

# Inspection report for Erdington Hall Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	383375
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<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Lois Furness

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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Erdington Hall Primary School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Little Folks Nursery EY228989

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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre manager, members of staff, a representative from the local authority, a range of agencies who work in partnership with the centre, members of the school's governing body, a member of the steering group and families using the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Erdington Hall Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in November 2007. It serves six super output areas, where there is some of the highest deprivation in Birmingham city. Approximately 665 children live in the reach area of which one half are of Asian origin, a quarter are Black Caribbean, a tenth are White British with the remaining families made up of a variety of ethnicities, including Chinese, African and Polish families. Data show that 29% of children from birth to four are living in households that are workless or in receipt of work-related benefits. The centre delivers a range of services to meet its core purpose, including integrated early learning, information and advice to parents and carers, outreach, employment, training and health advice. Most services are offered on site, with some satellite provision at St Chad's Church Hall and Erdington Medical Centre. Full day-care provision is offered at Little Folks Nursery and the children's centre teacher liaises regularly with this setting, local childminders and other nurseries within the area. Children's knowledge, skills and abilities on entry to early years provision are below age-related expectations especially in personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy.

The centre is open five days a week for 50 weeks of the year and operates from a purpose-built centre on the site of Erdington Hall Primary School. The governing body of this school governs the centre on behalf of the local authority. There is a steering group, which consists of a range of governors, professional partners and parents and carers, which operates as a sub-committee of the governing body.

## Inspection judgements

**Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

### Overall effectiveness

**The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

**The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management**

**3**

## Main findings

Erdington Hall Children's Centre is providing a satisfactory service. Although in some aspects, the centre can demonstrate improving outcomes, such as children's achievements at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, other aspects are not as strong. The proportion of mothers sustaining breastfeeding is well-below average, and obesity levels of Reception-aged children are high. The obesity data presented by the local authority are too imprecise for the centre to be able set targets for improvement or to show if there have been any year-on-year improvements. There are no figures available from the health authorities to show the effect of work on smoking cessation, although this has been identified by the centre as a priority. Also, the centre is unable to show its influence on improving the economic well-being of adults as it does not carefully track if training results in future employment, volunteering or further training opportunities.

The centre, nevertheless, has a positive impact on the lives of those who engage with it. Centre staff share the manager's passion and dedication to providing a warm, welcoming environment where families who come into the centre trust staff and feel safe. One parent, voicing the views of others, said, 'We love the centre. The staff are always here for us and will listen. They are like my family.' Families experiencing significant change or challenge in their lives receive tailored and targeted support through one-to-one sessions with the family support workers, and close partnership working with a range of agencies. This support leads to improved parenting skills. There is good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) for those families in greatest need. Parents and carers who use the centre have a satisfactory understanding of how to keep safe and ensure the safety of their children. A particular strength is the provision for children to learn and develop. The staff are

knowledgeable and the 'learning journeys' provide a good record of how children have developed during their time at the centre.

Parents and carers influence the day-to-day running of the centre and the monthly parents' forum enables them to make suggestions about the content and times of sessions, for example. However, the minutes of the steering group show parents and carers are less influential in making strategic decisions. Minutes show that sessions are mainly about information sharing and there is limited evidence of questions or challenge. The centre's action plan identifies the essential priorities for improvement and includes some criteria for success. However, these criteria are not sufficiently measurable and do not provide sharp enough information to enable leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of the centre's work over time. Self-evaluation is generally sound but overly generous as it has not considered that only approximately one third of families regularly engage with the centre. It is only recently that leaders have begun to consider how it must prioritise its services to address the needs of the most vulnerable families, for example, Black minority ethnic families, lone parents and children in workless households, and also how it might enable more families to engage with the centre. However, improvements made over recent months in breastfeeding for example, the improving outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage for the children who have used the centre and the good commitment of staff mean the capacity to improve is satisfactory.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes for families by introducing more rigorous processes for monitoring and evaluating the centre's provision, in particular:
  - working closely with the local authority and other partners, especially the health authorities and adult learning services, to collect up-to-date quantitative data relating to the centre's key performance indicators and its own agreed priorities
  - using this information to set sharp, measurable targets which can be used to monitor and evaluate the impact of the centre's work with families
  - improving the way in which the outcomes of adult learning sessions are recorded and tracked
  - developing systems to ensure the consistent evaluation of the longer-term influence of all services delivered through the centre.
  
- Develop the centre's marketing strategy to ensure more families engage with the centre, especially those families who are most vulnerable, and then ensure activities are those that are relevant to their needs.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>3</b>
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Children enjoy the activities the centre offers and their achievements, as demonstrated by their results in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, have improved significantly in the last year. By the end of the Reception year in 2011, approximately 73% of children who attended this centre achieved at least 78 points

across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales. Adults improve their parenting skills through the good support and activities at the centre. Adult education partners provide a range of courses, some of which are accredited such as ESOL (English for speakers of other languages), literacy, numeracy and teaching assistants' courses. Case studies indicate some adults gain qualifications and progress to further education and training. For example, at the present time 14 parents are on the introduction to the teaching assistant course. However, the centre does not have sufficient information on adults' achievements or progression rates to plan and monitor provision more accurately, particularly for the many in the area who do not attend, including those most vulnerable.

The centre is a safe environment and there is good attention to keeping users safe through regular advice and signposting to other agencies. Once families are referred to the centre, staff are quick to help them improve all aspects of their safety. Parents and carers spoken to say how the centre has helped them to understand how to keep themselves and their children safe. Good use is made of schemes to provide safety equipment in the home and one parent commented that the equipment 'has made her home safer.' One parent said how she welcomed the opportunity to speak to a counsellor when she was finding it hard to manage the challenging behaviour of her child. Case studies show that the centre is effective in improving outcomes for the majority of children subject to child protection plans. The Common Assessment Framework is used well when specialist intervention is required. There is effective one-to-one support for families and individuals in times of crisis as staff work closely with Women's Aid to support and guide women experiencing domestic abuse. However, the number of instances of domestic abuse is rising, and at the present time the centre is working with only about 12% of known cases.

Close partnership working with midwives and health visitors ensures that parents and carers are provided with a range of information on topics such as smoking cessation, healthy eating and breastfeeding. The extent to which this has influenced health outcomes, however, is unclear. This is because the centre lacks sufficiently up-to-date, reliable, localised data to show its impact which limits the ability to set relevant improvement targets. The proportion of mothers sustaining breastfeeding in 2010 at 37.7% was low, although there is some recent evidence of improvement in 2012. Of the last group of mothers attending the 'Bumps to Babes' sessions, 53% of them have sustained breastfeeding. The only data available for obesity was that 13% of five-year-olds were overweight in the period 2006 to 2010 which is above the national average. 'Active Kids' is, however, well attended and is helping parents and carers and their children understand the importance of regular exercise. The centre does not follow up if this awareness of the importance of exercise is sustained.

Children relate well to others, and behave well. Staff treat all with respect, and model good practice. Parents and carers make a good contribution to the centre's day-to-day decision-making processes. Staff ask them to evaluate the centre's activities through the parents' forum, the suggestions board and questionnaires. Then this information is used to shape the centre's activities. However, opportunities for parents and carers to contribute to decision making and governance are more

limited as only two or three parents and carers are involved. There are currently too few opportunities for them to act as volunteers at the centre.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>3</b>

### **How good is the provision?**

**3**

Although there is evidence of the good effect of the outreach services meeting the needs of families living in the area, there are too many who are not yet benefiting from these services, especially those from Black, minority ethnic groups, lone parents and children in workless households. However those who access the centre feel they are supported well, particularly in times of crisis. One parent said, 'I felt very alone before I met the family support workers, now I feel I have a family to help me.' Care is taken in assessing families' needs and 'Team Around the Child' meetings are held regularly which ensures the right support is provided. Good safeguarding procedures prevent various family issues from escalating. Case study evidence shows that rigorous assessment has led to intervention and improvements in outcomes for some identified families. Access to live-birth data is enabling the centre to identify families earlier and make an assessment of their needs. In addition, the assessment of individual cases is more secure due to the manner in which the Common Assessment Framework is used for both prevention and intervention strategies. The availability of a representative from Court Appointed Special Advocates has been instrumental in helping some parents learn how to manage their finances, deal with litigation and access benefits.

Opportunities available for children's development are good and a wide range of activities are planned well to take account of the needs of users. These include the popular 'Stay and Play' courses, baby clinics and maternity services, baby massage, counselling, and parenting courses. Parents' knowledge of child development has vastly improved due to the simple advice given. All children are assessed when first engaging with the centre and their progress is tracked appropriately using the Early Years Foundation Stage tracking system and through the 'learning journeys'. The

focus on communication, language and literacy is promoted well through initiatives such as 'Chatterbags' and 'Bookstart'. The centre teacher works closely with the local childminders and nurseries ensuring there is a good emphasis on promoting children's language skills. However, these good opportunities affect only a small minority of the children from the families with the greatest need living within the area.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

The centre manager's drive and enthusiasm permeate the whole centre. The team is hard-working and committed, and trusting relationships between key partners, such as the school, Court Appointed Special Advocates and health practitioners, have been formed to try and meet the needs of families within the local area. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities, and are appropriately supervised. Day-to-day management is good and feedback from those families who use the centre reflects good satisfaction with the services.

Governance and accountability arrangements are understood, but are only satisfactory in ensuring that strategic planning is focused on ensuring the outcomes of those who are most vulnerable are improving. Key partners are involved in planning and there is evidence of integrated working. However, the local authority does not set clear measurable targets for improvement against the centre's key performance indicators. The lack of accurate data limits leaders' ability to provide an accurate evaluation of its effectiveness over time.

Over the past two years, registration has increased as has the number of families regularly engaging in the centre's work. Even so, too few families from the reach area are regularly involved, especially from those who are most vulnerable. Leaders recognise the need to change their focus from providing universal services to providing services for those who really need them. However, the marketing strategy of the centre is ineffective. For example, the termly newsletter sent to families is inappropriate for adults with limited English and low reading skills. One parent said, 'I would have just put it in the bin if the health visitor had not been with me to read it.' Even so, the centre is satisfactorily providing services that make a difference to the lives of those families who access the centre's services. In this respect, it is providing satisfactory value for money.

The current statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding are met. Checks are



made on the suitability of staff to work with children, and all adults have clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau. Staff are trained in a range of safeguarding topics, such as substance misuse and integrated working. They use the Common Assessment Framework effectively to identify safeguarding needs. Staff work productively with social care and other agencies to provide early intervention to prevent problems from escalating.

The statutory duties for promoting equality and celebrating diversity are met. Action to promote equality has resulted in satisfactory engagement with some key target groups, such as children with disabilities, fathers and families experiencing domestic violence. Crèche facilities are effective in enabling parents and carers with younger children to attend courses. The gap between the lowest-achieving five-year-old children and the rest is narrowing at a faster rate than is seen nationally. In 2010, 44% of Reception-aged children were in the lowest 20% narrowing to 22% in 2011.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>3</b>

### **Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection**

The lead inspector liaised with the lead inspector of Erdington Hall Primary School inspection to share evidence relating to the Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the school. This was evaluated to be satisfactory.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Erdington Hall Children's Centre on 23–24 February 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We very much enjoyed our visit to your children's centre and would like to thank all of you who gave your time to speak to us and tell us your experiences of using the centre. Your views have helped inform us of how well the centre is doing. We found that your centre is a warm and welcoming place where you are offered practical help and advice on lots of issues including safety, keeping healthy and improving your economic well-being. You clearly value this support because you say it makes a difference in the way you support your families at home. Those of you that attend parenting courses appreciate how these help you to manage your children's behaviour. The children we saw were well behaved and clearly enjoyed their activities. You said that you feel safe at the centre and that your children are safe too. We found that staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures and that they are well trained. Those of you who have had help from the centre's family support are particularly appreciative of the support and guidance they have given. They have helped many of you to be safer at home and cope with difficult family situations more effectively.

You enjoy sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Active Kids', and we found that children benefit from the many activities the centre offers as staff help them learn and make good progress. Your children's 'learning journeys' are a wonderful record of how your children have developed over time. The centre works with adult education providers so you can improve your own education and future employment opportunities. However, we are unsure how successful these courses have been, so we have asked the centre to track more carefully how well these have enabled you to find work, become a volunteer or take up further training.

The staff try hard to find out if services are useful to you. We know that you are asked for your views on activities and that some of you have made suggestions about what you would like, for example through the monthly parents' forum. I know that it was one of you who suggested that there should be a first-aid course for parents and carers. However, we think you should be more involved in shaping the centre's services and to do this we think you need more information about the effect the services have on families' lives. The centre manager and staff know the services that are successful and what needs to be improved. They have outlined all of their improvement points in an action plan. However, those of you who are governors and on the steering group are unable to check if all actions are really effective as the plan does not include measurable success criteria. We have suggested that governors help the centre's leaders to improve outcomes by setting challenging but achievable

targets and by checking regularly that the services that are being offered are really making a difference to your lives. Also, though a number of families do attend the centre, we have asked the staff to find ways of involving those families who are vulnerable or are hard to engage to attend the centre's activities.

The centre runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and all staff are committed to continue to improve the numbers who use the services and to maintain the good outcomes for those who already attend. As a result, and with an accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development, the centre is satisfactorily placed to continue to improve.

Thank you again to everyone who was willing to speak to us. It was a real pleasure to meet you and your children. We hope you continue to thrive and enjoy your time at Erdington Hall Children's Centre.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)