

# Cheshire West & Chester – Chester locality



Carlisle Road, Blacon, Chester, Cheshire CH1 5DB

<b>Inspection date</b>	14–16 January 2014		
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b> Previous inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b> Not previously inspected	<b>3</b>
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Too few families from target groups are making use of the universal sessions offered by the centre.
- The quality of the planning, delivery and monitoring of sessions for children and their families is too variable. Not enough sessions are of good quality.
- The centre does not use accurate, current data sufficiently to identify which families from target groups attend, or benefit from activities and services; to ensure that the most vulnerable families are having their identified needs met.
- Too few adults have the opportunity to acquire the learning, training and qualifications needed to improve their economic stability and chances of employment.
- The advisory boards are not sufficiently well-informed to provide appropriate levels of challenge and hold the managers to account for the effectiveness of the children's centres in meeting the needs of target groups.
- Parents are not sufficiently involved in the evaluation and development of services offered by the group.

### This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- The group works well with partners to provide well-coordinated services that benefits those families who do access services.
- The large majority of families is registered with the group through highly effective information-sharing between partners.
- Services and activities are adapted well to meet the differing needs of families. When they are identified, families facing highly complex issues in their lives are well-supported through effective inter-agency working.
- Strong partnerships and support from early years consultants for early years workers are used very well to improve their practice and support local schools and private, voluntary or independent settings.

### Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children’s centre group 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 Blacon Children’s Centre, Chester Victoria Children’s Centre, Kingsway and Upton Children’s Centre, Lache Children’s Centre and Cherry Grove Children’s Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty’s Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority representative and the nominee, and with representatives from: the senior leadership; the advisory boards; local leaders of early years provision cross-sector including the senior practitioners; midwifery and health visiting team; the parenting team; adult education; local school headteachers; police officers; family support; early support and with parents attending the centres. Inspectors looked at the group’s two self-evaluations and associated development plan updates, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures and a wide range of relevant documentation.

The inspectors visited sessions at all five children’s centre sites and carried out joint observations. They observed the group’s work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

### Inspection team

Bob Busby	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Joanne Smith	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Mary Dudley	Additional Inspector
Parm Sansoyer	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

The Cheshire West and Chester – Blacon Group of children's centres operates across five centres around the city of Chester, no more than four miles apart. Cherry Grove Centre is located on the site of Cherry Grove Primary School; Kingsway and Upton centre is located on the Kingsway Campus of the University of Chester.

There are approximately 4480 children aged from birth to four years living in the reach area. Depending on the ward, children enter school-based early years provision with skill levels that are low for their age. Early years provision in the area is provided through a mix of childminders, school and non-school based settings. The primary schools and adjacent early years settings are inspected separately; the reports are available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

Governance is provided by the local authority which recently restructured its 20 centres into locality clusters. Since September 2013, the Cheshire West and Chester – Blacon Group of children's centres has been managed as a group by a Senior Manager Integrated Early Support, to meet the core purpose of Sure Start children's centres. Cheshire West and Chester – Blacon Group of children's centres are based in communities ranked within the top 30% for deprivation nationally.

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

- Improve the collection and use of data in informing the centres, and prioritising engagement and participation of target groups and the most vulnerable families.
- Better record the impact of all aspects of provision delivered by the group and its partners including through improved collection and use of the views of service users.
- Improve access to services by young children and families by increasing the range of sessions on offer throughout the group of centres:
  - to better target those families who need the services most and are reluctant to engage
  - to provide a broader range of sessions for children aged over two years, particularly for target children in Lache, Chester Victoria and Blacon so that more children are better prepared for school.
- Implement more rigorous monitoring, coaching and training systems to improve the quality of universal and targeted sessions and staff practice to ensure that practice is consistently good across the group.
- The centres, supported by the local authority, should further develop partnerships with adult learning providers to extend opportunities for families to access adult learning, especially in relation to improving their employability and accessing accredited courses, and implement robust systems to track their progress.
- Improve the effectiveness of the advisory boards in challenging and driving improvement in group performance and increasing the impact the centres have in improving the lives of families whose circumstances make them most vulnerable by:
  - ensuring that the expertise of all advisory board members is fully utilised through increased attendance at meetings
  - providing advisory board members with better quality, accurate information regarding centre performance.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The group has very strong relationships with partners, particularly with health visitors and midwives, who deliver ante-natal and post-natal services from the centres, and with local primary schools. Parents value this coordinated approach and see it as a 'pregnancy to school-starting' service for the community. Effective information-sharing is helping with the registration of the large majority of families.
- Management reports do not identify the main priorities within the reach area fully. Target groups are not identified sufficiently well nor are their participation levels monitored sufficiently. Too few families from target groups participate in universal sessions and there is substantial drop-out which is not always followed up; for example, in one baby massage the attendance dropped from an initial 12 families to five at the final session.
- Most services and activities that are available are adapted well to meet the differing needs of families. Families in which either a parent or a child has a disability are supported particularly well, for example, baby massage was delivered in a family home to enable a disabled parent to access the service.
- The group does not offer enough targeted sessions to further improve the lives of those who are most in need. Currently, only two early years workers support the centres in delivering universal and targeted sessions across the group. Although the centres offer antenatal groups and groups for babies on most days, there are too few groups for children aged over 18 months to help prepare them for school.
- Where indicators are low, for example sustained breastfeeding rates, some positive action is being taken. A 'Baby Shower' monthly group is a newly formed activity created to engage hard-to-reach families and encourage breastfeeding in expectant mothers with follow-on activities. The impact of this is yet to be measured and at present only a small proportion of families has been able to become involved.

### The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Parenting courses effectively equip parents with the skills and strategies that result, for some, in calmer family homes, improved relationships and improved confidence and self-esteem. Staff in some groups are adept in ensuring that parents develop their understanding of how their child learns and is progressing. Parents who attend make good progress but too few adults attend many of the groups and the centres need to provide a broader range of universal and targeted sessions.
- Families who access centre activities and are supported by family case workers receive good care, guidance and support. They are safeguarded well and learn how to keep the families safe. Those families who use services receive good timely support. Parents are supported well by staff and able to share their concerns readily. Emergency food hampers held at each centre and spare clothes are practical ways in which the children's centres provide care. Families facing highly complex issues in their lives are supported well through effective inter-agency working. The Team around the Family process ensures that a comprehensive package of support is put in place following early assessment of need.
- Strong partnerships and support from early years consultants are used very well to support local schools and private, voluntary or independent settings to improve the quality of services. The group has developed good partnerships for disabled children and those with special educational needs. Children with speech and language delay are supported well by speech and language therapists. Therapists teach parents strategies to support their child's speech and language development which helps children progress speedily. The centres offer good care and guidance through signposting families to support and commissioned services for domestic abuse.
- The quality and the planning and delivery of sessions for children and their families vary. Some are good and delivered by well-qualified staff, but practice is too variable. In good sessions such

as baby weigh clinics and baby massage, health professionals and centre staff skilfully question parents about their child and the resulting advice and guidance parents receive is highly relevant to the child's development. However, not all staff have such good knowledge or experience and there is too little monitoring of sessions, for example stay-and-play sessions, to ensure key messages regarding improving communication and language interaction are promoted. Staff do not always identify needs and monitor progress of children promptly and effectively, particularly for those families who need services most.

- Group leaders do not use robust data or track the quality and impact of services to help plan how services can better meet the needs of families. Centres do not offer enough sessions to engage and sustain engagement from those who need it most. For example, many of the groups are for children under eighteen months of age or are short four-week groups with insufficient follow-on groups or activities. The group needs to work more effectively with families in the Lache, Chester Victoria and Blacon areas to ensure that children are better prepared for school.
- There are too few opportunities for adults to acquire the learning, training and qualifications needed to improve their economic stability and chances of employment. A few parents benefit from attending training and education programmes but very few parents gain accreditation and fewer gain employment. Information on the progress made by parents undertaking training and learning opportunities is not monitored to demonstrate the impact of the provision on offer.

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

Requires improvement

- Group leaders have established some highly effective partnership arrangements with other agencies. Information-sharing particularly with health and midwifery services, has been instrumental in the increased registration rates.
- Appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and access to all centres is controlled well. The centre works well with partners to reduce the risk of harm to children. Parents are very well-informed about the centre's role in safeguarding their children's welfare. Families receiving support are involved in planning and reviewing their progress. Open and honest discussions take place so parents know why a referral has been made to the social care team. The centre is intrinsically involved in the multi-agency approach to domestic abuse support.
- Staff are supported well by managers and they have good access to further training and professional development opportunities. Staff receive regular case supervision with managers but the quality of case files is variable and actions resulting from managers' review of files are not always recorded well. A new electronic case recording system has recently been introduced but it is too early to judge the impact.
- Data and management information are not used sufficiently well in evaluating the impact of the services provided by the group. Accurate information on registration rates and participation rates of targeted groups is not routinely discussed in evaluating the performance of the centres. There is insufficient overall analysis of engagement and impact with respect to how the centres meet the needs of families most in need of support.
- The local authority and the group of centres do not agree and implement sufficiently challenging outcome and performance measures based on participation rates within the reach area. The centres have holistic targets to maintain participation rates and to increase engagement by ten percentage points, but there are not enough explicit targets related to increasing the engagement of particular groups. The centres are unable to demonstrate how services lead to sustained and demonstrable improvements for families, especially those in target groups.
- Governance arrangements require improvement. The group engages with three separate advisory boards, none of which is well-attended regularly. Data provided to the advisory boards do not provide sufficient, accurate information on how well the group or individual centres are reaching the families whose circumstances make them most vulnerable to enable the advisory boards' members to challenge centres' leaders robustly. Although senior managers monitor the progress of centres against overall targets through quarterly updates to the development plans, some

targets are too generic and are not sufficiently measurable.

- Centre staff and partners are suitably involved in the self-evaluation through effective away-days. However, parents have limited involvement in the development of services in the centre. Their involvement is largely through evaluations completed about activities and sessions or through informal discussions with staff. Most centre users express a high level of satisfaction with the quality of services but few express views that the centre could use to identify where services need to be amended or improved.

**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>	80413
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire West & Chester
<b>Inspection number</b>	430089
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	4480
<b>Centre leader</b>	Helen Brackenbury
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01244 976225
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:helen.brackenbury@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk">helen.brackenbury@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk</a>

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

- 20331 Blacon Children's Centre
- 20677 Chester Victoria Children's Centre
- 21695 Kingsway and Upton Children's Centre
- 21725 Lache Children's Centre
- 20663 Cherry Grove Children's Centre



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