

# Cotswolds Locality Children's Centre Group

Springboard Children's Centre, Trinity Road, Cirencester, GL7 1JU

<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–21 November 2014
Previous inspection date	Not Applicable

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
	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.

- A large majority of the priority families, such as lone parents, teenage mothers and workless households, use the centre group and benefit well from the services provided to improve their lives.
- Parents are highly satisfied with the services they receive. They take an active part in re-shaping services, including influencing the start up of activities in remote rural areas.
- Health outcomes for families are good. Parents develop healthy lifestyles because of the group's support.
- Children develop good speech, language and the social skills necessary to help them prepare well for school.
- Staff work extremely well with health and social care colleagues, as well as the voluntary sector, to give highly effective individual support to individual families in priority groups.
- Leaders and managers have taken effective actions to improve the quality of local services. In a short space of time, since coming together as a locality, managers have moved things forward at a rapid pace.

### It is not outstanding because:

- The group does not make sufficiently robust use of the wide-ranging management information to demonstrate the impact of its work over the longer term on families well-being.
- The tracking of children's achievements are not well enough developed and sometimes the quality and impact of activities are affected as a result.
- There are insufficient places for two-year olds who are eligible for free early education, and work to remedy this has only just begun.
- The provision for developing parents' skills in English and mathematics is insufficient. Volunteering opportunities to help prepare parents for employment are limited.

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

- Leaders should streamline the collection, analysis and use of management information to:
  - track the progress of children in target groups, those who do not take up a free pre-school place and those known to be eligible for free school meals
  - develop a robust system for assessing the impact of the centre's work, especially on improving the outcomes for priority groups
  - use assessment information to inform the planning of consistently good quality sessions.
- Work with the local authority and early years partners to improve the access of eligible two-year-olds to free early education places so that most take up their entitlement.
- Further develop the work started with adult learning providers and Jobcentre Plus to prepare adults for work and improve their chances of securing paid employment by:
  - offering improved careers guidance and advice so that parents can plan their employment pathways in the medium and longer term
  - ensuring English and mathematics skills are well promoted in the training offered
  - sharpening the focus on improving parents' employability skills in the planning of all centre services and activities
  - extending the volunteer programme to help parents get ready for work. Seek to support those wishing to undertake childcare training in order to help increase the supply of childcare places.

**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 two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

The inspection covered the following children's centres: Cirencester; Stow-on-the-Wold; Northleach and Fairford Library; Tetbury Library.

The inspectors held meetings with: the children's centre early help group manager and senior leaders from the local authority; centre staff; health professionals, social workers and social care staff; local headteachers; managers of early years settings; members of the advisory board and parents' forum; and parents. The inspectors held meetings with centre volunteers, as well as representatives from the charity 4Children, and a number of partner organisations such as Homestart, Growing Great Futures and Cirencester Opportunity Group, a specialist children's centre working with children with special educational needs.

Inspectors visited each of the four children's centres in the group and observed a range of their work. These included a baby massage session run by a local charity and baby clinics run by the health service. They observed sessions such as Bumps to Babes, Mellow Parenting, Play and Learn, Stay and Play, Healthy Eating for Young (HEY). Inspectors also evaluated the impact of parenting programmes on parents through an interactive video programme. They also visited a private voluntary setting in Moreton-in-Marsh and a Mothers' and Toddlers' Group run by volunteer parents in Blockley.

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

**Inspection team**

Harmesh Manghra, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Susan Crawford

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alan Comerford-Dunbar

Additional inspector

Megan Dauksta

Additional inspector

Rob Mottram

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

Cotswolds Locality has worked as a cluster since the designation of each of its children's centres. It consists of four children's centres. These are Cirencester, Stow-on-the-Wold, Northleach and Fairford Library and Tetbury Library. The local authority has overall responsibility for the delivery of children's centre services, and the charity 4Children has directly managed the group of centres on the local authority's behalf since April 2013. The children's centre group delivers a range of services to meet the core purpose, including early years childcare provision and health services. A number of private, voluntary and independent providers deliver childcare for local families. These early years settings have their own individual inspections and reports.

The locality covers 400 square miles and a third of the county. Most of the area is rural and sparsely populated, with very poor public transport. The least advantaged wards in the locality include Tetbury and Beeches, Watermoor 1, Watermoor 2 and Chesterton in Cirencester. Unemployment rates in the area are less than one per cent. Most of the jobs available are in the care and retail sector. Cirencester Children's Centre was inspected in October 2012 as a stand alone centre. The report can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). Gloucestershire has taken part in the national 'payment by results' pilot programme.

Some 3,651 children under the age of five years live in the locality's catchment area. Most families are of White British origin. Most recent data available to the group indicate that a few (8.6%) families come from minority ethnic groups. Just over 20% of children under the age of five are from workless households. The levels of learning and development of children when they enter early years provision are above expected levels.

The locality has identified its priority groups as teenage and young parents, fathers, parents with mental health needs or suffering from rural isolation, lone parents, workless households, and children involved with social care.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Over the past three years, and particularly since the formation of the locality in April 2013, the centre staff have improved the registration and engagement rates of all priority groups well. The registration levels have increased from 58% in November 2013 to 86% at present. In the words of a partner, the centres are the 'eyes and ears' of the local community, identify most families who need help and respond to them quickly.
- Due to strong outreach work and good working relationships with partners, particularly early years settings, schools and health services, staff identify and support a large majority of priority groups and families with the most need. These include all families from the least advantaged wards, teenage mothers and a high percentage of lone parents and workless families.
- The children's centre staff know all families with children subject to a child protection plan extremely well. Through regular contact and extensive support for the families, the number of children involved with social care has significantly reduced. Case files demonstrate that children and families are well protected.
- Only 35% of all eligible two-year-old children access good quality early years education and this is too low. The increase in the numbers, due mainly to the recent changes in the eligibility criteria has put a pressure on places. The very large majority of the early years settings in the locality are of good quality; however, places for early years places are in short supply in Cirencester and the take up of places is low in Tetbury. The managers have begun to work closely with the local authority to

rectify the situation.

- Health partners and staff work well together to provide valuable support and educate families about a healthier lifestyle. The access to services is well planned, with careful consideration of the use of centres in more rural locations.
- The take up of adult education classes to improve parents' English and mathematics is low and is delivered only from Cirencester. A small percentage of adults attend well, achieve qualifications and progress to higher levels. Managers have developed plans to run classes in the near future with the local adult education service and a further education college.
- All four children's centres in the group are the hubs of their community. They are safe, easily accessible and are being increasingly used well. By using public libraries in Fairford and Tetbury, the centre group is making best use of public resources. Stay and Play sessions at these centres are very popular and well attended. In consultation with the local parents, staff supported local parent volunteers to establish a Mother and Toddler Group at Blockley. Other examples of reaching local communities are the Toddlers' Group at South Cerney and the RAF base in Fairford. The summer programme, linked to promoting quality Early Years Foundation Stage experiences, is highly valued and well attended by families.

### The quality of practice and services

Good

- Partnership working between the health service and children's centre group staff has a good impact on the health and well-being of children and families. Clinics such as speech and language development, baby weighing, developmental checks, postnatal checks, breastfeeding and healthy eating have all contributed to the improved health of the families in the area.
- Sustained breastfeeding rates are high and above national figures. Obesity rates in the Reception year are slightly below national rates. Families adopt healthier lifestyles. New mothers overcome postnatal depression after receiving strong support from the group's staff.
- Staff carefully identify families in most need of support. Working closely with a variety of partners, staff support families to deal with their complex needs confidently. They are highly professional and provide good one-to-one support, often in the home. Parents spoke positively about the support they receive. As one mother said, 'I really appreciate the fact that staff come repeatedly to my home to help me.'
- Children make good progress in their learning. Those moving on to school are supported extremely well through 'Ready for school' sessions. Staff have established strong, meaningful relationships and purposeful dialogue with schools. Data from the Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores confirm that, over the years, children have continued to consolidate good levels of development across the area.
- Centre staff have developed and nurtured good relationships with local private early years providers. Staff support them well with, for instance, training and help to purchase specialised resources for children with additional needs.
- A programme for the victims of domestic abuse in Stow-on-the-Wold has a very positive impact on helping the mothers who attend to get back on track. Due to the programme, they accurately spot abusive behaviour and are able to deal with the abusers confidently and tactfully.
- By attending a variety of useful parenting programmes, parents are more able to deal with the behaviour of children by setting clear boundaries. Parents acquire greater understanding of how children learn and use this knowledge well to support their children's development.
- Recently forged links with Jobcentre Plus and an agency to improve parents' budgeting and debt management skills are too new to have had any impact on families.
- A few volunteers make a good contribution to the centres' life by helping with activities. However, managers do not promote volunteering sufficiently well or place sufficient emphasis on the link with building employability skills or as a stepping stone to paid employment. Careers advice is under developed.
- A high percentage of workless families have benefited from a variety of services offered at the

centre. The centre staff use a range of tools, such as progress and target wheels, to measure impact with varying degrees of success. Case studies present a good range of individual success stories; however, staff are not able to demonstrate fully the impact of their work on the whole family in a systematic way.

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

Good

- 4Children has a strong ambition and a clear view of the difference it wants to make to the lives of vulnerable families and children. Despite the reduced budget, 4Children has maintained frontline services and secured sponsorships from major companies to support families and specific health programmes. The national team uses a broad range of tools to evaluate programmes, with a varying degree of accuracy and success. They recognise that some of these are not yet robust enough to measure the full impact of activities on children and families.
- The locality manager has established highly productive working relationships with public and voluntary sector agencies, such as Homestart and Growing Great Futures, to enhance the impact of the work of the children's centre group. Almost all partners are highly appreciative and complimentary about the work of the local teams in supporting children's and families' well-being.
- Managers know the group's strengths and what needs improving further. Internal reviews and performance audits conducted by 4Children are thorough. Strategic managers have worked very closely with the local authority to devise detailed development plans to improve the provision. Through the sustained efforts of all, the locality has identified the priority families and their needs clearly and improved the registration and engagement levels. There is good capacity to build for still further effectiveness.
- Staff are well qualified, experienced, highly committed and passionate about their work. They are drawn from a range of professional backgrounds, such as teaching and social work. They improve and update their knowledge and skills by attending a broad range of training events, including joint training with partners, to better support families. Managers support the staff well in developing their skills and expertise through timely and valuable supervision.
- Performance management arrangements are thorough. The local authority representatives in their governance role monitor the provision closely and provide robust challenge and valuable support to the managers. As a result, targeting of priority groups' needs is highly effective. A large majority of these groups benefit from the centre group activities and services to improve the life chances of their families.
- Parent satisfaction levels are high. Parents contribute well to the design and evaluation of programmes and activities. Inspectors saw many improvements that have had a positive impact on improving the quality of services. Parents contribute well to the advisory board through a variety of means including social media.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet the current government requirements. Staff are appropriately vetted for their suitability to work with young children. Risk assessments on venues and activities are appropriate. Policies and protocols are appropriately detailed and kept up to date. However, practice does not always follow procedures. Inspectors identified a degree of laxity in using a fire door for users for good reasons. Once the related dangers of this practice were pointed out to staff they were swift to respond with appropriate actions.

**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**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	80323
<b>Local authority</b>	Gloucestershire
<b>Inspection number</b>	454730
<b>Managed by</b>	4Children on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	3,651
<b>Group manager</b>	Anna Sharpe
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01285 640964
<b>Email address</b>	Anna.Sharpe@4children.org.uk

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

- 22819 Springboard Cirencester
- 22822 Springboard Stow-on-the-Wold
- 22821 Springboard Northleach/Fairford
- 22823 Springboard Tetbury



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