

Oldham – Saddleworth and Lees Children's Centre

In the grounds of Springhead Infant School, Cooper Street, Springhead, Oldham, Lancs, OL4 4QT

Inspection date

18–19 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
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:

- The number of families, principally those in target groups, that is registered with the group of centres and that is regularly accessing the activities and services that are offered is not high enough. This is particularly true for families living in the area with an above average level of deprivation that is served by the Saddleworth West and Lees centre.
- The range of activities that is offered is limited and local needs are not always fully considered when planning services. Too little is done to meet the needs of toddlers and young children as well as adults who wish to improve their education and employability.
- Insufficient use is made of data to precisely identify target groups, to shape services and to evaluate the impact of services. The impact of the group's strategies to bring about improvement is not robustly analysed.
- The advisory board lacks a permanent chair and there is limited representation from the local community. Parents' views are not always sufficiently taken into account and used to shape services.

This children's centre group has the following strengths

- Challenge from the local authority has been pivotal in helping local leaders and managers secure the recent improvements to the numbers of families who use the services offered by the group.
- There is a welcoming atmosphere in all of the centres. The antenatal and postnatal services that are provided are valued by expectant mothers.
- Those parents who receive individual support report that it has improved the quality of life for their families. Support for parents whose children have disabilities and those with special educational needs is good.
- The local authority services have a positive impact on the quality of early year's provision in the area and have contributed to children's above average skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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 Saddleworth West and Lees and Saddleworth North and South.

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the leader of the group. They also spoke to staff who work in the centre, to managers from Action for Children and the local authority as well as members of the advisory board. Conversations were held with staff from partner agencies, including a range of health professionals and staff from the adult learning services. Inspectors also spoke with headteachers and other educational professionals. Discussions with parents took place at different times during the inspection.

Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Susan Walsh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Joan Cawdron

Additional Inspector

Elaine White

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Oldham - Saddleworth and Lees Children's Centre group consists of two centres. Saddleworth West and Lees which serves a population that lives in a mainly urban environment and Saddleworth North and South which serves a more rural setting. Both children's centres serve areas that are amongst the least deprived in Oldham, although there are small pockets of these communities that are amongst the 30% most deprived nationally, particularly in the Lees area. The proportion of children who live in workless households is below the national average in both areas. The vast majority of families are of White British heritage.

The North and South area centre offer is universal whereas the West and Lees also offers more targeted services.

In March 2010, Action for Children became responsible for the management of the group. There is a children centre group leader who is also responsible for the leadership of all Early Childhood Services across the area. The group leader and the manager who has responsibility for all the children's centres in Oldham that are managed by Action for Children have just returned after a period of absence. This centre is guided in the provision of services by the requirements of Oldham Local Authority. The advisory board acts on behalf of the group to offer challenge and support.

Most children in Saddleworth West and Lees area enter the Nursery and Reception classes with skills that are typical for their age. Those in the area served by Saddleworth North and South children's centre often enter the Nursery and Reception classes with skills that are above those that are typical for their age.

The centre has identified as particular target groups:

- disabled children, children with additional needs and children of disabled parents
- children living in families that have low incomes
- children who are on the child protection register, classified as children in need or who are supported by a range of other agencies.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of families from the reach area that benefit from the groups' services by:
 - developing a more structured and robust system for registering all local families and identifying their specific needs so that they remain involved with the group
 - doing more to engage those families who live in the most economically disadvantaged areas served by the Saddleworth West and Lees centre and making sure that there is regular contact with children whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable
 - raising the profile of the group in the local community, including in the outlying villages.
- Improve the impact of the services provided by the group by:
 - developing a greater range of services that are more closely matched to local needs
 - planning a coherent programme of activities that continue to meet infants' needs as they develop into toddlers and progress into early childhood
 - developing tracking and assessment systems that more accurately measure the impact of the provision on adults' learning
 - increasing the opportunities for adults to further develop those skills that will enhance their education and employability.
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- Improve the impact of leadership and management and governance of the group by:
 - using data and local intelligence in order to identify target groups more precisely and to make services more responsive to the needs of local families
 - enhancing the quality of development planning, including being more analytical when measuring the impact of the groups' work
 - appointing a permanent Chair to the advisory board and making certain that the views of the local community are better represented
 - enhancing parental involvement in shaping the strategic direction taken by the centre, including involving them more in the work of the advisory board and re-invigorating the parents' forum.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre has managed to increase substantially registration and engagement rates over the last few months. As a result, the large majority of families in the Saddleworth West and Lees area are registered with the centre. However, there is still a significant number of families living in the areas where there is most economic disadvantage who are not regularly accessing the services offered by the group. The centre does not have enough contact with children whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable. This limits the centre's work to challenge inequalities and reflects an unstructured approach to registering and engaging families.
- In Saddleworth North and South about a quarter of families are not registered with the group. The group does not always take advantage of detailed information provided by the local authority to identify families who are not accessing services and to find out why. There has been limited action taken to raise the profile of the group across the whole reach area and the group has not yet fully considered how it might overcome the challenges of serving families who live in the more rural parts of the area.
- The centre is not always good at reaching its target groups. The identification of and contact with families who have children with identified disabilities and those with special educational needs is good. However, the centre has been less effective at identifying and reaching other children whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. The Early Help Panel that operates across the group has improved information sharing and helped to identify families' needs more promptly.
- Most families take up the offer of free entitlement to early years education when their entitlement has been identified. The local authority is developing a more coherent system of identifying children's needs through a system of regular assessments. This is helping to identify additional needs in a timelier manner and more children are receiving the help they need before they start school.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Although the centre provides good quality services, the range of services that are offered are narrow and focus mainly on the needs of those that are expecting or have babies. There are relatively few services for parents of toddlers and young children that might impact on their health and well-being or achievement, or for those adults who want to improve their levels of education or employability skills.
- There are not enough opportunities provided for adults to build upon their educational skills or build their confidence in readiness for entering work. Parents report that they find first aid courses valuable and that these have had an impact on the quality of their families' lives. A small number of families receive individual support that helps them to manage their children's behaviour. However, there are no opportunities for parents to attend specific programmes to enhance their parenting skills and or to help parents to learn from one another's experience. Access to courses and adults' achievements is not routinely tracked by leaders and managers within the group, so they do not know what impact the provision is having over time.
- There is good access to antenatal and postnatal services throughout the group. Baby and toddler massage courses provide opportunities for mums to interact with their babies through touch and gentle movement. The Baby Bistro provides a popular venue where mothers can access breast-feeding support, but this is only available in one part of the relatively large reach area.
- Individual support is provided for a small number of families. This support is of a good quality. It improves outcomes for families and reduces inequalities. Support for families of children with disabilities and those with special educational needs is particularly good. Case files and records are maintained well and parents' views are taken into account and respected.
- The Stay and Play activity provided at Saddleworth West and Lee's children centre is of good quality. Staff are good role models particularly in showing parents how to develop their children's language skills. However, parents are correct when they point out that comparatively few activities

are provided that address the needs of toddlers and young children especially in the Saddleworth North and South area.

- The local authority has worked diligently to improve the services provided by local voluntary groups and those that provide child care including child minders. It keeps a careful check on the quality of provision in addition to providing more general guidance and it also puts in specific packages of support when necessary. The local authority is also starting to analyse data about children's skills when they access the Early Years Foundation Stage. The work and close links with schools is reflected in above average outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage for many children who live within the reach area.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The absence of key local managers has contributed to the reduced performance of the children's centre in the recent past. The return of these personnel, together with a high level of challenge from the local authority, have led to significant improvements and a higher proportion of families are now accessing the services that are offered by the group. Leaders and managers have ensured that services are of good quality, although a narrow range of activities are offered to improve life chances.
- The leaders and managers are provided with detailed information by the local authority about the families who live in their reach area and the proportions who are accessing services. However, this information is not always used effectively along with neighbourhood intelligence and parents' views to plan services that are closely matched with local needs. Resources are not always used well enough to ensure that activities are appropriately distributed through the reach area. For example, the needs of families in outlying villages are not fully taken into account.
- Data is not used well to measure the impact of the group's work. Although plans for improvement contain clear numerical targets the group's evaluation of the strategies for improvement is often a description of what has been done rather than a clear analysis of the impact of the actions that have been taken on improving outcomes for local families and reducing inequalities.
 - The group's leaders, managers and governors have a realistic view of the quality and impact of the group's work because they discuss data. Members of the advisory board are aware of the issues that the group faces as it works to reduce inequalities. Currently, the advisory board lacks a Chair person and there is insufficient representation from the local community. This limits the ability of the advisory board to have a crystal-clear vision of the direction in which the group needs to travel and to take fully into account, local needs.
 - The centre takes note of parents' evaluations of some sessions and sometimes responds to parents' views. However, it has not done enough to research a wide range of views including finding out why some parents are reluctant to register with the group or use the services that are provided. The parents' forum has very limited attendance. Therefore, parents have a restricted influence in shaping long-term developments of the group.
 - Appropriate day-to-day management ensures that the centre runs smoothly and provides a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Managers from Action for Children ensure that staff are supervised and arrangements for performance management are in place. The pivotal drive for improvement has come from the rigorous monitoring by the local authority. This includes setting weekly targets for rates of registration and engagement that have motivated the group's staff to reach out to more parents.
 - Responsibilities relating to safeguarding are taken seriously and staff are carefully vetted and trained. Policies and procedures are suitable for the needs of the setting and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process is used appropriately to identify which professional can best support a family. The centre is routinely informed about the children living in the area who are subject to a child protection plan, who are identified as being in need or who are looked after by the local authority. However, centre staff do not always have regular contact with these children and their families and, therefore, do not contribute to improving these children's well-being.

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 Group details

Unique reference number	80293
Local authority	Oldham
Inspection number	442817
Managed by	Action for Children
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1478
Group manager	Debbie Smolka-O'Brien
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0161 770 5964
Email address	deborah.smolka@actionforchildren.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 22614 Saddleworth North and South Children's Centre
- 22615 Saddleworth West and Lees Children's Centre

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