mothers.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The group has worked very effectively over the last six months to extend its reach so that the large majority of children under five years of age are registered. Three quarters of children, including virtually all those living in priority families, use the group's services.
- The group has successfully met most of the challenging access targets set by the local authority. Work is on-going to engage more workless families with young children in activities, by amongst other things raising the profile about what is on offer.
- Needs assessments are robust and this leads to services being delivered at a variety of locations that attract good numbers of users, particularly in the more rural communities. Cottonwood serves a relatively affluent community with pockets of disadvantage and staff are working successfully to engage with families who most need early help.
- Very well-forged links with health professionals mean that expectant mothers, new parents and those having their next baby are known to the group, with a high proportion in early contact. High numbers of breastfeeding mothers are seen by the group. Parents identify the ante-natal pathway as being very positive and appreciate being able to attend clinics held at the centres.
- The group works with partners to scope services that are of particular relevance to some families and meet identified issues. For example, a parenting group was set up and attended by one father and six mothers from the small but significant Muslim community.
- Most eligible two, three and four year-olds are taking up their free education place; robust support is given to the very few settings that have less than a 'good' Ofsted grading for their effectiveness. All registered childminders who provide for two year olds are assessed as good or better at what they do.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Strong partnerships actively support the right balance, quality and relevance of the group's services. The good quality of care, guidance and support provided for children and families helps build resilience, strengthens relationships, reduces inequalities and promotes their positive well-being. Case files are very detailed, but some fall below the quality of the best and this detracts from the otherwise good quality family support work.
- Family support work is well targeted at those who most need early help, and the strong network between professionals results in well-integrated and timely services being provided. Quite a few families were willing to share their personal stories, milestones and successes with inspectors and it is clear that the centre's interventions prove critical to assisting those who face very challenging circumstances, including domestic abuse.
- A high number of parents benefit from programmes such as 'Family Links' which enhance their parenting skills. Activities such as 'Little Foodies', the fussy eating workshop, swim-fit and first aid training help families to understand how to keep their children healthy and safe.
- Group activities such as 'Sing and Move' and 'Talking Tots' usefully draw on the early years guidance to promote prime areas of learning and especially communication and language. Although a useful start has been made in developing 'Learning Journeys', they are not yet being used consistently to show the progress target children are making or to share this with parents.

- Outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage were in line with the national average in 2013. Strong links with early years partners support children's readiness for school, with sessions such as 'Sing and grow' helping them to cope positively with transition. However, there is currently only limited follow up to see what impact the group's work has on children's overall achievement once they transfer to other settings.
- The volunteering programme results in some adults enhancing their work place experience and skills and providing additional resources to help families improve their life choices.
- Adult education courses are available through partners, but the centre is not yet proactive enough in ensuring that the large majority of workless families participate in order to enhance their skills and education, or in tailor-making activities to better meet local needs and add to the services available.
- Working with its health partners, the group encourages healthy lifestyles, and their effective collaboration is clearly reflected in the low levels of childhood obesity and the high proportion of mothers who sustain breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks.
- Parents' representatives 'champion' the view of other users at their regular meetings with managers, whilst others sit on the local advisory boards and contribute to decision-making. The centres have established themselves as focal points in their communities and families are highly satisfied with the services they receive.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Strong leadership and management ensure that the group's performance has improved over time; this is reflected in the increasing registration figures and improving health outcomes. Expectations are high and leaders and staff remain totally focussed on doing the very best they can for families despite the contract coming to an end. Leaders realise that they have yet to fully meet the needs of workless families.
- Regular meetings led by the local authority keep a close check on how well the group is doing and provide lots of challenge to ensure a rapid pace to positive change. Well-focused action planning and clear management procedures mean that the group has good capacity to achieve still greater success. Report cards are a positive feature of the group's evaluation that show the impact services are having.
- There is good representation of partners and parents on the Local Advisory Boards (LABs). The LABs are effective in their performance monitoring and challenge roles. A new group has recently come together that includes all heads of services; this meets to discuss strategic matters and ensure continuity in service delivery as the group moves forward under the management of a new provider.
- Supervision is undertaken regularly, is supportive and links well to professional development training. Performance management is viewed positively by staff who identify that targets give focus to their work, and reviews provide opportunities to reward success or support development.
- Safeguarding policy, practice and procedures are effective in protecting children and families. Very occasionally, parents forget about mobile phone use and are challenged by staff. There are well understood referral routes for families in need of support, and new early help procedures are being implemented well. The investment in 'Framework I' means that family support workers as well as all other agencies involved in the care and protection of children and families record their evaluations so

that there is an integrated approach and timely information sharing.

- The framework also enables staff to escalate cases speedily or step down from child protection to children in need status as appropriate. All looked after children, those subject to a child protection plan or in need, are known to the group. Close links with the safeguarding and social care teams contribute very well to reducing risks to children.

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.

Centre Group details

Unique reference number	80772
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	442840
Managed by	Action for children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	4,822
Centre leader	Susan Connor
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected as a group
Telephone number	01564 823139
Email address	sue.connor@actionforchildren.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20593 Tulip Tree
- 21016 Cottonwood
- 21340 Conkers
- 22341 Pear Tree
- 23002 Sunny Fields

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