

Solihull - Bentley

Bentley Heath C of E Primary, Widney Close, Solihull, B93 9AS

Inspection dates	1–2 October 2014
Previous inspection dates	Not applicable

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:	Not applicable	
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		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This group of centres is inadequate.

- Staffing difficulties and changes in management have led to a reduction in the number of families being referred to the centres or accessing the centres' services over the last year.
- Information about families is not used sufficiently well to ensure that the large majority of those living in the least advantaged areas and those from priority groups access the centres' services regularly. The centres are not meeting their targets in this respect.
- The centres have not worked with schools, nurseries and playgroups to see what more they could do to help all children reach a good level of development by the end of Reception.
- Staffing changes and lack of direction have led to a deterioration of relationships with some partners and undermined their confidence in the centres' leadership.
- Governance is weak. The local authority has been unable to complete its annual review of the centres' performance. The partnership advisory board has not been able to exercise its role effectively in holding the centre to account for its performance.
- The centres' self-evaluation is weak. Managers have not monitored the implementation of policies and procedures carefully enough or supervised the performance of staff rigorously.
- The local authority does not provide the centres with sufficient information about vulnerable families and children in need to enable the centres to identify these families and provide them with support.

It has the following strengths:

- The centre knows about almost all families with young children living in the area because the health services helpfully share information about all new children born within the area.
- Despite some cancellations, the centres have maintained a good range of activities and courses which those who attend feel are relevant to their needs and are of good quality.
- The centres have ascertained and used parents' views to improve the range of activities.
- 4Children has provided additional support, staffing and managers to enable the centres to keep functioning during a period of considerable staffing and leadership instability.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring the centres have a stable team of leaders and staff who can build positive relationships with partners and parents and develop good local knowledge of families living in the area
 - rebuilding partners' confidence in the centres' leadership and ensuring that they all have the confidence to refer families who might benefit from the centres' support and guidance
 - working with leaders from schools, nurseries and playgroups to ascertain how the centres might help all children to reach a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - ensuring the local authority, 4Children and the partnership advisory board strengthen governance arrangements to ensure that leaders and managers are held to account for the centres' performance
 - improving the centres' monitoring and self-evaluation processes and ensuring more rigorous supervision of staff performance
 - working with the local authority to obtain sufficient information about vulnerable families and children in need in order to identify their needs and provide them with support.
- Improve life chances and reduce inequalities for families living in the least advantaged areas and those in the centres' priority groups by:
 - making better use of data and information about these families to identify their needs and to ensure that the services provided fully meet those needs
 - ensuring that the large majority of these families access the centres' services regularly.

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.

This inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

The inspection covered the following two centres: Keystone Children's Centre and Temple Balsall Children's Centre. The inspectors visited activities taking place at both centres.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives from the local authority, 4Children and the local advisory board; the interim manager and staff of the children's centres; parents who use the centres; and representatives of organisations who work in partnership with the centres. The inspectors had telephone conversations with 4Children's county manager with strategic responsibility for Solihull and other partners.

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

Inspection team

Graham Sims, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Anne Ashworth	Additional Inspector
Chris Field	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Solihull Bentley children's centre group forms part of Solihull's offering of 13 children's centres which serve families living within the local authority. The group comprises two children's centres: Keystone Children's Centre (formerly known as Bentley Heath Children's Centre), which opened in June 2010 and is situated on the site of Bentley Heath CE Primary School; Temple Balsall Children's Centre (formerly known as Rural Children's Centre) which has been fully operational since July 2007 and is situated on the site of Lady Katherine of Leveson School. The two centres merged to form a group in April 2012, when 4Children was commissioned by the local authority to run them. Neither centre has its own childcare facilities, although a nursery attached to Bentley Heath Primary School and a privately run pre-school are located on the same site as Keystone Children's Centre. The schools and pre-school are subject to separate inspections. The reports are available on the website, www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Governance of the group is shared between the local authority, 4Children and the group's partnership advisory board. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the centre group manager, who oversees a relatively small team of four staff. The group has experienced considerable staffing difficulties over the last year. The group's manager left in December 2013 and was not replaced by a new manager until April 2014. The new manager has been absent since the end of April. At the time of the inspection, two of the four permanent staff were not at work and another was on annual leave. 4Children has provided a temporary manager from its national development team to attend the centres for three days a week for much of the year to cover the absence of the group manager. Other staff have travelled from 4Children's headquarters in Essex to provide further support for the centres.

The centres fulfil their core purpose by working with a range of partner organisations to offer a variety of activities and courses for parents and young children. They also refer them to other specialist providers. The group's activities take place at the two centres, at satellite venues in Balsall Common and Meriden, and at other community facilities.

The group's reach area is extensive, much of it covering the more rural areas of Solihull. An estimated 1073 families with 1455 children under the age of five live in the area. Most families are White British. Around 18% come from minority ethnic backgrounds. The group serves an affluent area which has small pockets which are less advantaged. Within the reach area, levels of unemployment and the proportion of families dependent on benefits are below average. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are generally in line with or above those expected for their age.

The centres have identified their key priority groups as: families subject to domestic abuse and families affected by isolation. The centres monitor other priority groups identified by the local authority, such as: children living in workless households, lone parents, teenage mothers, minority ethnic families, disabled children, children in need, children subject to a child protection plan and children who are looked after by the local authority.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- There has been a reduction in the number of children and parents accessing the centres' services over the last year. Staffing difficulties and changes in management have resulted in fewer activities and courses. This has had a negative impact on partners' relationships with the centre. Some partners have been reluctant to promote the centres' services because they have been unsure about what is on offer or whether activities will actually take place.
- The proportions of those living in the least advantaged areas and those in some of the centres' priority groups who are accessing the centres' services are below the targets set by the centre group and by the local authority.
- The number of families supported on an individual basis by the centres' staff is very low. The number of families in priority groups and the number of children who have been identified by the local authority to be in need indicate that there are far more families who could be benefiting from individual support, but are not receiving it.
- The changes in staffing and management have made it difficult for the centres to maintain personal knowledge of the families living in the area and to identify specific needs of families, particularly of those in the centres' priority groups. A number of partners and parents commented to inspectors that they found it unsettling constantly to be dealing with new members of staff.
- Although the group has a sound system for recording information about families and for producing statistics about who has attended the centres by area and priority group, the system is not being used sufficiently well to ensure that the large majority of those who are in most need of support are accessing and benefiting from the centres' services.
- The number of families supported on an individual basis by the centres' staff is very low. The number of families in priority groups and the number of children who have been identified by the local authority to be in need indicate that there are far more families who could be benefiting from individual support, but are not receiving it.
- As a result of agreements with the health authorities, the group receives information about all new births within its area and sends information to families about the services which it offers. Around three quarters of children under the age of five are registered with the centre and a half have accessed one of the centre's services in the last year. Although the centres aspire to follow up families who do not register their children, as well as families who do not access the centres' services, there are many families who have not yet been followed up by the centres' staff.
- Managers are fully aware of the difficulties the centres have faced, the importance of reaching a much higher proportion of families who are most in need, the need to make the centres' services better known and the necessity of re-establishing once fruitful partnerships. Progress has been made this term in dealing with these issues, and the number of children and parents accessing the centres' services has started to increase. However, the steps taken have yet to ensure that the large majority of those who are most in need access the centres' services.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The group's timetable provides a good range of activities and courses which cater for the needs of parents-to-be, new parents and young children. A large majority of the parents who attend feel that the sessions are relevant to their needs and of good quality. However, late cancellations, low attendance and accessibility difficulties adversely affect the impact that some of these activities have on improving life chances and on reducing inequalities for those from the centres' priority groups who make up only a small proportion of those who attend.

- Parents who attend parenting courses, such as 'Understanding your child's behaviour' and 'Messy Monsters', make good progress in developing their parenting skills and provide positive feedback on the quality of the sessions. However, few parents from the centres' priority groups attend these sessions.
- The centres carry out an annual consultation exercise to ascertain the views of parents. Around a quarter of families responded, and the centres have used their views to shape the centres' programme and the range of courses offered and to respond to their needs. However, there are still some priority groups, such as those suffering from domestic violence, whose needs are not yet being fully met through activities or outreach support provided by the centres.
- The proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in nine out of ten schools in the area is above, and in some cases, well above the national average. However, the centres have not yet worked with schools to analyse the impact the centres' activities have had on children's readiness for school or to explore what more the centres could do for those children who do not reach a good level of development.
- Although the centres have procedures for recruiting parents as volunteers, in the last year no parents have contributed to the running of the centres as volunteers or been given the opportunity to develop new skills through volunteering. Two potential volunteers have encountered unnecessary setbacks in their application process.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- The leadership of the centres has been seriously affected by a three-month period at the start of the year without a manager and by the long-term absence of the newly appointed manager from the end of April. Although 4Children has provided personnel from its national development team to support the centres, and an interim manager has been present for three days a week for much of the year, the changes, uncertainty and lack of direction have undermined the confidence of some partners in the leadership of the centres.
- Although the interim manager and staff are making a concerted effort to re-establish positive working relationships with local schools, pre-schools and other partners, many of the partners interviewed during the inspection spoke of a deterioration in relationships with the centre over the last year. Some partners did not know who was currently leading the centres.
- Governance is weak. The partnership advisory board has not met frequently enough and does not have a wide enough membership to exercise its role effectively in holding the centre to account for its performance. The board has been without an independent chair for some time. At its last meeting in July 2014, the first for six months, participants voiced concerns about aspects of the centres' performance but there was no senior manager or representative from 4Children present to respond to concerns. Currently, there are no headteachers, childminders, representatives from social care or parents on the board, although one parent is about to undertake training for the role of advisory board member.
- Although the local authority met with senior managers from 4Children in July to conduct its annual review of the centres' performance, it has been unable to complete the review process because it had not received sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the centres were meeting their targets.
- The centres' written self-evaluation is weak and does not provide rigorous insight into the effectiveness of the centres' performance. However, much stronger procedures have been introduced to identify areas for development. A detailed needs analysis, undertaken earlier in the year, has informed the recently produced development plan which identifies many issues which

the centres are starting to tackle. The centres are placing a much higher priority than before on targeting their resources to meet the needs of families from priority groups. These improvements have not yet had time to have a measurable impact on improving the centres' performance.

- The national development team for 4Children has provided a considerable amount of human resources to enable the centres to keep functioning, and has introduced new policies and procedures to strengthen practice within the centres. However, the implementation of some policies and the monitoring of staff performance have not always been fully effective. For example, case files have not been monitored rigorously enough by senior managers to ensure that staff are meeting the needs of families and that procedures have been carried out correctly.
- The centres have effective policies, procedures and practices for keeping families safe. There are robust procedures for assessing risks that may be encountered when running sessions, using buildings and equipment or when online. The centre provides individual support to a few families with children subject to child protection plans, those being supported through early help assessment, looked after children and children identified as in need. However, their ability to support all such families living in the reach area is hampered because information about such families is not shared fully with the centres by the local authority. Work is in progress to establish appropriate protocols to allow this to happen.

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.

Group details

Unique reference number	80034
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	447608
Managed by	4Children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1455
Group manager	Alison Richardson (interim manager)
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0121 2487614
Email address	alison.richardson@4children.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20276 Keystone Children's Centre
- 22579 Temple Balsall Children's Centre

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