

# Halton – Runcorn-Halton Lodge/Halton Brook

Grangeway, Halton Lodge, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 5LU

**Inspection date** 14–15 January 2014

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 have good access to services and activities offered across the group. Staff have worked hard and successfully to register the large majority of families from the areas served by the centres. By using social media, community events and other promotional activities, staff ensure that families and the wider community are kept well-informed about services and activities.
- Staff work very productively with a wide range of professionals and workers from health, housing, charities, churches and other organisations to provide services, resources and support for families. As a result, outcomes for families are good.
- The quality of information-sharing, referrals and signposting of families to the most appropriate service is good.
- The centres make a significant and highly valued contribution to the local authority's 'early help' strategy by ensuring that families' needs are identified early and that swift action is taken to prevent problems from escalating.
- The quality of leadership, management and governance is good. This is evident from leaders' and managers' concerted efforts to implement effective quality assurance systems which ensure that the centres are continually improving and constantly striving for excellence.

### It is not outstanding because:

- The centres' contribution to the educational achievement of children within the reach area is limited because they are not working in partnership with enough schools in the area.
- Not enough parents have opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge, and increase their chances of employment, by volunteering at the centres.

## 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. The centres that form part of this children’s centre group are Halton Lodge and Halton Brook.

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the manager of the group, senior leaders and managers from the local authority, staff from the centres, early years practitioners, members of the advisory board, parents, childminders and representatives from health, Jobcentre Plus, housing, churches and other organisations.

The inspectors visited both centres and other sites where services are delivered.

They observed the centres’ work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Inspection team

Priscilla McGuire, Lead Inspector	Additional Inspector
Elaine White	Additional Inspector
Ann Taylor	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

The Halton group of two centres serves families who live in Runcorn, Cheshire. It is one of two groups of centres in Runcorn. The local authority directly manages the centres. A joint advisory board provides governance for all the centres in Runcorn. The communities served by the two centres are broadly similar in characteristics. Levels of deprivation are high and most families live in social housing and are of White British heritage. Families living in the most deprived areas of the reach area and those in most need of support are amongst the centres' key target groups. The centres offer a wide range of services including stay-and-play sessions, adult learning and health services.

The Halton Lodge reach area covers the wards of Grange, Health and Mersey and contains three areas that are within the top 10% of the most deprived areas nationally. Halton Brook covers the wards of Halton Brook and Halton Castle and has four areas that are within the top 10% of the most deprived. There are 2,110 children aged under five in the reach area. Across the group, approximately 39% of children under four live in households dependent on workless benefits, which is higher than the average for England. The percentage of pupils claiming free school meals is also much higher than the national average. On entry to early years education, most children have skill levels below those expected for their age. The Halton Lodge centre shares its site with Halton Lodge Primary School and Ladybirds Nursery. The school and nursery are subject to separate inspection arrangements. Reports for these are available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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

- In order to ensure that it can make a greater contribution to the educational achievement of children, the group should extend its existing partnership work with educational professionals to include more of the schools within the reach area that offer places to children.
- Fully implement the new volunteer policy to ensure that adults have a range of opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge and employability by volunteering at the centres.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

**Good**

- A large majority of families is registered and has good access to the wide range of services offered by the centres. Midwives, health visitors and other health professionals work cooperatively with the centres to ensure that prospective and new parents can access services. Display areas are also used well at each centre to provide good quality information leaflets and to promote key messages about health, safety at home, education and other topics relevant to families' needs.
- Through regular multi-agency meetings and other means of communication, staff routinely share information with, for example, health, social care, housing, employment support staff and other professionals. As a result, there is a shared and very good understanding about local priorities, and families with the most needs are identified early.
- Centre staff make good use of social media, links with partners, community events and outreach work such as home visits, to encourage families to access services. This ensures that families are well-informed about centre activities, and access the most appropriate services that match their needs and interests.
- The centre group makes good use of information and data to monitor participation and attendance rates. As a result, staff are in a good position to identify where in the area more work needs to be done, to ensure that particular target groups, such as those living in the most deprived parts of the area, participate in and benefit from the centre's services.
- As a result of the centre's conscientious and successful work, the very large majority of children who are entitled to do so, benefits from free early years education.

### The quality of practice and services

**Good**

- The centre group provides a good balance of activities that are open to all families, such as 'stay and play', and those that are targeted at families with more specific needs, such as those who have disabled children. Services such as health clinics and breastfeeding support sessions help parents to develop a good understanding of how they can improve and maintain the health of their children.
- Data from the most recent Early Years Foundation Stage profile show that local children do not achieve as well as their peers at a national level. Although the centres make a meaningful contribution to children's improving educational achievement, not enough links have been made with all the schools in the reach area that offer places to children. This limits both the impact of the centres' existing good work to develop children's knowledge and skills, and children's readiness for school.
- Families' needs are assessed accurately and thoroughly. Staff actively participate in multi-agency meetings, such as 'Working Together', to ensure that services are well-matched to the needs of families, particularly those in most need of support. As a result, when problems and crises arise in families' lives, intervention from family workers, early help staff and other professionals is swift and effective.
- Parents value highly the excellent support that they receive from the centres. This helps them to overcome personal barriers and to access services that improve the quality of their lives and increase their children's life chances.
- By attending courses and also through individual guidance, parents receive the help they need to develop effective parenting skills. Groups such as 'the young parents' group' have been particularly effective in responding to the specific needs of teenage parents.
- The centre group works very effectively with partner organisations such as Jobcentre Plus, to help parents develop the skills and confidence they need to gain employment or progress to further education. Case study evidence demonstrates the centre's success in helping parents to gain skills and qualifications that have increased their employability. Parents do volunteer through the Community Parent Scheme, but not enough opportunities are available to help parents develop skills and knowledge through volunteering in the centre. The centres have recognised this as a gap in provision and have developed a volunteer policy which has yet to be implemented.

**The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management****Good**

- The group of two centres is managed well by a dynamic and energetic manager who is supported by a highly competent and highly motivated team. Leaders have responded well to the recommendations made during the inspection of Halton Lodge Centre in 2011. These have been used to strengthen the quality of services at both centres and to ensure that they make a positive difference to the lives of families.
- Arrangements for governance, leadership and management are effective. At all levels, continuous improvement of the centres' work is a key priority. The advisory board provides effective governance to the centre group. It has improved its own effectiveness through high quality training of board members and successful use of a 'self-evaluation' tool which has helped board members to identify how they can improve their individual contribution to the work of the centres.
- Performance management and monitoring of the group's work is effective and ensures that staff, as well as advisory board members, are fully aware of the centres' key strengths and areas of improvement. Through the rigorous self-evaluation process, the quarterly and annual monitoring of the centres by local authority managers, borough-wide meetings of centre managers and reports to the Children's Trust, there are effective arrangements in place to ensure that the centres continually improve and strive for excellence. Leaders complement the robust quality assurance process by regularly monitoring the work of staff through annual appraisals and frequent supervision meetings.
- Leaders, managers and the advisory board routinely use data reports and local information to identify strengths and areas for improvement. For example, data show that the centres have been successful in reducing inequalities, by ensuring that all disabled children in the area access services. The centres are also actively contributing to the narrowing of the achievement gap, at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, between children who receive free school meals and those who do not.
- Safeguarding of families underpins the centres' work and is at the core of the local authority's strategy to use children's centres as a means of providing 'early help' to families. Safeguarding and safer recruitment policies are appropriately implemented and staff are well-trained in a range of safeguarding topics. Staff use tools such as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and partnership work with social care professionals, to identify families with priority needs and to ensure that those needs are met.
- Parents make an excellent contribution to decision-making. They are well-represented on the advisory board, which is chaired by one of the parents. They also contribute to decision-making through their roles on the 'parents' voice' group and played a significant role in developing the outdoor area at the Halton Brook site.
- Good quality accommodation and resources are offered to families. Resources are managed and used well. The centres also make good use of links with churches, charities, housing associations, health professionals and other organisations to provide resources and activities for families. For example, through links with churches, the centres were able to provide families identified as in most need of support with food hampers and toys at Christmas. Families also value the weekly 'swap shop' at Halton Lodge which offers clothes, toys and other goods for families.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	80155
<b>Local authority</b>	Halton
<b>Inspection number</b>	430115
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	2,110
<b>Centre leader</b>	Val Armor
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01928 573 107
<b>Email address</b>	val.armor@halton.gov.uk

**This group consists of the following children's centres:**

- Halton Lodge
- Halton Brook

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