

Gloucester South Locality Children's Centre Group

Linden Road, Gloucester. GL1 5JAE

Inspection dates

4–6 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Access to services by young children and families		Not previously inspected	
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 group of centres requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Not enough families use centre services, especially from the Compass and Quedgeley areas.
- Leaders do not have enough information to offer some families help and support, especially where parents are out of work, are from minority ethnic backgrounds, or are teenage parents.
- Systems introduced by Barnardos since the recent reorganisation are not yet fully established throughout all centres in the group.
- Reorganisation of the group's advisory board is not complete. Therefore, parents and partner organisations do not formally contribute to the running of all centres in the group.
- Arrangements for assessing the success of the group's work and planning improvements are not precise enough to enable priorities for development to be addressed fully and quickly and checked.
- Not enough eligible two-year-olds take up their free entitlement to early years education, and in some areas there are not enough places available to them in good quality settings.
- Systems used to check the difference that centre services make to families are not always detailed enough to show their success or identify future needs.

The children's centre group has the following strengths:

- The local authority and Barnardos have worked well with the senior leadership team and staff so the recent reorganisation of centres has been smooth and has not interrupted services for families.
- Every centre in the group offers a pleasant, safe and well-resourced environment. Staff give families and visitors a warm and friendly welcome. Parents say their children 'would love to come every day'.
- Sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and 'You and Me' are well attended by local families and provide good opportunities for children to learn and develop.
- Help for families who experience domestic abuse is very good, giving emotional support and practical help to keep them and their children safe.
- Staff cooperate effectively with other organisations to keep families they work with safe and well.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this group of children's centres 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 inspectors held meetings with leaders, managers, and staff. They spoke with parents and centre volunteers, as well as representatives from the local authority, Barnardos, and a number of partner organisations. They met with members of the advisory board.

Inspectors visited each of the six centres and observed a range of their work, including play sessions such as 'Stay and Play', the 'Squirrels Group', and 'You and Me'. They also observed health sessions, including 'Baby Group', and courses designed to help sufferers of domestic abuse.

They looked at a range of relevant documentation which included policies, procedures and 20 case files.

The inspection covered the following centres:

The Lighthouse Children's Centre
The Link Children's Centre
The Compass Children's Centre
The Beacon Children's Centre
The Oaks Children's Centre
Quedgeley Children's Centre

Inspection team

Susan Mann, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kenneth Jones	Her Majesty's Inspector
Joan Lindsay	Additional inspector
Georgina Beasley	Additional inspector
Joyce Cox	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Gloucestershire South Locality Group of Children's Centres was formed in November 2013. The group consists of six centres: Beacon Children's Centre; Compass Children's Centre; Quedgeley Children's Centre; The Lighthouse Children's Centre; The Link Children's Centre; and The Oaks Children's Centre. Two centres have been inspected previously as individual centres: The Link Children's Centre was inspected in October 2010 and The Lighthouse Children's Centre was inspected in November 2011. In April 2013, the local authority commissioned the charity organisation Barnardos to run the group of centres on its behalf. The advisory boards for each centre are in the process of being combined to form a joint partnership advisory board for the locality group.

The centres in the group were established in phases one, two and three of children's centre implementation. They offer the full range of services, including early years daycare provision, health services and adult learning opportunities. The areas served by the group have some areas of economic deprivation, including The Link and The Lighthouse catchment areas that are in the lowest 30% found nationally. In the local area, there is a higher level of workless households than found nationally, with almost one fifth of households reliant on workless benefits. In the area, 13% of children live in families with minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly in The Oaks, Quedgeley, The Compass and The Lighthouse catchment areas. In recent years, the number of families with Eastern European backgrounds living in the group's catchment area has increased. The centres prioritise a number of groups to work with, including families from workless households, lone parents, and teenage parents.

Some 6000 children under five years of age live in the group's reach area. Children's levels of learning and development are variable when they enter early years provision, but generally these are below expected levels. There are early years settings at The Compass Children's Centre, The Link Children's Centre and at The Lighthouse (Pebbles). These early years provisions are subject to separate inspections and reports.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen existing governance arrangements by developing the role of the group's partnership advisory board so that parents and all key partners are fully involved in its decision-making.
- Improve systems of checking the group's performance so that the work of each centre in the group is rigorously evaluated, services are accurately targeted and improvement planning clearly shows how and when identified priorities will be achieved by:
 - obtaining data pertinent to the area served by the group, particularly for minority ethnic, workless and teenage parent families
 - making effective use of this information to plan and monitor services.
- Increase the number of families who engage with centre services, especially from workless households living in the group's catchment area, and particularly families living in the Compass and Quedgeley areas.
- Work with the local authority to increase the opportunities for two-year-old children from families in need of support so that most take up their funded early years place by :
 - improving systems used to identify eligible two-year-olds
 - increasing the number of places available so there are enough suitable places for all children to attend
 - ensuring all provision used is of good quality
 - tracking the difference attendance makes so improvements in children's learning and development are monitored in early years settings and schools.
- Build on existing good practice so that all centres accurately measure and monitor the difference services make to families by:
 - ensuring every case file provides a clear and detailed record of work with eligible families
 - making sure that all centres routinely carry out accurate measurements of how well families, especially those most in need of support, progress as a result of their use of centre services
 - broadening the use of systems used to track and monitor how well children do in their learning and development as a result of their involvement with centre services.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Overall, the number of families using services of the centres has more than doubled over the past three years, but has not improved so well in all catchment areas. In the group of centres as a whole, the large majority of eligible families make regular use of centres. However, this is not the case for households in the Compass and Quedgeley areas, where fewer families are involved.
- Once families, especially those in need of support, are known to the centres, they benefit from regular involvement that helps improve their overall well-being and safety. However, a minority of families most in need of help, including families from workless households, are not yet using the centres, and this requires improvement.
- Leaders receive a range of information from health services and other partners concerning new births and families living within their catchment area, and so have a broad understanding of the area's make-up. However, they are unable to show accurately how well families from some groups, including those out of work, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, and teenage parents, use services. Thus, they are uncertain whether some families who would benefit are using the centres.
- The centres are successful in involving some priority families. For example, the large majority of lone parents make regular use of the centres, and most families with a child subject to a child protection plan have sustained involvement with staff and services. Families 'in greatest need' are identified through a defined assessment system, and staff plan and deliver tailored support that involves a range of other organisations such as social care and housing services.

- Individual families identified through the referral or assessment process generally engage well with staff and services over a period of months. As a result, they improve life for themselves and their children. However, staff do not make good enough use of information about the area to be confident enough that families requiring such support are involved with centre services.
- Arrangements for funded early years education for two-year-old children in need of additional support are not fully effective. Systems to identify eligible children are not always thorough, and there are not enough places available in good quality early years settings for all children. Thus, a small minority of children known to be eligible do not use their place, which limits opportunities to improve their learning and development from a young age.

The quality and impact of practice and services

Require improvement

- Although the range and quality of sessions delivered by the group is good, the impact of these is unclear because the effects of services on improving lives for children and their families are not routinely measured in all centres. Thus the difference some centres make to families in need of help and support is not always known, or is not detailed enough to show improvement, and so requires improvement.
- Centres are beginning to use Barnardos' systems to measure the success of their services. At The Link, these systems are well established, and improved lifestyles for families attending parenting courses, for example, are clearly demonstrated. However, the other centres in the group are yet to establish full use of these, and currently rely too heavily on more basic evaluation, such as an evaluation on an individual basis, which gives a less clear view.
- Case studies and the feedback from parents indicate that children do well as a result of their involvement with the centres, and benefit from outreach family support. General session evaluation analyses how well children use activities and staff plan follow-on sessions to build on this and help children learn more. However, tracking of how well children attend sessions regularly, such as in the crèche, is not detailed enough to show their progress.
- In some instances, children's progress is traced into school. For children supported by the children's centres, and those in receipt of two-year-old funded places, this process is beginning to show how well they are doing and how well they have caught up with their peers. At Pebbles Nursery (based at The Lighthouse Children's Centre), for example, inequalities are being reduced because children who have accessed children centre services have caught up with the rest of their peers. However, not all centres work with local early years settings and schools in such an effective way in order to know what works well and what needs improvement.
- Most case files provide a clear record of involvement with supported families and proposed actions, although not all give enough detail to show the rationale and impact of work with the families. Files show the engagement of a wide range of professional partners and family members to meet identified needs and enhance families' well-being. Leaders monitor this family support work through regular discussions, although systems of file supervision and auditing are not fully established in all centres within the group.
- Adults with children, and those expecting babies, access a suitable range of health services delivered in partnership with health professionals at the centres. Information about the local area does not indicate any particular area of concern. However, sessions to support healthy eating, weaning and breastfeeding are well attended.
- The quality of opportunities for adults to improve their economic circumstances and job prospects varies across the group. There is good provision for adult literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology at The Lighthouse, and to a lesser degree at The Link, but not at the other centres. Some parents make good use of volunteer opportunities to gain experience and increase their chances of successful employment, although the number of parents involved with this programme at present is relatively small (18 parents over the six centres).

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The local authority, Barnardos and locality children's services manager have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the Gloucester South Locality Group. This results in effective governance and performance management overall, although some initiatives have not yet been implemented fully. For example, the roles of the senior leadership team are not yet fully established following the group's reorganisation.
- The advisory board is in the process of reorganisation. Individual centre boards are merging to create a joint partnership for the locality group, but this is not yet complete. Parents give their views and partners meet with centre staff to influence service provision. However, the lack of a partnership board for the group limits opportunities for parents and partners to contribute to governance on a regular and formal basis.
- Self-evaluation is not coordinated between some centres in the group, with several separate processes currently in use. Leaders do not always make best use of data. As a result, some assessments of how well the group is doing are unclear, such as in increasing the number of households with teenage, workless or minority ethnic families using services.
- Although strategic priorities for improvement have been correctly identified, planning for implementing these changes is incomplete. Leaders have not defined the characteristics of successful action, which makes progress towards improvement difficult to monitor.
- Leaders know enough about the local area to plan a balance of universal and tailored services that match the needs of families quite well. As a result, they deliver some sessions that are well attended because families find them useful and enjoyable. 'Krasnoludki' at The Lighthouse Children's Centre, for example, is popular with families who speak English as an additional language; 'YAPPS' provides popular sessions for young parents and those expecting a baby.
- Safeguarding arrangements are well established. Leaders and staff prioritise the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable adults, and work proactively with social care colleagues to ensure the correct action is taken. Children subject to child protection plans and children in need make good progress as a result of family work correctly focused on the needs of the child. Centre staff routinely make assessments under the Common Assessment Framework, and their expertise is valued by local partner organisations that sometimes rely on centre staff to make these for them.
- Over the group, the centres deliver a range of services each day of the year, including during the school holidays, which generally meets families' needs well. Sessions are staffed with enough personnel to support new and regular families. Premises are well resourced and secure, and families report they feel comfortable during sessions.

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	80784
Local authority	Gloucester
Inspection number	443669
Managed by	Barnardos on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	5999
Group manager	Alexandra Kershaw
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01452 872290
Email address	alexandra.kershaw@barnardos.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

23209 The Lighthouse Children's Centre
23213 The Link Children's Centre
23173 The Compass Children's Centre
21698 The Beacon Children's Centre
23224 The Oaks Children's Centre
22444 Quedgeley Children's Centre

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

This template is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130186.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 130186

© Crown copyright 2014

