

Bath West Children's Centre Group

Woodhouse Road, Twerton, Bath, Somerset, BA2 1SY

Inspection date	29 June–1 July 2015		
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
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 is a good centre group

- The group works successfully to ensure that children and families in greatest need receive timely and effective support. A very high number of families from target groups are registered and the large majority use the group of centres or their partners' services regularly.
- Parents are helped to build their confidence, to know how to keep their children safe and healthy and to build their experience of work through very good quality volunteering opportunities.
- A high proportion of eligible children take up their funded education places. The group is effective in helping those at risk of underachievement to do well. The gap in achievement between children from the poorest backgrounds and their peers is closing far more rapidly than seen nationally.
- Safeguarding matters are given high priority, and parents say that they feel safe and very well looked after when they visit group activities.
- The board of trustees who manage the group on behalf of the local authority is extremely well informed about the community. Trustees play an important role in making sure that the group responds well to meeting the diverse and complex needs of local families.
- Good leadership and management are at the helm in steering the group's effective work with children and families. Resources are sufficient to ensure the group has capacity to sustain improvement.

It is not outstanding because:

- Too few opportunities are available for parents to further their learning and qualifications or enhance their employability skills. This affects the level of engagement of some target families, particularly those living in Twerton who are workless.
- Staff are not tracking the progress made by target children closely enough, neither in sessions nor over time, to check the impact of centre group interventions on their achievement.
- Despite regular monitoring and a range of checks on performance, neither the local authority nor the trustees use data well enough to probe and challenge why some aspects of the group's work are not as successful as others.

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

- Develop the links with Jobcentre Plus, colleges and training providers to extend the range of further learning, qualifications and skills training for parents, especially those who are unemployed.
- Increase the engagement of children and families living in Twerton, particularly those families not in paid work, so that at least the large majority access appropriate services to meet their needs.
- Sharpen the systems for tracking and recording the impact that group services have on the progress made by target children when they access sessions such as 'Stay and Play'. Work with early years partners to share information about how children who have accessed children's centre services achieve over time.
- With the local authority and trustees, make sure that accurate and reliable data are used to inform the checks being made on the group's performance in supporting the best possible outcomes for all target groups.

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. The centres that form this children's centre group are Moorland Children Centre and Twerton Children Centre.

This inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre group manager, coordinator, staff, local authority officers, partners, volunteers, parents, childminders and members of the board of trustees.

The inspectors visited Twerton and Moorland Children's Centres to observe activities including the 'Incredible Years' parenting programme, 'Mad and Marvellous Mandarin' group and a 'Bumps and Babes' group. The 'Stay and Play' group at Dominion Road was observed jointly with the centre coordinator. Safeguarding policy, procedures and practice were examined in depth, and case files and supervision records were sampled. Inspectors also looked at a wide range of other documentation.

Inspectors took into account parents' views as expressed directly to them during the inspection, as well as through survey responses and their recorded evaluations about the group's work.

The centre group manager and coordinator attended all team meetings.

Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead Inspector	Additional Inspector
Joyce Cox	Additional Inspector
Debbie Farley	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Bath West Children's Centre Group comprises two children's centres: Twerton and Moorland. The group is managed by a local charity, First Steps (Bath), on behalf of the local authority. Governance is provided by a board of trustees with the chief executive (also the group manager) responsible for overall operations, management of the centre coordinator and staff team, and strategic direction. An advisory board, which has met three times, is in the process of development under the direction of the local authority. Services provided by the group include activities to promote early learning, family support, child and family health, careers, adult learning and volunteering.

Twerton was the first children's centre to be opened in the local authority in 2006. It has been inspected previously in 2011 as a stand-alone centre. First Steps also manages two nurseries located on the same site as the children's centres, which have both been inspected previously. Moorland Children's Centre is co-located with Moorland Infants School, and Twerton Children's Centre with St Michael's Church of England Junior School. Both schools are inspected under separate arrangements. All reports can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

There are 1,542 children under the age of four years living in the area served by the centre group, which is mixed socially and economically with pockets of significant disadvantage. Four of the communities in Twerton are amongst the most deprived when compared to those seen nationally. Overall, a quarter of children are living in homes where no one is in paid work. Most families are White British but a small percentage are from other ethnic groups, including those who speak Mandarin or Spanish as their main home language. Children living in Twerton enter early education provision at levels below those usual for their age. The skills and abilities of children living in Moorland on entry to nursery are more typical.

Target groups identified by the centre group are: families living in the most disadvantaged areas in Twerton; workless families; lone parents; and children from minority ethnic families living in the area served by Moorland Children's Centre.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Most children and families are registered with the children's centre group. Health colleagues support the group's work in helping parents and their children to access services. For example, clinics are located in both centres, which means that centre staff have early contact with expectant and new parents and can let them know what services are available. The development of 'feeding hubs', to support parents in choosing how best to nourish their baby, has created further opportunities for securing families' early engagement.
- More children are seen at Bath West than at any other children's centres within the local authority. The large majority of children and families from most target groups, including those living in Twerton, lone parents and minority ethnic families in Moorlands use centre group services regularly. Activities to promote the culture and heritage of the small but significant groups of Mandarin or Spanish speaking families are currently running at Dominion Road.
- Some 88% of eligible two-year-olds and virtually all three- and four-year-olds take up their free early education place at good or better quality settings. An 'early years hub' has recently been set up; centre staff attend this with early years partners to focus on making sure that boys and girls from different backgrounds get off to the very best start.
- There is very effective work taking place to ensure that children and families in greatest need, including the high number subject to child protection plans, are well supported. In contrast, although data show that nearly three quarters of workless families have been in

contact with the centre group five times or more in the last year, their access to, and engagement in, services that will help improve their chances of employment are less positive.

- A very effective volunteering programme is used as the pathway to help parents, mostly from target groups, to build their confidence and work-readiness skills; this has led to paid work for some. However, this programme meets the needs of only a small percentage of the number who are workless, and there are too few opportunities for those parents who do volunteer to increase their qualifications or employability skills.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The centre group provides good quality experiences for children; these are reducing inequalities and improving children's well-being. Leaders are actively working to strike a better balance between services available to everyone and those in place to meet target group needs. For example, a session for new mothers and their babies at Moorland has recently been discontinued as it was not being attended by those most in need of the group's support.
- A recent survey shows that parents hold the centre group in high regard. They see Twerton centre in particular as a safe haven within the community and describe staff as friendly and approachable. Work with families in their own homes helps them to overcome the often complex problems they face and empowers them to access other services independently. A large group of parents spoke to inspectors about how valuable the staff's support is in helping them overcome domestic violence, family breakdowns, drugs and alcohol problems, or mental health issues.
- Parents who lack confidence in managing their children's behaviour positively, or who are finding life especially difficult, are well supported by a range of well-planned courses alongside more intensive programmes of support. Parents were observed to be learning successfully about how to use 'time out' strategies, for example, to enable everyone to reflect on the consequences of their actions and deal with situations calmly. Parents are also helped to build their understanding about how to prevent accidents in the home and deal with any first aid incidents.
- Courses such as 'Cook It' and good quality guidance about the importance of a healthy lifestyle raise parents' awareness about diet, nutrition and exercise. Six out of ten mothers across the authority breastfeed their babies, and childhood obesity – though relatively high – is being tackled. The need for more up-to-date information about local health outcomes is recognised by health partners and the local authority as an area for further development.
- Good quality experiences such as 'Stay and Play' focus on the prime areas of children's learning, including communication and personal development. The use of pencils and crayons is actively promoted in all activities to support 'mark-making', as data show that children's writing skills are particularly weak. Boys' enthusiasm for, and interest in, learning are encouraged by the use of specially chosen resources, such as 'superhero' outfits that engage them in imaginative and creative play, and tool kits to promote dexterity and control.
- The proportion of Reception-age children achieving a good level of development in Moorland last year was at the level seen nationally, but below this in Twerton. Children's achievement is improving year on year across the area served by the group and the gap between the lowest achieving children and others is not as wide as seen nationally. Tracking takes place in some sessions, such as 'Wiggle Shake'. However, the group is not consistently tracking how much progress target children make from their starting points; this is a missed opportunity to demonstrate the value being added by centre group services to their achievements over time.
- Parents receive effective help to enable them to claim the benefits to which they are entitled and to seek better housing conditions. The group is aware that one of its previous strengths – its work to improve parents' economic situations – is currently being curtailed by the lack of adult learning and skills training opportunities. Partnerships are now being developed with JobCentre Plus and local training providers to assist the group in widening parents' access to services that will make a positive difference to their life chances, particularly for those who are out of work.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The group manager is well respected and, since her appointment two years ago she has strengthened partnerships with health, early years and social care professionals and effectively set the group on an improving course. The centre coordinator supervises and manages the staff team well, and keeps close oversight of the case work being undertaken with the high number of children and families in greatest need. Resources are being deployed appropriately to meet diverse local needs and improve the outcomes for children and their parents.
- Robust procedures and effective practices for safeguarding children are at the core of the group's work. Appropriate safe recruitment checks are undertaken for staff and volunteers, with comprehensive induction provided for new starters. Guidance about children's health and safety is readily available for parents; emphasis is given to safe internet use in current displays.
- Staff work closely with health services, social care and other services to reduce the risk of harm to children, including those subject to child protection plans. Monthly meetings of key partners keep a firm focus on following up any family who is causing concern. Social care services generally provide good quality information but do not routinely share details with the group about children in need who live in their area.
- The board of trustees is well established and ensures effective governance. Members include parents, health and education partners who have clear insights into the needs of the community and keep the group's progress in meeting them under close review. Trustees are currently increasing the representation of partners on the separate advisory board, which is developing its role under new arrangements that are being led by the local authority.
- The local authority undertakes regular monitoring of the group's performance and also carries out safeguarding audits and quality assurance visits. The local authority has a clear grasp on the effectiveness of the group, but recognises that information is not always as accurate or reliable as it should be. This impedes the ability of those responsible for governance to undertake full accountability checks. For example, there is a lack of clarity about the level of sustained engagement by target groups in the information available to the centre group; this makes it hard to see whether sufficient numbers of each target group are accessing the right services for long enough to have a useful impact.
- Parents who use the centre group are encouraged to have their say about services and quality. Trustees visit group sessions to listen to views and take them back to board meetings for consideration. Fathers have recently asked for more play activities out of doors, and in response the group is trialling an adventurous play event at Bath City Farm, called 'Roots and Boots'.

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.

Children's centre group details

Unique reference number	80130
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	455117
Managed by	First Steps board of trustees on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,542
Centre Group Manager	Roz Lambert
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01225 444791
Email address	Roz.Lambert@firststepsbath.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

First Steps Moorland Children's Centre: URN 21176

First Steps Twerton Children's Centre: URN 21177

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