

West Wirral Children's Centre Group

Pensby Park Primary School, Fishers Lane, Pensby, Wirral, CH61 8SD

Inspection dates	21–22 January 2015
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
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 children's centre group is inadequate.

- Access to services is inadequate, because not enough children and families in greatest need keep in contact with the centre cluster or continue to use its services.
- Performance management by the local authority has not enabled the children's centre group leadership to improve how well it knows the community, what its needs are and how well the centre group is meeting those needs.
- The centre group does not use clear and consistent data from the local authority and partners to inform the development of services or measure the impact of services on the range of children and families who use the centre group.
- The advisory board does not have appropriate representation to discharge its duties and has not held the children's centre group to account.
- Parents and volunteers are not sufficiently involved in the running or management of the centre group.
- Links with schools and health colleagues are underdeveloped: the centre group does not make good use of partner agencies' knowledge to help it to identify areas where the life chances of children could be improved.
- Adult learning is not promoted and facilitated by the children's centre group.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Strategic direction is improving and senior leaders have communicated the reasons for change well.
- Standards of practice, and management oversight of individual case work, have been implemented well.
- Safeguarding policies, procedures and training for staff are a strength in the centre group.
- The standards of early education and health services delivered in the centre group are a strength.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership, management and governance of the centre group by:
 - extending the membership of the advisory board so that it includes in particular more schools and more parents from across the area
 - improving performance management so that the centre group's leaders and the board are clear about the local authority's expectations and the pace at which change should occur
 - increasing the recruitment of volunteers and the involvement of parents in all aspects of the centre group
 - obtaining better information and clearly presented data from the local authority and partners and using that information to determine the needs of the children in the area and develop services to meet those needs.
- Improve access by:
 - taking steps to identify why children registered do not sustain contact with the centre group
 - developing relationships with local partners to improve the take up of centre group services and share knowledge about local children's specific needs.
- Improve the quality and impact of services by:
 - ensuring that the centre group has a clear understanding of the quality of early years provision in the area and the impact the centre group and other providers are having on children's development
 - working with providers to ensure that adult learning is targeted, delivered and tailored to identified needs effectively
 - ensuring that the progress of all adults and children who use the centre group is monitored and tracked closely.

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 Pensby Children's Centre, West Kirby Children's Centre and Greasby Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre group managers, centre group staff, officers from the local authority, parents, health staff, education staff and representatives from the advisory board.

The inspectors visited all three centre sites, Black Horse Hill Primary School and Nye Home Nursery.

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

Inspection team

Ali Mekki, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Gillian Bishop

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sheila Iwaskow

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre group

The Wirral West Children's Centre Group comprises centres in Pensby, West Kirby and Greasby. The Pensby centre acts as the hub for the group. It is located on the site of a former primary school and social care teams for the South and West Wirral areas are located in a separate part of the same building. The West Kirby centre is co-located with Black Horse Hill Primary School, which was not part of this inspection. The school's reports can be found at <http://ofsted.gov.uk>. The Greasby centre is co-located with Greasby library. There is no separate on-site childcare offered by the local authority in the centres or in the area they serve.

Children's centres form part of the local authority's targeted services which include youth and play, youth justice, family support and other specialist services. The children's centre service is currently subject to a review by the local authority. This coincides with new arrangements for the delivery of health visiting and school health services. Since December 2014 the centre group's management has consisted of an early years manager, who is also responsible for the South Wirral group of children's centres, and two coordinators who oversee different aspects of management across all three centre sites. The centre group offers a range of services to families with young children and those expecting children, which include parenting and nurturing, speech and language development, support for families experiencing domestic abuse and a variety of health services for expectant parents, babies and young children.

The centre group contributes to the authority's arrangements for early help in the area which are accessed through the Gateway service. All referrals for early help are referred to this service and, following a common assessment framework (CAF) assessment by social care or a partner agency, their cases are then allocated to a social care team, a partner agency or the children's centre group. The Gateway service also arranges for children's centre group staff to work with children who are allocated to another service, where appropriate. Target groups for the children's centre services include looked-after children, children subject to a child protection or child in need plan, children from black and minority ethnic communities and children from the most deprived local areas.

The under-fives population of West Wirral is 3,336. Of these 470 or 14% live in the 50% most deprived areas of the country. The area served by the centres is, therefore, relatively affluent and most of the local population live in relatively affluent areas. The number of families dependent on worklessness benefits is also relatively low at 2.8%. The population of West Wirral constituency is 95% white British and 2% white other. It is understood that there has been a recent increase in the number of families of East European origin in the area, but there are no recent data in respect of this. On admission to early years provision, most children have generally reached the expected level of development. However, one school reports concern about children's level of speech and communication.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- A large majority (74%) of children under five years in the area are registered with the centres. However, following registration their engagement and contact with the centres drop significantly and only a minority from the groups and families identified as most in need have sustained contact. As a result, the centre group cannot be satisfied that children and families are aware of the early childhood services available to them.
- Looked-after children; children subject to a child protection or child in need plan and children from the most deprived parts of the area are the stated priority groups for the

local authority. Although these children are small in number, the children's centre group has not had sustained contact with a majority of children from any of these groups. This means that a significant number of the children who are most in need are not receiving a service from the centre group.

- The children's centre group does not have detailed information about other identified groups of children with specific needs in the area to enable it to develop services to improve the life chances of children from those groups. Centre leaders and the advisory board refer to a wide range of possible target groups, but there is no consistent manageable list of priorities which have been identified and against which children's progress and the impact of the centre group's services have been measured. For example, the centre group has identified children from black and minority ethnic groups as a target group, but does not have clear information about the location, numbers and specific needs of these children.
- The engagement of families identified by the centre group as most in need is not routinely tracked to assess how well services are used or their impact. As a result, the children's centre group is unable to demonstrate the effectiveness of the services it provides. Feedback from those families who receive a service from the centre group is generally complimentary. However, this information is not used well to help plan services which will make the most positive difference for children.
- A majority of eligible, local two-year-olds access funded early education places. However the centre group does not have a good grasp of which children are eligible or how many of them come from target groups. Children who do not take up places are not tracked well and encouraged to take advantage of the services available to them. This means that the centre group is not in a strong position to measure the impact of local services on children's development and their readiness to start school.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- Too few families, particularly those already identified as being most vulnerable, use centre group services on a regular basis. As a result, the impact the centre group has on improving life chances, health and education outcomes for families is significantly reduced.
- Insufficient data from health partners means that the centre group is unable to target vulnerable families to attend its sessions for babies, such as New Mums and Bumps to Babies. Furthermore, tracking systems are not embedded to allow centre group staff to monitor the progress and impact of its services.
- The few health services which are offered by the children's centre group are delivered well. These include programmes focussed on healthy eating and relaxation for young children. The centre group also provides programmes for adults, such as those addressing domestic abuse, or to promote good parenting and nurturing. Parents and children report high levels of satisfaction and benefit from these services, but this information has not been collated and outcomes evaluated consistently to determine if they are making a difference.
- The centre group has been successful in improving and sustaining good breast feeding levels because it provides good levels of support and guidance at the weekly group.
- The quality of early years activities provided by the centre group is good as staff are trained well to provide these successfully. Centre staff have developed some skill in the provision of programmes to improve children's communication skills. These include Makaton and other specialist programmes.
- Independently run groups such as the child-minding groups are of good quality because there are effective agreements in place.
- The children's centre group staff are only beginning to implement a consistent system to track children's progress from starting points up to the point at which they start school. They are, therefore, unable to confirm the full impact of their good quality services in reducing the achievement gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers who have used their services, in comparison to those who have not. Staff are working with only a small number of schools and do not, therefore, have an overview of children's levels of development on starting school.

- Adult learning, volunteering and improving employability are promoted and supported poorly by the children's centre group. No relevant information is displayed about adult learning or job vacancies through Job Centre Plus and the progress of those adults who do take up courses is not tracked and reported upon. The centre group has collected some limited information about possible adult learning needs in the area, such as areas of relative deprivation and possible language development needs for children in minority ethnic communities, but these have not been investigated locally.
- The centre group has made limited use of volunteers to improve its profile in all parts of the community and increase the range of services offered to children and families.
- The standard of individual work with children and families has improved since changes introduced in June 2014. Files are in good order and the reasons for children's centre group staff, family support or social work involvement are clear and explicit. Children's centre group staff have also been encouraged to develop the knowledge and skills to take on roles such as lead professional and to undertake direct work with children who are allocated in other social care teams.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- Centre group leaders and the advisory board have failed to address the centre group's poor performance in securing sustained contact from groups of children and families who are clearly identified as being most in need. The centre group's self-assessment does not recognise this as an area of inadequacy and performance management has not resulted in significant improvement within a reasonable timescale.
- Data are not used effectively by centre group managers or the advisory board to measure impact, examine performance and set well-informed targets for improvement. The manager and the board have recently been provided with a range of information about the performance of the centre group and needs of the local population but this has not yet had a significant effect on services or planning. Information from the centre group's self-assessment and in the authority's data sets is inconsistent, in some cases unclear and could be presented more simply.
- The centre group is involved with too few children who are looked after, subject to child protection and children in need plans, or who live in the areas of greatest deprivation. The centre group is also unclear about which other groups of children should be receiving services and so cannot satisfy itself that resources and services are being used effectively. These failures have not been addressed in detail by senior managers in their formal consultations with centre group leaders or by the advisory board.
- The local authority has undergone and continues to be subject to structural, staffing and service changes. Since June 2014 there has been an increase from three to six centres in South and West Wirral managed by the centre group manager and, since December 2014, a reduction from three to two coordinators to manage the three centres in West Wirral. All of this impedes stability, progress and the capacity for future developments in the centre group.
- Parents and volunteers do not play a significant part in developing and delivering services in the centre group. There is only one parent on the advisory board and one volunteer currently involved in the centre group.
- The advisory board includes representatives from a range of partner agencies and is chaired by a family support manager from the local authority. Planned additional schools and parent representatives have not yet been recruited.
- Members have received training from a specialist consultant, a dedicated administrator and improving levels of data from the local authority. However, these changes are very recent and it is too soon to measure their impact on the board's effectiveness.
- There is strong strategic leadership from the local authority and a clear vision for improvement. However, the long-standing nature of the centre group's access, performance management and governance problems mean that recent changes have had limited impact on the current performance of the centre group. Governance is improving and staff report that they are supported well, but the activity of the centre group does not have sufficient focus and

measurable impact on the lives of children in the area.

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	80440
Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	454552
Managed by	Wirral Borough Council
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3,446
Centre leader	Katy Lowry-Phillips
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0151 666 4819
Email address	katylowryphillips@wirral.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 22362 Pensby and Thingwall area
- 23721A Greasby Children's Centre
- 23510 West Kirby Children's Centre

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