

Atherton Sure Start Children's Centre

Formby Avenue, Atherton, Manchester, M46 0HX

Inspection date 3–4 October 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.

- Families are warmly welcomed into this vibrant and busy centre. They clearly enjoy and value the time they spend at the centre and the difference it has made to their lives.
- Centre staff clearly know the area well and meet the needs of the large majority of families from the area who use the centre's services. Well-established working groups help to place a clear focus on ensuring that services are appropriate and well focused, with a clear emphasis on promoting families' learning and development, health, and safeguarding those who need it most.
- The strong children's centre leadership communicates high expectations across the team and provides good levels of support to the enthusiastic staff team. Clear roles and responsibilities, and the effective use and analysis of data, contribute well to the centre's performance and targeting of services, to help meet the needs of families in the area. The centre is improving well.
- Families describe as excellent the care, guidance and support they receive, especially when they need it most. They make good use of what is on offer. In particular, they improve their parenting skills and their family's health, safety and well-being as well as their own.
- Strong collaborative working with partners, such as health professionals and the local schools, early years providers, adult learning, community organisations and early intervention and prevention agencies, results in positive outcomes for children and their families.

It is not outstanding because:

- The centre does not yet offer a wide enough range of adult learning and accredited courses to further increase users' chances of employment.
- Not all staff keep a precise enough chronology of events in case files to give an overview of each case easily.
- The timetable of activities does not include a session for children of mixed ages, so that parents can benefit from bringing more than one child. Therefore, opportunities are missed for them to learn about the importance of play and learning for them all.

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, staff, members of the Collaborative Leadership Committee (CLC), volunteers, and representatives from professional partnerships including health, early years and education, as well as officers from the local authority.

The inspectors visited the local adult learning centre and St Philip's Primary School, which have links with the centre. Inspectors took into account parents' views as expressed during the inspection, as well as through recorded evaluations of the centre's work and a review of the centre's most recent parent satisfaction surveys.

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

Inspection team

Parm Sansoyer, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Barbara Wearing	Additional inspector
Philip Ellwand	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Atherton Sure Start Children's Centre is a phase one, single centre, which opened in 2008. It provides a range of services including health services, social care, family play sessions, parenting programmes, adult education and outreach services. Services are provided at the children's centre and from St Philip's and St Richard's Primary Schools, the Green Grass Centre and Dorset Road Community Centre.

The centre's reach has 12 Super Output areas. Six of these are in the top 30% most deprived areas in the country and, of these, four are in the top 10% most deprived areas. The latest data show that 24.6% of children are living in households dependent upon workless benefits. There is predominantly a mix of private rental and social housing, with some pockets of privately owned homes. The very large majority of the population is of White British heritage.

There are 1,330 children aged under five in the reach area. The main target groups assessed in need of centre services are vulnerable children, families living in the most disadvantaged areas, young parents and workless families.

Most children who live in the targeted areas within the centre's reach enter early education with knowledge and skills that are significantly below expectations for their age. The centre has links to seven of the local primary schools.

The Collaborative Leadership Committee (CLC) at Meadowbank Primary and Children's Centre is commissioned by Wigan local authority to run the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Widen the range of training opportunities, including accredited courses, to improve adults' chances of employment and reduce worklessness in the area.
- Enhance further the chronology section of the case files, to help provide a clearer overview of each case more easily.
- Enhance further the current timetable to include a session for children of mixed ages under five, to target more parents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Staff have good local knowledge of the area and ensure that they have a good presence in the community. They advertise services well at local venues, regularly knock on doors and take regular walks and bicycle rides to promote the centre's services. Consequently, engagement from the community is good and it continues to rise. Therefore, families make good use of the centre's services and are improving their life chances and well-being.
- Staff place a clear focus on working effectively with partners, helping them to get in touch early with expectant mothers and maintaining contact. This ensures that mothers and their families benefit from the full range of early childhood services available before and after their child is born.
- Effective strategies, such as identifying each family's needs at the point of registration, mean staff can easily identify those families in need of the most intervention and support, and the nature of their needs. Staff have a clear understanding of local issues within the community and the main target groups, through the good use and analysis of local and national data.
- The centre offers a broad range of early childhood services, which are popular and extremely well used. For example, baby massage, weaning and breastfeeding groups attract parents early and targeted groups, such as the young/single parents group, offer support for those who need it most. However, as yet the centre does not provide a session for children of mixed ages. This prevents parents from bringing more than one child to sessions and discovering the importance of play and learning for them all.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Very effective partnership working with headteachers from the local primary schools, nursery leaders and children's centre link workers results in a strong focus on school readiness. Children attending the centre's services, on-site nursery and school nursery make significant gains in learning from their starting points. There is an improving trend in more children achieving good levels of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Groups and services to promote healthy lifestyles are set up and run in direct response to well-researched needs of the local community and collaborative working with health partners. For example, the minor illnesses clinic and comprehensive range of strategies to reduce obesity, reduce smoking in pregnancy, increase breastfeeding and promote a healthy lifestyle are improving life chances.
- The centre offers excellent care, guidance and support, in particular, for women experiencing domestic abuse. In addition, the very strong partnerships with the counselling service mean that individuals are supported well to alleviate distress, resolve crisis, make changes and improve their well-being.
- The centre provides good and responsive sessions to ensure that almost all families increase their parenting skills. Sessions are adapted to meet families' needs, such as using evidence-based programmes, targeting specific groups and home-based learning. This results in supporting families in keeping their children safe, and well-targeted intervention and prevention.
- Partners offer a wide range of advice, information and guidance, with signposting to specialist help such as for those experiencing debt and housing problems. Some parents have completed courses in mathematics, English, first aid and computing. However, the centre does not yet offer a broad enough range of training, including accredited courses, to engage more adults in improving their opportunities for employability.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The local authority, CLC and centre's leadership team is effective; it sets challenging targets and

systematically monitors the centre's performance. Therefore, a good focus is placed on reducing inequalities between the different target groups identified and the changing needs of the community.

- The additional layer of the dedicated Under 5s Working Group, which is made up of primary school headteachers, nursery leaders, link workers, parents and health professionals, and the Centre Development and Commissioned Projects Group, complement the work of CLC. They ensure the services are improving and targeting school readiness, health and well-being. They also make sure that those services are appropriate, effective, efficient and meet the needs of the families.
- The strong parents' forum places a clear focus on promoting services for groups who may be reluctant to attend and may need additional support. These include disabled parents and parents of disabled children and the minority of new Polish families in the community.
- Despite decreased budgets and the forthcoming re-structuring of services, the centre has worked hard to retain frontline staff and the groups and services already provided. Therefore, resources are used effectively and efficiently and continue to meet the needs of families attending.
- Close working with all partners, including social care partners, and clear roles and responsibilities result in effective protection of the families that have the greatest need. Staff make effective use of the Common Assessment Framework; high priority is given to children subject to a child protection plan and looked after children.
- The well-qualified team members describe the highly supportive supervision and coaching systems that are in place, and are clearly motivated by the high aspirations of the leadership team. Overall there are good monitoring systems in place. Case files on families are up to date and reflect the families' views and wishes. However, not all staff consistently record the correspondence they have had with other professionals involved with the family, in the chronology section, to help provide an overview of each case more easily.
- Making families feel welcomed and part of the community is central to the work of the centre. Many parents describe how they have overcome barriers and have developed a strong support system from attending the centre. Adults and children learn to value diversity and, for example, warmly welcome Polish families; staff work hard to break down any negative stereotypes about the changing community. This results in a centre that is proactive in removing barriers to engagement.

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

Unique reference number	20138
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	427446
Managed by	The Collaborative Leadership Committee (CLC) on behalf of the local authority.

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,330
Centre leader	Maureen Middlehurst
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01942 879012
Email address	headteacher@admin.meadowbank.wigan.sch.uk

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