

The Parks Children's Centre

Griffiths Drive, Ashmore Park, Wednesfield, Wolverhampton WV1 2LH

Inspection date	7–8 May 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:	Not applicable	
Access to services by young children and families		Inadequate	4
The quality of practice and services		Inadequate	4
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that is inadequate.

- Those responsible for the leadership and governance of the centre have failed to ensure adequate day-to-day management and supervision of the centre and its staff and as a result the quality and impact of services are inadequate. They also hold an overly optimistic view about how well the centre performs because their judgements are not always based on robust, reliable and up to date information.
- A minority of children currently access children's centre services overall, including those from the priority groups identified by the centre. The needs of priority groups are not well known. For example at 4%, the proportion of two-year-old children taking up their entitlement to free early education is exceptionally low. As a result, the centre is not effectively narrowing inequalities.
- The balance between services open to all and targeted services to help those most in need of support is inappropriate because too little is in place to assist those whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable. Services are not well planned, are too infrequent and not easily accessible to a number of families. The adult education, training and skills offer is particularly weak.
- Leaders and managers do not receive timely information about health outcomes. Additionally, checks on the quality or impact of services are insufficient and do not demonstrate what difference they make to families' lives.

It has the following strengths:

- The centre works effectively with health partners. As a result, most expectant parents and children living in the reach area are registered with the centre and most new babies receive an early visit from a family support worker.
- Discussions with parents clearly show that the families receiving one-to-one help from the centre staff are well supported to make good progress in improving their family's well-being.

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: the headteacher and chair of governors responsible for the centre until December 2013; a locality manager and senior officer from the local authority; health visitors; midwives; educational psychologists; and front line family support workers. They also spoke to parents on a one-one-basis and at the 'Stay and Play' session.

The inspectors visited the weekly 'Stay and Play' session at the community centre with a locality manager employed by the local authority.

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

Inspection team

Michael Blakey, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Deborah Sanders	Additional inspector
Janet Dinsmore	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The Parks Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in 2008 and opened in a purpose built extension to Ashmore Park Nursery School (URN: 104279) in 2009. The school is subject to a separate inspection and the report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

From 2008 until December 2013 the governing body and headteacher of Ashmore Park Nursery School were responsible for the day-to-day leadership and governance of the centre on behalf of Wolverhampton local authority. In November 2012 the centre co-ordinator was seconded to manage another children's centre and the headteacher took over responsibility of the management of the children's centre staff team. From January 2014, the centre has been in the process of merging with The Children's Village Children's Centre to form a locality (Locality 8) and all staff were transferred to become employees of another school outside the reach area. The local authority has been directly responsible for the centre since January 2014. The centre does not have an advisory board in place and did not under the previous management arrangements. Plans are in hand to establish a locality board to oversee governance matters.

The centre serves thirteen Lower Super Output Areas, seven of which are in the top 30% most deprived in England. There are 1,145 children under five years of age living in the reach area. Most families are White British and 6% of children are of Asian ethnicity. The proportion of children who live in workless households is well above the level seen nationally. Children's skills and understanding on entry to early years provision are below expected levels for their age.

The centre aims to deliver its core purpose by providing family support, universal health services, and activity sessions: 'Cot Gossip' and two 'Playing and Learning Together Sessions' at the children's centre, a community centre and Perry Hall Primary School. The range of services has significantly reduced since December 2013, despite a commitment from the local authority to maintain services during the period of reorganisation.

The centre has identified its priority families as: children living in workless households and two-year-old children who are eligible for free early education.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management arrangements by:
 - Ensuring all staff receive appropriate professional supervision on a frequent basis, so that they are supported to undertake the important work they do with vulnerable families
 - Ensuring all case files are quality assured appropriately to identify areas for improvement and improve the consistency of practice
 - Ensuring the centre has access to all the information it needs, including breastfeeding rates at six-to-eight weeks and the obesity rates of children in Reception Year, so that targets for improvement can be identified
 - Sharpening and using the needs analysis, and developing an improvement plan which is focussed on improving specific outcomes for families and which clearly shows specific, measurable and achievable targets that all staff and partners understand and jointly deliver
 - Ensuring the locality board, which will act as an advisory board, provides effective support and challenge to the centre.
- Improve access to services for children and families so that a large majority of those identified as priority groups by the centre access relevant services until their needs are met by:
 - Undertaking an analysis of the local population to accurately identify priority groups and their needs
 - Ensuring the timetable of activities and services is matched to identified needs, and that there is an appropriate balance of well located services open to everyone with specifically targeted services across the reach area
 - Working with the local authority to ensure that most two-year-olds who are eligible for free early education have access to good or better early years learning provision.
- Improve the quality of services so that they are good by:
 - Ensuring outcomes for all activities are clearly defined so that staff and parents are clear about the purpose of the activity, service or intervention and these services are clearly linked back to what the centre is seeking to achieve
 - Tracking the progress that target children make when they access children's centre services, to clearly demonstrate the impact of the centres work
 - Working with partners to ensure that health data is up-to-date and enables the centre to see whether outcomes are improving or not
 - Ensuring adults have access to a range of training and support to help them improve their basic skills and employability and track the impact of these services.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- The centre has not fully identified the groups of families most in need of support living in its reach area because leaders and managers have not undertaken a thorough enough analysis of local needs. As a result, the centre does not effectively target or support the majority of families most in need of its services, including those who may be less likely to do so.
- Access is inadequate overall because only a minority of children are engaged more than once in centre activities or services and those groups currently identified by the centre as in need of additional support are not sufficiently well engaged. For example, there are over 300 children living in workless households and at 35%, only a minority accessed a service more than once in 2013. At 24%, a small minority of families access services more than five times, demonstrating that the centre is not sustaining contact with enough families.
- The centre is aware of 66 children who are eligible for free early education. The nursery school and children's centre provided sixteen two-year old places per week until Autumn 2013, when the local

authority and school governing body took the decision to close this provision. As a result, at the time of the review, only six vulnerable children (4%) were accessing provision in the centre's reach area.

- As a result of effective partnership working with health visitors and midwives most children are registered with the centre. Most mothers to be are well engaged and receive good antenatal support. At 87% most of the families with new babies are visited by family support workers who provide information, advice and guidance on a range of issues including breastfeeding.
- Teenage parents and lone parents, although not identified as priority groups by the centre, are engaging with its services. However, an initial analysis of the data for the period January to March 2014 indicates that the positive engagement levels seen in 2013 may be starting to decline as a result of the changes to services over recent months.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- The centre has not published a programme of activities and services since early 2014, and its services are not well-balanced or matched to identified needs. The services open to everyone are poorly located across the reach area and the reduction in activities has hit some families hard, meaning that they are now travelling significant distances to access support. During the inspection, some families said that they believed the centre had closed rather than merged with the Children's Village Children's Centre whilst others spoke highly of services previously delivered.
- The centre does not track the impact of its services sufficiently well and as a result is not able to demonstrate the difference that it makes to improving the well-being of families or on reducing inequalities. However, family support workers provide effective support to the vulnerable families they work with and this help clearly makes a positive difference to children and families' lives.
- The progress that children make in their learning and development when they access centre services, and their readiness for school, are not effectively evaluated by the centre. However, achievement at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, across the reach area is improving, and in 2013 was above the level seen nationally. At the same time, the gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers has narrowed well. Despite this overall positive picture, only one third of children achieved a good level of development in one of the main schools in the centre's reach area and the centre did not identify this as an area for further development.
- Breastfeeding rates at six-to-eight weeks, although well below national levels, were improving up until 2012 and obesity rates of children at the end of the Reception Year had reduced to well below national levels. However, the centre does not have access to any recent data to be able to evaluate its current performance. Parents, who spoke to inspectors, confirm that they receive very good antenatal support at the centre and are helped to continue breastfeeding in their homes by centre staff.
- With over one third of young children living in workless households, training and support for their parents to develop skills and knowledge to return to work is a key area for the centre to work on. Currently the centre does not provide, or facilitate, access for these adults to high quality learning or skills development opportunities in order to improve their life chances.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- In January 2014, the centre's programme of activities was reduced, despite a commitment from the

local authority to maintain services. As a result, services are now infrequent and poorly located, and some parents believe that children's centre services have been closed. Leadership is ineffective and resources are not used well to enable the centre to meet its core purpose.

- The centre coordinator was seconded to work at another children's centre in 2012 and family support workers did not receive supervision from the headteacher, who was then responsible for the staff, until December 2013, or from the local authority since then. These essential staff manage a wide range of family cases without the vital management support they need.
- The centre does not effectively: undertake a local needs analysis; identify its priority groups; identify priorities for improvement; rigorously review its performance; or devise and implement improvement plans. As a result, services are poorly tailored to meet the needs of children and families.
- Staff are safely recruited and all relevant checks are undertaken. Safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and understood by all staff.
- When appropriate front line centre staff work closely with children's social care they ensure that children who are subject to child protection plans, children in need and looked after children are effectively supported. The Common Assessment Framework processes are used by centre staff to provide early support to children and families, however the quality of assessment and action planning is variable and some are sub-standard. The centre is about to use the new Early Help assessments.
- Family files are audited by managers but the quality of audits is poor and often misses key areas for improvement. The quality of case file recording is inconsistent.
- Governance is weak because there has been no advisory board since the centre opened and the local authority's approach to monitoring the performance of the centre has not identified serious weaknesses in its performance. The last annual monitoring visit by the local authority was in May 2012. Plans are in hand to establish a locality board to provide effective support and challenge in going forward.
- There is no parents' forum at the centre and parents are not currently involved in the running of the centre or its governance.
- Some information that the centre needs is not made available to leaders and managers. In particular, they do not routinely receive a detailed breakdown of the achievement of children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and breastfeeding and obesity data is from 2012.

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	23233
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	442899
Managed by	The Local Authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,145
Centre leader	Andrew Wolverson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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