

Birmingham - Erdington Group

29 Highcroft Road, Erdington, Birmingham, B23 6AU

Inspection dates	16-18 July 2014
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 is a centre that is inadequate.

- Only 40% of children, living in the reach area, are engaging with the centre group and leaders cannot demonstrate whether children are attending on a regular basis. The group do not promote their services well enough.
- Data is insufficient to demonstrate the impact the group is having on improving the outcomes for children and families, especially children with disabilities and special needs and looked after children. Key partners including health, the local authority and JobCentre Plus are all responsible for not providing the group with up-to-date and meaningful information.
- Only 43% of two-year-olds entitled to early education funding take up the offer; and only 46% of children achieve a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- With the exception of one English for Speakers of Other Languages, there have been no adult education classes provided this year. Opportunities to attend further education and to promote employability are poor.
- The premises at Erdington Hall Children's Centre are not secure; and some weaknesses are identified in the risk assessments and single central record.
- The capacity of the leadership, management and governance to improve the effectiveness of the group is insufficient due to the weaknesses in data and information sharing.

It has the following strengths:

- The skilled and determined locality strategic leader has taken the five previously stand-alone centres and has established some of the essential foundations of an effective locality group. Staff have overcome significant challenges and obstacles, including petitions and protests against the restructuring of the centres in the locality. Consequently, they have gained the support of most parents and partners.
- The large majority of the children and families living in the reach area are members of the centre group. The proportion of families who have completed membership forms has increased on the previous year.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve the governance, leadership and management by:
 - working with the local authority, health and JobCentre Plus to provide clear, relevant and meaningful data to support the centre group leaders to improve and monitor the access, engagement and outcomes for children and families especially those in the target groups.

- Increase the number of children and families participating in services, groups and activities, including those from the identified targeted groups by:
 - exploring innovative ways to reach more families and sustain their engagement in appropriate services
 - marketing and promoting the centre's services across the group's reach area
 - planning more outreach activities to widen access to those reluctant to take up services.

- Improve the attainment of all children by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - ensuring the local authority provides up-to-date and timely Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data for the locality to use to plan appropriate support
 - maximising the take up of early education funding by eligible two-year olds living in the locality
 - ensuring that children are provided with consistently good or better quality learning opportunities in all groups, activities and settings
 - tracking the progress of children who use centre services, to monitor and demonstrate the contribution the group is making to children's readiness for school, and their progress over time
 - ensuring that those children who are at risk of falling behind their peers are provided with additional help and support so that they catch up and fulfil their potential
 - ensuring that observations and assessments used to evaluate target children's progress are accurate
 - improving session planning by ensuring staff focus on clear learning objectives for all sessions and sharing these with the parents so that they can understand the purpose of all activities and use them at home with their children more productively
 - improving the quality of sessions so that children are always making accelerated progress in their learning and development
 - recording accurately children's progress and always sharing the assessment records with parents
 - working with early years providers in the area to support the transition of children into early education.

- Improve the quality and practice of the centre's provision on health outcomes by:
 - ensuring health partners provide the group with information about rates of breastfeeding, childhood obesity, smoking in pregnancy, tooth decay, accidents and immunisation; and using the information to help plan and prioritise actions and ensure services are matched to families' needs.

- Establish robust methods to identify and meet the learning and development needs of parents, in order to help them improve their chances of employability and the future economic well-being of their families by;

- providng more meaningful opportunities to volunteer,
 - working closely with the local authority, adult learning service, other providers of learning and JobCentre Plus to plan and facilitate greater levels of adult learning, vocational skills, information, advice and guidance, volunteering and other services to prepare adults for employment.
- Improve the robustness of systems to record the suitability of staff, and the precision of risk assessments, and ensure that all staff take responsibility for ensuring that the environment and resources are safe for all centre group users.

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 of Her Majesty’s Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the locality strategic leader; senior leaders from the local authority; education and health; early intervention and family support workers; early childhood providers, volunteers; health and social care professionals; adult education and commissioned services; parents and centre users; and representatives of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited a range of services offered, including ‘Stay and Play’ sessions, ‘Musical Babies’, ‘PEEPs’ (Parents Early Education Partnership) for older children, and they observed the delivery of the ‘Freedom Programme’ which provides support for adults in potentially abusive relationships. The inspectors visited each of the five children’s centres and spent time meeting children and families.

They observed the centre’s work, and conducted two joint observations with group leaders. They looked at a range of relevant documentation, including case files.

Inspection team

Deborah Udakis, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Linda McLarty	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Harmesh Mangra	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Tara Street	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Birmingham City Council city has 59 children's centres organised into 16 groups and a number of centres operate as collaborations. The Erdington Children's Centre group was established in January 2014. The group is led, on behalf of the local authority, by an education provider. Together with the centre leaders, the locality strategic leader holds responsibility for the daily management of each centre. Some 4,711 children under five years of age live in the group's reach area.

Each of the group's five centres delivers a range of services, including family support, early childhood services, adult learning, parenting support, health services, speech and language therapy and family welfare. Governance arrangements for the locality are provided by the local authority and the advisory board. Registered early years provision is located in each children's centre area. The most recent inspection reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centres serve a number of areas of significant disadvantage, particularly poor quality housing, low income (causing financial hardship), and many adults have few or no qualifications. There are 13 areas in the top 10% of deprivation nationally within the locality. A larger proportion of children under five years are living in homes dependent on workless benefits than seen nationally. The majority of families living in the area are White British, with approximately 44.57% of families from different minority ethnic backgrounds, including a large proportion of families of Pakistan origin. Many families attending the centres speak English as an additional language.

Services within the group are targeted specifically at lone parents, young parents, families from minority ethnic backgrounds, and families living with domestic violence.

Children's skills and understanding on entry to early years provision are below typical levels for their age.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families **Inadequate**

- Key partners such as health, JobCentre Plus and the local authority limit the information they provide to the group. This hinders the group's ability to target potentially vulnerable children and families for support and early help and intervention.
- It is not possible for the centre group to establish that all vulnerable children are being identified and their needs met because the local authority does not provide reliable data which would help the locality team to know whether 'looked after children' are accessing services. The local authority data cites that only about 11 children are receiving early intervention, which is disproportionate to the numbers in the reach area, and this data is being challenged by the family support team coordinator in the locality group.
- The proportion of families engaging with the group, particularly those from potentially vulnerable groups, including expectant mothers, is too low. Strategies to reach out to

more families, including through the marketing and promotion of the range of services is insufficient. As a result, not enough families are engaging with or benefiting from centre group services to improve their health, well-being and life chances.

- In general, priority access to activities and courses is allocated to target families. For example, lone parents, families from minority ethnic backgrounds, young parents and those families experiencing domestic violence are signposted to various activities including the Freedom Programme, 'Baby Massage', 'Stay and Play' sessions, 'PEEPs', and parenting courses to help improve their situation and outcomes for their families.
- Only 43% of two-year-olds access their free early education places and staff are unsure if the families who most need this support are taking up their place. Consequently, the majority of these vulnerable children are not accessing the help and support needed at an early enough stage in their lives.
- Staff work hard to ensure that the centres are warm and welcoming to families but this has not translated into greater levels of engagement.
- Access to adult education, other learning and programmes that improve parents' employment prospects and skills in seeking jobs are poor. This year, the group has facilitated a class for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Other short family learning courses, to introduce parents to learning, and a volunteer programme is available for a very small number of parents.
- Attendance and take-up of classes that promote further learning is poor as those who express interest do not join classes and some leave the programmes early. The level of provision is very low. For instance, the demand for ESOL is high and the volunteer programme is now on hold. However, the centre has plans to introduce a wider range of classes in the near future.
- Families access a positive range of services to alleviate poverty such as welfare entitlements, debt reduction and improved housing conditions which are taken up by a large number of families and is a strength of the group.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- There is an appropriate balance between those activities open to all and those supporting specific priority groups. Sessions such as 'Musical Babies', 'Baby Club' and 'Polish Stay and Play' are popular with some families, including minority ethnic families, and help those who attend the centres to see what else is on offer and how it might help them. Staff are seen by many families as positive role-models because of their knowledge and experience. However, not enough families benefit from the centres' work.
- Health organisations and other key partners do not ensure that all essential information about the health outcomes of children and families is shared with the centre group. Consequently, leaders are unable to plan and prioritise actions and ensure services are matched to families' needs. Levels of obesity in Reception-age children is not showing a sustained decrease over time and breastfeeding initiation and sustaining at 6-8 weeks is below both the local and national average. The centre does not know what percentage of mothers continue to smoke during pregnancy or what the level of uptake is for

immunisations in the area.

- Many staff plan appropriate resources and activities in group sessions based on the known needs of the families who attend regularly. However, some sessions are not sufficiently well planned to promote learning, including how parents can best support their child's learning during play both in the session and when at home. Records of observations of children's development, assessments and monitoring of the progress of each child who attends activities is in the early stages of development. As a result, staff cannot sufficiently demonstrate that the needs of these children are being met and that they make at least good progress.
- Only a minority of children achieve a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation (EYFS), which is below both the local and national levels. The lack of locality wide EYFS data hampers the centre groups' ability to address any emerging concerns and ensure that the gap in achievement is narrowing for the lowest-attaining children.
- Case files are routinely audited with helpful and developmental comments for staff. Support is tailored to need, families' progress is tracked well, and their input to the files is clearly evidenced. Early intervention and targeted activities and services are helping to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for some families living in the area.
- The group works well with children's social care to assess and reduce risk. There is clear evidence of early identification of additional causes of concern. 'Step-up' and 'Step-down' arrangements are effective, resulting in a flexible response to children's changing needs. The group contributes to social care plans that ensure a proportionate and timely response to need. As a result, some children requiring early intervention are effectively protected and their life chances are improved, but numbers receiving this support are unusually low.
- The quality of practice and services varies widely, some quality is poor. Where the services are highly effective the impact on the families is outstanding. For example, the Community Advocacy Support and Advice service is excellent. The advice and training sessions have helped parents to own their mistakes and have given them the tools to manage their money better and budget accordingly. They understand their rights and responsibilities better, gain self-confidence and deal with matters more efficiently to improve their housing conditions or lifestyle.
- In ESOL classes, tutors plan lessons appropriately with a good mix of activities and engage parents in learning. This helps parents develop confidence in understanding, listening and speaking. They use these skills appropriately to deal with daily life such as meetings with the school teachers, shopping, and routine form-filling. Parents enjoy their learning in safe venues. However, there are too few activities available to help individuals to become employment ready.
- The content of the volunteer programme is good; however, only one session of volunteering has been run. This has given parents the opportunity to develop new skills and improve their chances through work experience under expert guidance from staff.

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

- There is a strong determination and shared vision among the leadership, management and governance for the success of the group. However, this is unlikely to be realised without significant improvements being made to the protocols and procedures for key partners to share information with the group's leaders. The lack of important data means that the group has not been able to contribute to the delivery of integrated services to meet the needs of potentially vulnerable children including looked after children, children with disabilities and special needs, and the 57% of two-year-old children who are entitled to the early education funding who are not taking up the offer. Consequently, the leaders cannot demonstrate, with any confidence, the impact the work of the group is having on the majority of children and families over time.
- The advisory board includes some very experienced and skilled leaders, and parent representatives. They are assertive, challenging and supportive of the locality group. They have worked closely with the group leader throughout the restructuring programme which brought the centres together under one locality. One advisory board member said of the locality strategic leader, that, 'no-one else within the city could have led the restructuring process as well'. The advisory board are well-placed to continue to enhance the leadership, management and governance of the group.
- The local authority is supportive of the work of the locality strategic leader and holds her in high regard. However, the difficulties with information sharing have been known to the leaders and advisory board for some time and they have yet to achieve a successful resolution to the problems. Therefore, the leadership, management and governance of the group is inadequate overall.
- A hefty budget reduction of 35% accompanied the move to a locality based group. This has impacted negatively on the groups' ability to maintain services at the previous levels and some services have had to be cut back or reduced. For instance, the volunteer programme has had to be put on hold for the time being. This, together with almost half of staff employed by employment agencies, has hindered the roll-out of some services in targeted areas.
- There are inconsistencies in the safeguarding arrangements. Safeguarding policies and procedures meet statutory requirements and help protect most children and vulnerable adults who use the centre. The safeguarding arrangements benefit from local authority and locality auditing, which also reviews the policies and procedures and monitors how well they are implemented. The leaders are still working towards ensuring that safeguarding information is consistent across the five centres. For instance, there is some inconsistency in the way some details are recorded on the single central record, attributed by leaders to trying to blend the records from the five centres into one single record.
- Formal risk assessments are completed regularly, but staff had not identified some potential dangers seen during the inspection, some of which were also detected in the local authority safeguarding audit. The use of the public area in Erdington Hall Children's Centre as an overflow play area for the targeted 'Stay and Play' session is not appropriate as it is next to the front door, the toilets and the waiting area for centre users. Consequently, some children are potentially at risk from unvetted adults.

- Performance management arrangements are clear and effective. Staff are appropriately trained to support their roles and responsibilities, for example, to support families experiencing domestic violence or substance abuse. Consequently, staff say they feel well supported in their work. Children most at risk are safeguarded well because of close working between centre staff and social work colleagues, underpinned by effective case file management, and close supervision. Those needing higher-level social care, such as children subject to Child Protection or Children in Need plans, are supported well. The Common Assessment Framework procedures are used well and demonstrate effective partnership work to trigger swift support.
- Partnerships at strategic levels are ineffective. For example, JobCentre Plus does not provide data to the staff. Health partners provide the group with some but not all required information; and the local authority provides data but much of it is city wide rather than locality based. This hampers the centre groups' ability to target its services to particularly vulnerable families, including workless families and households..
- Partnership with Birmingham Adult Education Service has helped to facilitate some family learning classes and to refer some parents to classes. However, they do not work collaboratively with the centre group to identify the learning and further education needs of families or to find ways of meeting those needs.

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.

Group details

Unique reference number	80125
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	443652
Managed by	Education provider on behalf of the local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	4,711
Centre leader	Elaine Dupree
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
Telephone number	0121 6753408
Email address	head@feathern.bham.sch.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 21109 - Erdington Hall Children's Centre
- 21151 - Featherstone Children's Centre
- 22273 - Osborne Nursery and Children's Centre
- 22437 - Pype Hayes Children's Centre
- 22837 - Barney's Children's Centre

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