

Rochdale – Howard Street, Meanwood & Norden Children's Centre Group

Howard Street Nursery School and Children's Centre, Howard Street, Rochdale, Lancashire,
OL12 0PP

Inspection date 18–19 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group is good.

- The group successfully identifies and works with the large majority of families whose circumstances are likely to make them vulnerable. Strong and effective relationships with partners help the group to make contact with and register most local families who have a child aged under five.
- The early intervention manager (group manager) is a strong leader who has high expectations of herself and her staff. She actively seeks solutions when she encounters barriers or problems so that the group can move forward with its work with families in the area.
- Families receive effective early help and guidance, helping them to make positive changes and good progress. Staff are well qualified and skilful. The vast majority of services and activities are of good quality, targeted to the most appropriate area and well planned.
- Activities for families are carefully planned to address the inequalities experienced by families in the area. As a result health outcomes and children's skills and knowledge are improving well.
- Adults have access to a good range of learning and development opportunities. Parents who use them develop skills which include supporting their children's learning and development. A significant minority accesses further learning or enters employment.

It is not outstanding because:

- Leaders do not receive timely information from the local authority about the group's performance. The manager has manual tracking systems so that she, the advisory board and local authority retain a broad overview. However, this does not provide adequately for a robust review of the impact of the local authority children's centre redesign.
- There are areas where children's skills and knowledge remain well below expectations and not enough parents use the funded nursery education for two-year-olds available to them.
- Since the local authority's redesign of children's centres, leaders have not refined and embedded monitoring systems sufficiently to ensure that practice is consistent across centres or that partners are delivering what the centre needs to the quality that they require.

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 Howard Street Children's Centre, Meanwood Children's Centre and Norden 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 leaders and managers, parents and representatives from the local authority, the advisory board and partner agencies.

The inspectors visited the three children's centres, Healey Primary School and Spotland library.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, such as the centre's self-evaluation documentation and development plans.

Inspection team

Joanne Smith Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

Parm Sansoyer

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Rochdale Howard Street, Norden and Meanwood Children's Centre group operates from three main sites across Rochdale. The group is managed by the local authority. Private day-care providers run childcare facilities on all three sites. Howard Street Day Care EY279723 at Howard Street Children's Centre; Norden Playgroup 316416 at Norden Children's Centre and The Willows Playgroup at Meanwood Children's Centre. These are subject to separate inspections and their reports can be found on the Ofsted website, www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The local authority has operated the three centres in the area as a group under one manager since the local authority's redesign of children's centre services in April 2013. Prior to this, the centres were under individual management. The redesign brought about changes to the staff team, management responsibility and the opening hours of the centre buildings. The Howard Street site remains open full time and the Norden and Meanwood sites are now part-time centres, each opening for 20 hours a week. The group serves an area that is approximately five miles across, including the town centre area of Rochdale. It serves a varied range of communities, including more affluent areas and areas with high levels of asylum-seeking and refugee families.

With partners the centre delivers parenting advice and support, parent and child activity groups, adult learning, volunteering opportunities and health appointments alongside one-to-one work with families.

There are around 2,484 children aged under five years living in the area served by the group. The large majority of families are from a White British background. The area served by the centre is in the top 30% of the most deprived areas in the country. Across the area the levels of deprivation vary, with Howard Street being the most deprived. Worklessness and the number of families dependent on workless benefits are higher than national averages. Around 580 children aged under five years live in households dependent on workless benefits. The centre works with asylum-seeking families and families whose two-year-old children are eligible for a funded nursery education place.

Children enter school Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and knowledge below those expected for their age.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Work with partners and the local authority to reduce inequalities and improve children's school-readiness, particularly in the Howard Street area, by increasing the take-up of funded two-year-old nursery education places.
- Refine and embed monitoring systems so that procedures are consistent across the three centres in the group and the quality and relevance of delivery by partners is checked by leaders and managers.
- The local authority should prioritise the input and sharing of the most up-to-date quarterly monitoring data so that leaders and managers can have a clear and accurate overview of both the group's progress against its targets and the impact of their strategies to counter the reduced delivery hours following the children's centre redesign.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Strong and effective strategic work with partners at the advisory board level successfully helps

to identify and engage the most vulnerable families living in the area as soon as possible, including ante-natally. A very good partnership has developed with the service that supports asylum-seeking families with school-age children. They now notify the group about families with children under five years old on a six-weekly cycle and centre staff make contact and visit within a week of notification.

- Thoughtful consideration is given to where activities and services are delivered. Since the reduction in opening hours at Norden and Meanwood centres, more community venues have been used across the whole area. Parents are very positive about being able to attend good quality groups locally and use of these groups is high.
- Information from partners about where children live is used to good effect to identify whether families in the area have registered with the group. In addition, attendance registers are monitored to identify any decline in numbers and non-user questionnaires are analysed well to identify low usage. Centre workers then actively target the areas to raise the awareness of families about what children's centres have to offer, or activities are moved to where there is more need.
- Requests for children's centre services and support are scrutinised by a senior manager to ensure that they are appropriate and that the agency requesting support is clear about what it wants the family to achieve. As a result, families in most need of support have their needs assessed well so that the most appropriate team works with them to meet their needs.
- Most parents of three- and four-year-old children who live in the area take up the offer of a free nursery education place for their child. Across the area served by the centre, the large majority of parents of two-year-old children who are eligible for a free nursery education place take up the offer. However, in the Howard Street Children's Centre area this falls to around 50%, which is too low, especially given that not enough children in this area reach a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Families who have individual support from the children's centre and family support workers make good progress to improve their parenting skills and increase their confidence. Families have been supported to live together again as a family unit. They have advanced from intensive involvement with social care and family support teams to using the children's centre voluntarily, because they understand the benefits to their own and their children's development.
- Health outcomes for families in the area are improving well; for example, the number of children who are overweight or obese at the end of Reception Year in school is reducing well. The programme of activities is carefully planned to meet local needs. For example, there is a highly evident focus on improving the health of families in the area throughout the activity programme. Groups, such as breastfeeding support, are offered where they are most needed.
- Physical activity sessions are well-attended and 'Healthy little eater' play and lunch sessions are extremely popular. Parents are keen to use what they learn in the centres at home with their children and are appreciative of the affordable meal and play ideas they are given.
- Parents have good opportunities to volunteer in the centres as community champions. They receive a high standard of training and this has led to some moving into higher education or employment. Three of the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) champions, for example, have undertaken trainer qualifications to deliver the programme and have secured jobs with the ESOL service.
- There is strong evidence to show that children in the area who have benefited from the good quality children's centre services make strong progress in their learning and development. They achieve good levels of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and are well-prepared for school.

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

- Staff work very closely with partners such as midwives, health visitors and social workers to identify and support families who are most in need as soon as possible. Children and families at risk of struggling are identified early and effective support is given. Children who are subject to a child protection or child in need plan or whose parents have agreed to a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) approach have positive experiences to help them to meet their targets. Safeguarding policies, procedures and practices are good.
- The local authority has undertaken an ambitious project to collect information about children in schools and children's centres on a single database to provide them with a comprehensive tracking tool. The transfer of historical information has hindered the recording of current information. As a result, the local authority, advisory board and children's centre leaders have relied on manually-collected, unvalidated information to monitor the group's progress against targets.
- Clear leadership and management structures are used well to monitor the group using the available information. Staff supervision is used well to check how effectively their work is contributing to the group meeting its targets. They are challenged to make changes where progress has slowed or is not strong enough.
- The advisory board is an effective part of the governance and management of the group. Members, including parents, are knowledgeable and work with the group to identify where the group needs to focus its work to reduce inequalities for families in the different parts of the area. As a result the achievement gap between the children at risk of not meeting age-related expectations and their peers is narrowing.
- Resources are managed well across the areas served by the group. Activities are prioritised for delivery in the areas where they are most needed and since the children's centre redesign more community venues are used. Use of activities in outreach venues is good. Nevertheless, leaders and managers have not been able to analyse fully the impact of the redesign due to the limited validated data available to them.
- Activity and session monitoring is not yet as robust as it needs to be. Delivery by centre staff is reviewed by leaders and managers and is used well to make changes. There are, however, some inconsistencies in practice in how management activity, such as the recording of accidents, is completed across the group. In addition, there is too much reliance on partners, such as the local college, to report on the quality of delivery and attendance rates in their sessions. As a result, some low retention rates and poor delivery have not been promptly picked up by the group leaders and managers to enable them to review the relevance of what is being delivered.

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	80422
Local authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	430103
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,484
Centre leader	Linzi Baxter
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected as a group
Telephone number	01706 753240
Email address	linzi.baxter@rochdale.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- URN 21570 Howard Street Children's Centre
- URN 21978 Meanwood Children's Centre
- URN 22158 Norden Children's Centre

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