

# Knowsley – Whiston & Prescott Children's Centre group

Sherwood Drive, Prescott, Knowsley, Merseyside, L35 3XJ

<b>Inspection date</b>	20–21 February 2014		
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
	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		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a good centre.

- Highly focused, thoughtful and effective leadership creates an environment in which all staff are relentless in their determination to improve the impact of the centre's work on families' well-being.
- Service planning and review are based on rigorous analysis of data and changing circumstances. Leaders accurately identify those areas that need to be improved and take successful action to ensure that improvement occurs.
- The local authority and the advisory board both provide strong support and challenge in equal measure.
- Innovative practice, such as the development of a skilled and reliable volunteer workforce, greatly enhances the quality and availability of services and their impact on users.
- A large majority of families, including those from groups generally more reluctant to participate, engage in the centre's activities. The detailed knowledge of staff and volunteers about the local community ensures that most work is directed towards encouraging those in the most disadvantaged areas to benefit from what the centre has to offer.
- The centre's work to improve children's readiness for, and success at, school is highly effective.
- Those families referred for extra support gain swift access to the relevant services and begin to take control of their lives. This is due to strong partnership working and staff's attention to detail which underpin the centre's highly successful work with individuals in most need.

### It is not outstanding because:

- The centre provides insufficient advice and guidance about employment and benefits to help adults improve their families' economic well-being.
- Levels of breastfeeding, smoking during pregnancy and obesity in young children remain stubbornly worse than national figures.

## 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 Phoenix Sure Start Children’s Centre and Southmead Sure Start Children’s Centre.

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with: centre staff; parents; volunteers; a range of partners from education, health and social care; members of the advisory board and representatives of the local authority.

The inspectors visited Phoenix Children’s Centre, Southmead Children’s Centre, and Kirkby Municipal building.

They observed the centre’s work, including four sessions for children and adults, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including case files, the centre’s evaluation of its success and action planning, policies and practice related to safeguarding.

## Inspection team

Sarah Drake, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Alan Comerford-Dunbar	Additional inspector
Ann Taylor	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre group

Knowsley – Whiston & Prescot Children’s Centre group consists of two centres, Phoenix and Southmead, which are amalgamated under the leadership of one manager. It is managed directly by Knowsley local authority and is held to account by an advisory board which includes three parents as well as representatives from a wide range of partners. The centre group delivers a range of services that are open to all (universal), and others that are targeted for those with specific needs. The services include: child and family health advice; access to adult learning; parenting support; sessions to help parents support their children’s learning and development as well as family support for those in greatest need. The majority of the universal services is provided by Family Voices = Family Choices, which is a social enterprise with charitable status, set up by the centre and run by parent volunteers.

There are approximately 1,432 children aged between nought and four years living within the area served by the children’s centre group. Overall, 57% of local families live in areas identified as among the 30% most deprived in the country, with slightly more pockets of disadvantage in the area local to the Phoenix Centre. Approximately 3% of families belong to minority ethnic groups. Approximately 15% of families are workless and dependent on benefits. The skills of most local children on entry to early years provision are below those expected for their age. The centre has identified the target groups on which it needs to focus as: those referred for extra targeted support; those living in the areas of highest deprivation; young parents; disabled children; dads and male carers; lone parents.

St Mary and St Paul Church of England Primary School, St Leo’s & Southmead Catholic Primary School, Sue Gill Nursery at St Mary and St Paul’s, and Little Treasures Nursery are all linked to the children’s centre group. They did not form part of this inspection but their inspection reports can be found on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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

- In partnership with health colleagues, improve the impact of work to increase the numbers of mothers who breastfeed their babies at six-to-eight weeks, and to reduce levels of smoking during pregnancy and obesity in children of Reception age.
- Increase adults’ ability to strengthen their families’ economic well-being by improving their access to advice and guidance related to benefits and employment.

### Inspection judgements

#### Access to services by young children and families

**Good**

- Since 2011, the proportion of families and children registered at the centre has increased by more than one third to 86%, and those regularly engaged in its activities have more than doubled to 71%. Due to leaders’ excellent analysis of the local area and sharply focused actions, the greatest increase has been among those families who live in the areas of highest deprivation. Volunteers’ outreach work has been exceptionally successful, with 98% of the 252 families that they registered in 2013 becoming actively engaged.
- Most disabled children benefit from services at this centre or, through collaboration with its neighbours. Work to increase the proportions of young parents, lone parents and male carers who engage with centre services is having a positive impact, although these groups are not yet as well engaged as others.
- Both centres provide a welcoming environment with similar displays of useful information and an

equally warm welcome from reception staff. This means that families feel confident to 'drop in' with queries and concerns, sure of a helpful response. The regular antenatal clinics held at each centre also provide a good route to advice, support and centre activities.

- The highly efficient and well-coordinated system for processing referrals of those families with children who are 'just coping' but do not meet the criteria for social care input, leads to a speedy response, home visit, detailed analysis of need, and liaison between professionals to help ease difficult situations. Many such families progress to participating in universal services and volunteering. This demonstrates the centre's successful promotion of equality of opportunity.
- The numbers of two-year-olds taking up their entitlement to free early education have increased significantly over the past year, so that a very large majority now does so. All three- and four-year-olds have places in good quality settings, the great majority in school nurseries.

### The quality of practice and services

**Good**

- Parents' views strongly influence the regular adaptations made to the centre's good range of universal and targeted services. This means that the different sessions are well attended which has a beneficial impact on adults' and children's learning and well-being.
- Of recent participants, 95% completed parenting courses and their evaluations confirm the positive difference that these have made to their families' lives. Similarly, while most local children's skills on entry to Nursery are below those expected, in the current year the skills of those children who attended more than 20 sessions at the centre, and of those who participated in the 'Ready for Nursery' course, were typical for their age.
- Vibrant partnerships between centre staff, childcare settings, schools and the local authority underpin the successful work to improve children's learning. All involved are passionate that parents understand why staff encourage children to, for example, explore jelly, rather than just seeing the centre as a place where children can enjoy 'messy play'. All those families who have experienced the home-based 'learning through play' sessions for those living in the most deprived areas have progressed to accessing the centre's universal services. The proportions of local children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year are consistently above national figures.
- The centre's exceptional volunteering scheme, started in 2011, provides the backbone for its services. The highly focused training programme and on-going support instil individuals with confidence, empower them to run universal sessions such as 'Stay and Play' or 'Baby Massage', and free professional staff to carry out one-to-one support in the home or targeted group sessions. Between them, 47 volunteers have donated 6,884 hours to the centre's work during the current year, the equivalent of four full-time staff. The volunteering experience has also provided 38% of volunteers with a route into employment.
- The numbers of adults participating in education have increased over the past year to almost 300, with approximately one quarter pursuing accredited courses. However, there are too few opportunities for adults to gain information, advice and guidance about welfare benefits and employment. This reduces their ability to improve their families' economic well-being.
- The centre works in close partnership with health professionals, both to meet individuals' needs and in their joint efforts to improve the health of local families. Despite this, the proportion of mothers choosing to breastfeed is less than half the national average; almost one third more smoke during pregnancy than do so nationally; and 11.6% of Reception-age children are obese compared to 9.3% nationally. These figures show little or no signs of improvement over time.
- Centre staff offer families in crisis highly professional and deeply concerned care, guidance and support. As well as providing practical help, this has a very strong impact on the mental and emotional well-being of children and adults, enabling them to move forward with their lives. 'I could write a book on the help I've had', and, 'I haven't just received help, I've gained friends,' are typical of families' comments.

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

- First-class leadership and management, firmly rooted in exemplary analysis of individuals' needs and the centre's strengths and weaker areas, provide the bedrock for notable improvements in the well-being and lives of local children and families. The centre manager deftly deploys senior leaders' diverse skills and expertise to maximise the centre's impact. Regular performance management ensures that all staff's work is of high quality. All actions taken are based on careful research of their potential benefits, and they have a significant impact.
- The innovative work with volunteers boosts the centre's capacity to increase numbers, run activities and, through impressive success with funding applications, has improved the resources for outdoor play at each centre and, imminently, adults' access to computers at Southmead. It is also an example of the centre's exceptionally inclusive practice which fosters high levels of community involvement and participation. One senior leader's creation of the 'Midas Touch', an activity based on recycled materials, has had measurable, nationally recognised, success in extending children's communication, physical and social skills.
- Sub-groups, comprising professionals and users relevant to each aspect of the centre's work, meet regularly to inform and influence the advisory board's decision-making. Advisory board members undertake joint observations of the centre's activities with senior leaders which help them to understand the quality of practice and services, and what is driving forward improvement. Members regularly refer to data on the centre's performance. They are proud of the centre's work to reduce inequalities and close the achievement gap. Governance is both secure and challenging.
- The local authority plays a significant role in streamlining access to services, enhancing staff's qualifications, promoting partnership working, and holding centre leaders to increasingly rigorous account for the impact that their work has on families.
- Safeguarding arrangements have a high profile and staff apply them consistently. Seamless working between different agencies, taking the views of parents and children into good account, leads to reductions in risk of harm for those children who are looked after, have a child protection plan or are subject to Common Assessment Framework (CAF) procedures. Staff complete case notes to a high standard. Social workers praise the centre's work with vulnerable families. Parents, typically, comment, 'When the CAF opened we were frightened, now we don't want it to close.'

**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>	80509
<b>Local authority</b>	Knowsley
<b>Inspection number</b>	430119
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	1,432
<b>Group manager</b>	Joanne Parry
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 443 4531
<b>Email address</b>	joanne.parry@knowsley.gov.uk

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

- URN 22375 Phoenix SSCC
- URN 22800 Southmead SSCC

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