

Prenton Children's Centre

Prenton Primary School, Norwood Road, Prenton, Merseyside, CH43 0SR

Inspection date 4–5 June 2013

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.

- A good knowledge of the area and innovative staff ensure that the very large majority of children and families most in need of support register with the centre and so have easy access to services.
- The centre's focus on 'parents as first educators' is having greatest impact in the most deprived areas of the reach where the gap between these children's attainment by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and that of other children is rapidly narrowing.
- Families fully appreciate the high quality care they receive from the well-qualified staff saying for example, 'They helped me and my children get on the right track to make a happier household and help me get stronger'.
- Key strengths in the quality and impact of services include opportunities for adults to volunteer and for children to be prepared well for school and to live healthier lifestyles.
- Work in partnership with the co-located school, another local children's centre and also with health and domestic abuse professionals is a strength.
- Leaders and managers have set clear priorities to help improve the quality of practice and services at the centre and are driving these forward at a fast rate.
- There is a wide range of resources for users to share because the centre collaborates effectively with another centre to the benefit of families, children and the staff.

It is not outstanding because:

- Too few mothers start to breastfeed their babies from birth or carry on breastfeeding beyond six-to-eight weeks.
- Staff do not record children's skills when they first join in with activities that the centre runs, or formally check how well children do during the time they are involved with the centre.
- Governance, through the advisory board, does not offer enough challenge to the centre's leadership about its performance.

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 three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with parents, centre staff, members of the advisory board, volunteers, representatives from professional partnerships including health, early years and education, as well as officers from the local authority. Inspectors observed two activities jointly with centre staff.

The inspectors visited a centre-supported Early Years Foundation Stage activity in a local primary school and a health visitors' team meeting. Inspectors took into account parents' views as expressed directly to them during the inspection, as well as through parents' recorded evaluations of the centre's work and a review of the most recent parent satisfaction surveys.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation such as the centre's checks on its performance, development plans and data, information related to safeguarding and a selection of case files.

Inspection team

Jane Hughes	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Elaine Murray	Additional Inspector
Philip David Ellwand	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Prenton is a stand-alone, phase two children's centre and was designated in 2007. It shares a site with Prenton Primary School. Staff work in close collaboration with nearby Rock Ferry Children's Centre, and the centres share a leader and advisory board. The centre is managed directly by the local authority. There are five children's centres and four satellites in the Birkenhead locality. The range of services provided includes family support, health services, parenting, home learning, domestic violence support, volunteering and adult education. Target groups include families most in need and grandparents. The centre is situated in the middle of a housing estate which comprises both relatively affluent families and less-affluent families. Three of the super-output areas within the reach area are within the 30% most deprived areas in the country. A further 10 super-output areas are within the 70% most affluent areas in the country. There are 1088 children under four years of age living in the reach area. Approximately 218 live within the most deprived areas; of these children, 88% are registered with the centre. There are 870 children within the more affluent areas; of these, 72% are registered. Almost all children are of White British heritage. Within the reach, 19.7% of children aged under four years live in households dependent on benefits, including those relating to worklessness. Children enter early years provision with skills which are generally below those expected for their age.

The centre enables Prenton Primary School to run an out-of-school breakfast and after-school club from its site. This is inspected separately and the report of its inspection is available on our website: www.Ofsted.gov.uk.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that more mothers breastfeed their babies from birth and continue breastfeeding for at least six weeks.
- Record checks on children's skills and the progress they make from when they first start attending regular activities at the centre or engage in centre-led activities at home.
- Ensure that the advisory board provides effective challenge to the centre about its performance.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The centre makes good use of information collected about families with young children in its reach. Families know what services the centre provides and those in target groups are carefully identified by partners or sometimes 'self-referred' by families themselves. Staff acknowledge that there is more to do to promote user engagement further within the reach area.
- High-quality administrative support ensures that staff establish and maintain successful contact with families.
- There is a careful balance between services that are available to all families and targeted services, which successfully engage a large majority of families in the area. Staff are innovative in organising events, such as the holiday events in the park, working in collaboration with other centres across Birkenhead. These are very popular and help to engage parents who would otherwise never consider using on-site children's centre services.
- Centre staff work effectively with families in their own homes. They are often targeted by health partners and this approach puts families at ease, so that they quickly begin to benefit from the services on offer, such as 'home learning'. Health visitors are highly appreciative of this partnership work and confirm that, 'we don't know where we'd be without the staff here at the centre'.
- Pregnant women are registered early by midwives and health visitors to ensure that those in all groups have equal access to the best possible antenatal and postnatal support.
- The centre provides access to high-quality services for most adults and encourages them to have high aspirations and to strive to improve their life-chances. A large majority of adults who access courses complete them. They develop their literacy, numeracy and social skills which help them to develop future employability skills.
- Intervention and prevention work are particular strengths. Positive results of this aspect of the centre's work show how effectively staff identify and prioritise families' needs.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Well-organised support, advice and training are improving the quality of early years provision in the local area, much of which is good. In 2012, 63.3% of children living in the reach area achieved a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage which is similar to the national average. The gap in attainment between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest narrowed to 14%, down from 32.7% in 2008 and 23.8% in 2011, reflecting a successful focus on improving children's readiness for school, removing barriers to learning and reducing inequalities.
- 'Beautiful Beginnings' postnatal clinics held in the children's centre are very popular and help raise awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles. Support for parents to stop smoking is effective, with the percentage of mothers smoking at delivery at 5.17% in 2012, well-below the national average. The proportion of reception-age children who are obese has remained relatively stable at 8.99% which is also below regional and national averages.
- The centre holds UNICEF 'baby friendly' accreditation. 'Breastfeeding Champions' work alongside health professionals to promote the benefits of breastfeeding. Even with this good quality support network, the percentage of mothers who breastfeed their babies from birth as well as the 25% of mothers who are still breastfeeding their babies at six-to-eight weeks are not high enough.
- Very effective care, guidance and support for families ensures a keen focus on improving parents' understanding of how to keep their children safe and well. Resources, partnerships and expertise are used well to support users who are known to be most in need and staff are adept at matching support to best meet the needs of individual children and parents.
- Meticulously documented case studies reflect the success of targeted support. Grandparents are delighted at the regular opportunities they have to enjoy the free and 'quite amazing facilities' alongside their grandchildren. Volunteers are actively encouraged and make a strong contribution to the centre. Some move on to paid employment.

- Staff do not record the skills that children start with when they begin to access centre activities regularly, or when they receive support at home or in other local venues. This makes it difficult to keep track of how well they do over time.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The local authority regularly monitors the performance of the centre and provides clear data to measure how well the centre makes a difference to the lives of the families that it helps and reduce inequalities. There is a clear recognition that the services provided are of good quality and that targets for staff are met through regular reviews.
- The structure of the advisory board is changing as part of a reorganisation of children's centre management across the Wirral. Although there are good intentions, challenge from the advisory board on how well the centre is doing is not effective enough.
- The parents' forum operates through a weekly informal, 'Cuppa and a Catch Up' session. Users complete evaluations of activities and courses and help to shape services in this way. Rates of parental satisfaction are high. Parents' views are represented on the advisory board.
- Targeted parents who access the centre's services and achieve positive outcomes are successful ambassadors for the centre. For example, parents who have experienced domestic abuse are proud of their own successes. They are eager to share their stories with others in the community who are going through similarly difficult times in order to give them the confidence to seek help and move forward.
- The centre is highly inclusive. Staff target support for groups and individuals most in need. Almost all families living in the most deprived areas of the reach are registered with the centre. The barriers to engagement are consistently addressed so that the very large majority of children from the three most deprived areas within the reach are registered and the large majority are engaged in centre activities.
- Checks that the centre carries out on its own performance are appropriately rigorous, accurate and present an improving picture. Staff know what is working well and what to focus on next. All staff prioritise tasks effectively and try to make every second count for all users.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding supported by robust policies, procedures and practices, including the vetting of staff's suitability for employment. These are familiar to, and followed carefully by, staff and visiting partners. This successfully reduces the risk of harm to children and promotes their welfare, particularly for those children subject to child protection plans, Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes, looked after children and children identified as in need.
- Resources, including financial, are well deployed, particularly through partnership working. Collaboration with the centre at Rock Ferry enables staff to maximise their impact on users at both centres as well as other local providers of early years education. Staff learn well from each other.
- Professional supervision and the setting of targets for the well-qualified staff are highly effective. Staff appreciate how leaders help them to prioritise their work and develop new skills. This helps the centre to continue to move forward and to play a key role in improving the local community.

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 details

Unique reference number	22416
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	421490
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1088
Centre leader	Helen Richards
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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