

Trafford – South Cluster

c/o Coppice Library, Coppice Avenue, Sale, Cheshire, M33 4ND

Inspection dates	8–9 May 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

This children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- A large majority of families in target groups, such as lone parents and families belonging to minority ethnic groups, do not yet regularly access the group's services.
- Leaders' access to meaningful data, and the analysis of information, about families' engagement and the impact of the group's work are not sufficiently robust.
- Not enough partner professionals regularly contribute to the advisory boards or provide leaders with evidence to demonstrate the difference that the centre group makes to children and adults.
- There are too few opportunities for adults to participate in accredited courses or volunteering.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- In the short time that the group has been open, leaders have worked with great skill, determination and effectiveness. They have built a strong team of enthusiastic, committed staff who are clear about their roles and determined to help families improve their well-being.
- Effective outreach work means that the large majority of local families are now registered with the group.
- Staff members are highly skilled at fostering families' willingness to accept support and at helping them to build their confidence. Parents say that 'staff do not judge, they listen'. Families see the centre as a 'one-stop shop where we can go and feel happy to talk with someone and find any support for our children'.
- The group activities and the support for individual families provided by centre staff are of good quality. As recognised by families and partner professionals, the group works effectively to help keep children safe.
- Centre staff work in close, purposeful partnership with a wide range of professionals. This enhances the quality and accessibility of services and helps to ensure that resources are used to good effect.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Increase the engagement of families in target groups so that a large majority are regularly involved in centre activities, placing a particular focus on lone parents and those belonging to minority ethnic groups.
- Improve the way in which information about families' use of the centres' services is recorded and analysed so that leaders have a firm basis on which to evaluate the group's effectiveness and plan its future development.
- Build on the well-established partnerships with other professionals and services in order to:
 - enable the group to identify the impact of its work on children's readiness for and success at school, and adults' development of skills leading to employment
 - establish regular attendance at advisory board meetings by a diverse range of stakeholders.
- Increase the opportunities for adults to participate in accredited courses and volunteering in order to enhance their ability to secure their families' economic well-being.

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.

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings or telephone conversations with: centre staff; representatives of the local authority; the Chairs of the two Advisory Boards and a wide range of partners from education, social care, health and the wider community. They also spoke formally with one group of parents and informally with parents attending activities.

The inspectors visited both Altrincham and Sale Children's Centres, as well as centre activities within the community in the Altrincham, Broadheath, Broomwood, Sale Moor and Sale West areas.

They observed the centres' work and looked at a range of relevant documentation relating to leadership, governance, management and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Sarah Drake, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Emily Wheeldon

Additional Inspector

Ken Fisher

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Trafford South Children's Centre cluster was established in June 2013 after the reorganisation and merger of children's centres throughout the authority. The cluster comprises two 'hub' centres, each of which serves an area formerly served by four separate centres. There are approximately 4,514 children aged under five years living within the Altrincham Children's Centre area and approximately 3,661 children of a similar age living in the Sale Children's Centre area. The cluster is led by one head of centre, supported by two senior leaders, and managed at a strategic level by Trafford local authority. Each centre is held to account by a separate advisory board whose members represent a range of interested partners, including parents. In partnership with other professionals, the cluster provides a range of activities, on-site and in community buildings throughout the large area that it serves, including: health care and information; sessions to help parents support their children's learning and development; adult learning; individual advice and guidance.

Much of the area served by the cluster is relatively affluent with few families living with unemployment or on low incomes but there are small pockets throughout, amounting to 7.8% of the total, where families face significant disadvantage. The large majority of families are White British but there are increasing numbers of families that belong to a range of minority ethnic groups. Most children's skills on entry to early years provision are broadly typical for their age but, in some areas, they are below this, especially in their ability to communicate.

The centre group has identified as the most significant local groups in need of support: children belonging to minority ethnic groups; workless households; teenage parents; lone parents; children with disabilities and fathers.

The cluster is linked to, and shares the Altrincham site with, Broadheath Primary School and Rascals out-of-school club. Neither of these linked provisions formed part of this inspection. Reports of their quality can be found on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Recruitment work undertaken since the group opened, ranging from a presence at schools and community events to electronic marketing and registration, has been effective in raising local awareness of the children's centres' services. A large majority of families and those expecting children throughout the area are now registered with the group. This includes families in target groups and those who are likely to be more difficult to reach.
- Good partnership working enhances families' access to and participation in activities. The centres' close proximity to a school, in Altrincham, and a library, in Sale, means that it is easy for families to call in when passing. Staff are skilled at identifying those most in need of help. Projects such as the health visitors' daily 'drop-in' and weekly well-baby clinic at Altrincham provide parents with swift access to specialised support.
- Staff record families' use of the group's services and follow up the non-attendance of those in targeted groups. However, the local authority's data system does not provide reliable information about those that engage in activities. A new system is being piloted but the available data indicate that a large majority do not yet regularly participate in the services. Most teenage parents have regular contact but, for example, fewer lone parents or families belonging to minority ethnic groups do so.
- Most eligible two-year-olds and almost all three- and four-year-olds access funded early education either in school nurseries or with good or better quality private providers. This helps them to prepare for more formal schooling, and professionals to identify early any extra learning

needs.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Despite the good quality of the group's services, they do not engage a large majority of potential users that could benefit from these facilities. Information sharing between schools, adult education and the group is not detailed enough and there is little robust evidence to demonstrate the difference that the services make to children's well-being and families' lives. This is why the quality of practice and services requires improvement.
- Although there is no formal parents' forum, group leaders do take parents' views into account when organising services. This has led to the retention of as many activities as possible that are open to families, and to the provision of services at community sites throughout the reach area.
- Local children's achievements at the end of Reception are above national averages, including for the lowest achieving 20%. Group staff work closely with other professionals to identify disabled children early and to provide them with support.
- Good-quality provision in the crèche that allows adults to access, for example, behaviour management sessions, helps to develop children's confidence and skills. Activities, such as 'Toddler gym' or 'Story and Rhyme time', have a beneficial impact on children's emotional, physical and intellectual development as well as their communication and social skills. However, neither centre staff nor schools have clear evidence of the lasting impact that participation in centre activities has on children, including those in target groups.
- The group provides good-quality activities to support families' adoption of healthy lifestyles, such as courses related to nutrition and exercise. Those who have used the services confirm that they have helped them to change what they do at home. Parents praise the work of the breastfeeding group worker, describing her as 'like a big mother hen', and the proportion that maintains breastfeeding for at least six-to-eight weeks is above the national average. Levels of childhood obesity and emergency hospital admissions are below national figures.
- The education and training officer provides much useful advice and guidance for adults, particularly those in workless households, on a one-to-one basis. Users confirm the difference this makes to their confidence, job application and interviewing skills. However, there are too few opportunities for volunteering and little access for adults to accredited courses, both of which significantly improve adults' ability to improve their families' economic well-being. Few fathers participate in adult learning or other activities and there is only anecdotal evidence available about the long-term impact of the centres' work with adults.
- Staff carry out daily risk assessments and begin each session with reminders for parents, such as not to use mobile phones during activities, about their responsibilities for keeping their children safe. Social care professionals confirm that staff are very effective in helping parents to understand, for example, the need for safety equipment and a clean home environment. They also praise the group's 'fantastic preventative work' in helping families to avoid crises.
- Staff complete case files well and these provide clear evidence of strong partnership working between different agencies. This leads to well-adapted and flexible support, tailored to families' individual circumstances, which reduces risks for children and empowers adults to take charge of their lives. As one parent commented, 'It has made a massive difference and given me the confidence that I can care for my child.'

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- It is as a result of the group's strong leadership that, less than a year after extensive reorganisation, staff who have been brought together from across the borough are working as a cohesive group. Leaders ensure that available resources are used effectively and with care. The best interests of families and improving children's readiness for school lie firmly at the heart of the work of all the staff.

- Clear policies and procedures underpin the group's work and the accountability of the staff. Increasingly rigorous management of individuals' performance leads to improvement. This includes perceptive observations of, and feedback related to, the direct work of the staff with families. Good practice is identified and shared. Staff have good access to further training.
- Staff use effective systems to demonstrate families' perceptions of how the group's work has helped to improve their well-being. However, they do not bring together and evaluate such information so as to provide a clear overview of how the group's work is making a difference and where there are areas to improve.
- The local authority provides regular support and challenge but the rigour of this is hampered by the lack of reliable data about families' regular engagement with services.
- Members of the two advisory boards are well informed about their centre's provision, staff performance and the way in which it is helping to reduce inequalities. They are prepared to challenge the group's leaders as well as to offer support. However, their effectiveness is reduced due to the lack of regular attendance at meetings by some important stakeholders, such as from education and social care.
- Regular staff training and careful checking of the suitability of the staff to work with children ensure that safeguarding remains a high priority. Staff know well the needs of individual families and work closely and effectively with other professionals to support children subject to child protection plans, looked after children, children in need and those supported through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

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 well-being 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	80587
Local authority	Trafford
Inspection number	442828
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	8,175
Centre leader	Janet Barker
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0161 912 2431
Email address	janet.barker@trafford.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20446 Altrincham Children's Centre
- 22621 Sale Children's Centre

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