

Rochdale – Belfield, Littleborough, Heybrook and Hamer Children's Centre Group

Samson Street, Belfield, Rochdale, Lancashire, OL16 2XW

Inspection dates	29–30 July 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
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.

- The arrangements for the governance, leadership and management of the centres are not effective. The performance of the centres is not being sufficiently monitored and challenged by the local authority or the advisory board to secure adequate improvement. Weaknesses have not been addressed and many performance targets set for the centre group are not met.
- Criteria to judge the performance of the centres are not fit for purpose as the centre group's self-evaluation and the findings from the annual conversation are overinflated and inaccurate.
- Not enough parents and representatives from the community are enabled to contribute to the governance of the centres and the shaping of services through consultation and membership on the advisory board and parent forums.
- Leaders are not ensuring that all partners are providing services and activities that families in the community need and want the most, and that they are having the desired impact. This is due to the poor accountability arrangements in place.
- The services and activities do not currently meet the full range of needs of families living in the diverse community. They are not enabling enough children and adults to achieve their potential and gaps in achievement are not narrowing sufficiently.

This centre group has the following strengths:

- An adequate number of children and families access services due to some strong partnership working and effective community work. This includes families that the centre group has identified as in most need of its support and those least likely to participate.
- Parents feel welcome and safe at the centres. The work of the centre group is highly valued by those who access the services and activities.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Significantly improve the effectiveness of leadership, governance and management by:
 - ensuring that local authority monitoring arrangements enable self-evaluation procedures to be accurate and that robust targets for improvements are correctly identified for the centre group, with stringent procedures in place for measuring progress
 - ensuring that the local authority holds leaders robustly to account and that performance is monitored and challenged by senior colleagues and the advisory board to secure rapid improvement
 - recruiting more parents and representatives from the diverse community on to the advisory board and securing more effective consultations and parent forums so that they can contribute to the governance of the centres and shaping services.

- Improve the quality and impact of practice and services by working with partners to:
 - agree targets for improvement and strategies through which to monitor and demonstrate the impact of the centre group’s services and activities
 - make a concerted drive to reduce health inequalities
 - improve children’s readiness for school and narrow the gaps in educational progress between groups of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - increase the range of provision to enable more adults to take up further learning and development opportunities in order to enhance their employability prospects and parenting skills.

- Improve access to services by young children and families by:
 - ensuring that the local authority provides the centres with enough information about the groups of children and families who live in the local area so that the centres can make sure they are targeting those in greatest need of their support
 - ensuring that centre staff provide information to families in a format that they can readily understand.

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: Belfield Children’s Centre, Heybrook and Hamer Children’s Centre and Littleborough Children’s Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with parents, staff and leaders, representatives of the advisory board and a range of professionals.

The inspectors visited activities and services operating from each of the three children’s centres and other community venues.

They observed the centres’ work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Rachael Flesher, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Tim Vaughan	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Janet Glover	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Rochdale – Belfield, Littleborough, Heybrook and Hamer Children’s Centre Group provides services for families from three children’s centre buildings and other schools and outreach venues in the area. The children’s centre group offers a range of services which include: family support, health services, family play sessions, and occasional adult learning and parenting courses.

In total, approximately 2,976 children under five years of age live in the area, with a significant number living in one of the 10% to 30% most deprived areas in the country. There are approximately 311 lone-parent families and 688 children living in workless households. Most children and families living in the area are from minority ethnic groups and approximately 41% of children are White British. Most children enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities below those typical for their age.

The priority families identified by the centre group as having needs or circumstances that require intervention and additional support include: lone parents, fathers, children in workless households, minority ethnic groups, teenage mothers, disabled children, pregnant teenagers and children of disabled parents.

The group has an advisory board and is managed by Rochdale Borough Council. There are primary schools on each of the three children’s centre sites which are subject to separate inspections and their reports can be found on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Due to some strong partnership working, a good number of families, including those expecting children, are registered with the centre group. As a result, the centre group has a sound understanding of the range of needs of the community. However, data provided by the local authority do not fully support the centres to identify accurately particular groups of families in most need of its services.
- A satisfactory, but not good, number of lone parents, fathers, children in workless households, minority ethnic groups and children with disabled parents, which are families that the centres have identified as in most need of its services and activities, are accessing them. Some adults do not complete courses and attendance at sessions is variable but, overall, participation rates are sound.
- In partnership with a range of professionals, staff have been particularly successful in engaging with some of the most vulnerable families in most need of their support and intervention, such as pregnant teenagers, teenage parents and disabled children. Their lives are significantly improving as a result.
- English-speaking families have access to a range of information, advice and guidance about services to help improve their lives. However, too much written text, a lack of information in other languages and a shortage of interpreters do not always make this accessible to those with low literacy skills and those with English as an additional language.
- Outreach work is beginning to reach out to, and engage, more families, including those who are unable to access the activities and services delivered at the centre buildings. Community venues are used to secure wider coverage and staff make home visits to some of the families the centre group has identified as in most need of its support.
- The local authority, centre staff and partners promote and facilitate the overall good take-up rates by two-, three- and four-year-olds of their entitlement to free early education funded places in good and better provision, to support their readiness for school.
- The centre group ensures that services are provided throughout the year, including school holidays, across the area. In addition, the whole family is welcome, so older siblings are also able to attend.

Parents highly value these opportunities to have continuous access to support services.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- Not enough adults are being provided with an adequate range of learning and development opportunities to meet their needs, including those who choose to develop their parenting skills. Consequently, not enough parents are being supported to acquire the learning, training, qualifications and advice necessary to improve their economic stability and chances of employment.
- The number of mothers sustaining breastfeeding their babies at six-to-eight weeks is too low and obesity rates are too high and rising. Targets to improve the take-up of healthy lifestyles are not defined and monitored in the centre group’s improvement plan clearly enough in order to address weaknesses.
- Not all partners are monitoring the access to, and impact of, the services they deliver. Leaders are not following this up with sufficient rigour to ensure that they are making a difference to families and providing value for money.
- The centre group fails to facilitate enough opportunities to empower adults to contribute actively to developing the activities and services, for example, by volunteering in the centres and community, contributing to the running of the centre group and developing networks of support.
- There is insufficient support to improve the English language skills for the vast number of adults with English as an additional language.
- At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the gap is too wide between the achievement of most children and that of those at greatest risk of not reaching their potential. Too few children are achieving a good level of development.
- Almost all local early years settings and the majority of local childminders are of good quality. They report on how they benefit from the work of the centres and that they are supported well to improve their quality of provision.
- Staff take every opportunity to promote the take-up of healthy lifestyles to families attending sessions. In partnership with professionals, they educate parents about ensuring that their children have good oral health and a healthy diet.
- Staff take time to get to know the families who use the centres and support is well targeted at those who most need their help. Families who use the centres value the care and support that staff provide, stating they are ‘friendly, helpful and supportive’ and that the centres have helped to reduce social isolation. They also report that the centres have helped to develop their parenting skills and supported their children’s learning and development.
- Case files ensure a well-maintained record of events and decisions that involve the whole family, although the voice of the child is not always clearly recorded. Assessments made through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process are becoming standard practice and are securing early support and intervention for families.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- The local authority does not provide sufficient challenge to the centre group and performance is not managed effectively. Targets set to improve performance are not met, weaknesses are not being addressed swiftly enough and the inadequate progress that the centre group is making has not been identified. As a result, the centre group has an inaccurate evaluation of its performance.
- The advisory board is not effective in its role to support and challenge the centre group’s performance. The centre leader has unnecessarily been acting as Chairperson for a considerable length of time and this, despite being poor practice, has not been challenged by the local authority. An enthusiastic and independent Chairperson has now been appointed and the advisory board members have very recently received training to support them in their role to drive improvement in the centre group’s performance. However, it is too early to assess the impact of this in strengthening governance arrangements.

- Not enough parents are involved in the governance of the centres and contributing their views to shape services. There is insufficient representation of the diverse community on the advisory board and the parents’ forums are ineffective.
- Leaders and staff clearly value the views of families, hold consultations and use all feedback to shape services. The ‘You said, we did’ board demonstrates this. However, a very limited number have been enabled to contribute, providing the centre group with a restricted range of views from a limited sample.
- Families, staff and partners are consulted about important decisions relating to the provision of services, for example, when deciding to reduce the opening hours of some of the centre buildings. Outreach venues are now used to provide activities and services in addition to those delivered from the centres. However, the insufficient range does not meet all the needs of the community.
- Families state that they feel safe in the centres. Their safety is adequately promoted through the generally secure implementation of policies and procedures that are in place and the good range of training provided for staff.
- Strong partnership working and clear and effective policies and procedures ensure that the centre group works collaboratively to support looked-after children, children identified as in need and children subject to child protection plans and CAF processes. This ensures that families receive swift and timely support from the range of professionals required.
- Front-line staff receive a good range of training and professional support and supervision to ensure that they are carrying out their roles effectively and continue to meet the diverse needs of the families they support.

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	80420
Local authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	442733
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,976
Group manager	Rachael El Weshahi
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01706 356634
Email address	rachael.elweshahi@rochdale.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children’s centres:

- 20256 Belfield Children’s Centre
- 21832 Littleborough Children’s Centre
- 21468 Heybrook and Hamer Children’s Centre

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