

# Wirral Birkenhead Children's Centre Group

Rockferry Primary School, Ionic Street, Birkenhead, Wirral, CH42 2BL

|                                 |                          |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Inspection dates</b>         | 13–15 May 2014           |
| <b>Previous inspection date</b> | Not previously inspected |

| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                               | <b>This inspection:</b><br>Previous inspection: | <b>Inadequate</b>        | <b>4</b> |
|--|---|--------------------------|----------|
|  |   | Not previously inspected |          |
| 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.

- The local authority has not helped the leaders to precisely identify their priority groups, or to understand and use the data they provide to set measurable targets which help the local authority, advisory board and leaders to check the difference they are making or to improve.
- Leadership, governance and management are unaware of some key weaknesses because the authority has not monitored the performance of the group closely enough. At all levels, staff are not held to account for their contribution to how well the centre meets its targets.
- The safeguarding policies and procedures are not implemented well enough to protect children and some case files and records are incomplete.
- The untrained advisory board members lack a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and have no involvement in the centre group's self-evaluation and target setting.
- Too few parents take an active role in decision-making about the centre group's services.
- The centre group leaders do not check the quality and impact of the services they deliver closely enough, and the quality of activities and services provided is too variable.
- The leaders are unable to show the difference they are making to children's school readiness, to parenting skills or to the job prospects of adults from their targeted families, as they do not track learners well enough. The centre does not monitor how many families from each of its target groups access services, how often they attend or how well these families' needs are being met.

### This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Those experiencing domestic abuse are supported well by the centre group.
- The volunteer programme is highly successful and has been copied across Wirral.
- Where the centre group's WELLCOM programme and the newly implemented Home Learning initiative are being used, early results suggest a very positive impact on learning.

## What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve governance at every level by ensuring that the local authority:
  - improves the support and challenge they give the centre group by helping the leader to interpret the data provided by the authority in order to precisely identify the target groups in the locality
  - helps the leader to evaluate their services accurately to set the right improvement targets with measurable success indicators and ensure that leaders and staff at every level know what the targets are
  - improve the way they challenge, support and hold the leader to account for the progress made towards improvement targets
  - ensure that the advisory board members receive training to support their role so that they can advise, assist and challenge the leader about the impact of the centre group's work, including by becoming involved in the evaluation of the centre group's effectiveness and in setting the right targets for improvement.
- Improve the systems for managing performance at every level, including by the local authority, so that all individuals are held to account for their contribution to improving outcomes in the reach area.
- Improve the extent to which adults and children are safeguarded and protected in all settings linked to the centre group by:
  - working with the local authority to improve all staff's understanding, implementation and promotion of the safeguarding policies and procedures;
  - ensuring that safeguarding information about onward referral of concerns, and all record keeping linked to establishing the initial and ongoing suitability of staff, is in line with current legislation and guidance.
- Improve the quality of family case files to:
  - consistently demonstrate the rationale for support
  - provide clarity about key issues and chronology
  - evidence the role of supporting agencies in planned interventions
  - provide clear evidence of decision-making processes particularly where safeguarding issues occur.
- Improve the arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of:
  - the quality of provision delivered by centre group staff and that of commissioned services to ensure consistently high quality services which prepare children well for school, improve parenting skills and enhance adult learning and employability skills
  - the attendance and participation of all target groups to gauge access and to check how well provision meets identified needs.
- Consolidate and extend the newly implemented tracking of children's progress across the centres in the group, and work with local schools to establish children's skills on entry to school-based provision in order to enable the centre group to demonstrate their contribution to children's readiness for school.
- Increase the numbers of parents, including those from target groups, who are meaningfully involved in decision-making about the development of services and activities.

## 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 Rock Ferry, Claughton, Birkenhead and Tranmere, Brassey Gardens (linked to the Bidston St James satellite) and Prenton Children's Centres.

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

The inspectors held meetings with parents, staff, leaders, representatives of the joint advisory board, and the senior locality manager and Head of Targeted Services for Wirral.

The inspectors visited premises at Rock Ferry, Claughton, Birkenhead and Tranmere (Cathcart site), Brassey Gardens and Prenton. They observed the work, spoke informally with parents and partner representatives and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Inspection team

Linda McLarty, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Gillian Bishop

Her Majesty's Inspector

Elaine White

Additional Inspector

Janet Glover

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

The Wirral-Birkenhead group comprises Rock Ferry, Claughton, Birkenhead and Tranmere, Brassey Gardens (also referred to as Bidston St. James) and Prenton Children's Centres. The centres share a joint advisory board and governance is by the local authority. Rock Ferry is co-located with Rock Ferry Primary School. Birkenhead and Tranmere Children's Centre operates across two sites, comprising an on-site nursery, Honey Bees Day Nursery at St Werburgh's Primary School, and a small outreach base at Cathcart Primary School. Claughton Children's Centre is linked to Hillside Primary School and has Windmill Day Nursery on site. Prenton Children's Centre is co-located with Prenton Primary School. The schools and nurseries were not part of this inspection and their reports are available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

In September 2013, Wirral authority implemented three Targeted Service Locality teams, and the Birkenhead team offers a range of multi-disciplinary agency support including social work, family support, early years care and education, health services, restorative practice and youth services. Activities and services are delivered from the centres' premises, and increasingly, from community venues and through outreach work. When required, families in the centre group's reach areas are referred to the locality group for targeted support such as nurturing, parenting and home learning programmes, domestic violence support and speech and language screening and support.

There are 6059 children aged from birth to four years living in the reach areas of the five centres. In general, children enter school-based, early years provision with skills and capabilities below the levels typically seen in children of their age.

The main target groups for the centre group are identified as families living in disadvantaged areas, those who have experienced domestic abuse, workless households and low income families and those experiencing poor parenting.

The Rock Ferry, Birkenhead and Tranmere and Brassey Gardens centres serve communities ranked within the top 30% of deprivation nationally. The Claughton centre serves a community ranked within the top 38% of deprivation, and the Prenton centre is in an area within the top 70% in an area of comparative affluence. Across the group, the centres serve areas in which 98% of the population is of White British heritage, with Bengali families the most prevalent minority ethnic group.

Unemployment across the centre group's reach areas varies, but averages out at 32% and the group does not have information about the percentage of families who are in receipt of benefits.

The local authority is currently carrying out a consultation on the future of Early Years and Children's Centres. In 2013, the five individual centres merged into one group, which is led by an Early Years and Children's Centre Team Manager. On-site staff coordinate the operational service delivery.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- Outreach work, and contacting families during pregnancy, have helped to ensure that most of the families in the area are registered, including the large majority of the currently identified target groups. However, these target groups almost mirror the general population in the area, as they include a very high percentage of those living in disadvantaged areas, workless households and low income families. The local authority has not helped leaders to precisely identify the specific target groups or their particular needs.
- The staff do not track how many of the families from their identified target groups attend most services and activities, or how often, or what difference this is making to their outcomes, including those who have experienced poor parenting.
- The centre leaders cannot provide evidence that they are prioritising for some families who are less likely to access centre group services. There is insufficient evidence that some significant groups such as the minority ethnic population, teenage parents, children on child protection plans or looked after children are receiving enough support. Staff are not following up the attendance or impact of times when they have signposted to other services.
- Brief intervention records record initial contacts with new families or families experiencing a specific need, but records are not used effectively to monitor sustained and ongoing engagement with families. Consequently, they contain minimal evidence of impact and staff are unable to show that families remain engaged until their needs are met.
- There are insufficient courses and support for adults to improve their job prospects and employability skills. The centre signposts them to other agencies and organisations but does not monitor the attendance or completion rates, or know what difference this has made to their lives. Access to some services, such as adult learning programmes, is significantly reduced because of the lack of promotion of community-run services across partner agencies, for example, Birkenhead Development Trust.
- The group has encouraged a number of adults to access their very successful volunteer programme, which is now being rolled out across Wirral as a model of good practice.
- The overwhelming majority of eligible two, three and four- year-olds take up their entitlement to funded places in settings which have been judged to be offering good or better provision.
- The staff are rightly proud of the support they offer those experiencing domestic abuse, partly by increasing access to the regularly provided Freedom courses.
- The newly implemented Home Learning initiative is also showing early signs of increasing families' levels of engagement.

### The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- The group leaders do not monitor closely enough the quality, impact and relevance of the services they or their partners deliver, and the quality of provision is too variable.
- There is a rising trend of improvement in the achievement of Wirral children as demonstrated by their Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores. However, the leaders are unable to demonstrate what specific contribution they are making to children's school readiness in their locality, because their tracking of children's progress is at too early a stage. Furthermore, they do not work with local schools to identify children's levels on entry to school-based provision.
- The WELLCOM programme is improving the communication and language skills of children in those settings in which it is used. Anecdotally, teachers in schools where centre group staff are implementing the 'Relax Kids' sessions report that children return to their classes with increased concentration and an improved ability to learn.
- Partnerships with health visitors are strong, and greatly enhance the staff's ability to contact pregnant mothers at an early stage to offer breastfeeding support. Too many children in the area enter the Reception Year above a healthy weight. As soon as the centre group became aware of this, they put in place initiatives to improve this.

- The group cannot show what difference they are making to the parenting skills or job prospects of adults from their targeted families. The range of adult learning opportunities available in the area is good, but weak partnership working with adult learning providers prevents the centre group from using these services effectively. Leaders do not track access and outcomes for the adults they signpost to these services.
- The quality of case records, tracking and supervision is variable. Case files in general are difficult to track. They have some gaps in detail and chronology and do not provide a clear audit trail to demonstrate appropriate safeguarding supervision or partnership working with centre group services. They do not show the active contribution of parents and children in the action planning process.
- The volunteer programme is highly successful in supporting individuals to develop the confidence and skills that, in many cases, lead to enrolment on courses which could significantly improve the volunteers' future employment prospects. Volunteers say the programme 'turned my life around', 'staff are very good role models and help you develop self-confidence', and report that they feel very much valued as 'part of the team' in the centres.
- Although the staff have not put in place any systems to measure the difference they are making to families' well-being or parenting skills, parents told inspectors that they value highly the help provided by centre staff. They commented that this support has resulted in them feeling stronger and able to manage their children's behaviour and their own lives better.

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

Inadequate

- Governance is weak at every level. The centre group leader and staff are over-stretched and under-supported by the local authority. The authority has not helped them to precisely identify the target groups in the area, or to use the large amount of raw data they provide to set measurable improvement targets. The leaders, advisory board and authority do not have a shared understanding of the improvement targets for last year, or how well these were met.
- The centre group leadership and staff are hardworking and extremely committed to the people in their area, but they are struggling to manage their workload with shrinking resources. There is one leader over the five centres, and the coordination of operational service delivery is delegated to an outreach coordinator on each centre site. However, these posts are not acknowledged by the authority as leadership posts and the capacity to improve is vested too much in one person.
- The authority has not monitored the performance of the group closely enough. Staff at all levels are not held to account for their contribution to how well the centre meets its targets or reduces inequalities by narrowing the gaps in educational achievement and other outcomes.
- Many of the areas for improvement identified in this inspection were recurring themes in previous children's centre inspection reports, indicating that the local authority is not analysing or implementing lessons learnt from previous inspections. The newly appointed Head of Targeted Services has inherited this situation but takes full responsibility for this legacy and the need to improve local authority support, challenge and guidance for centre leaders. She already has plans in place, through a full service review, to rectify this. The review is currently out to consultation with the centres' advisory boards, key user groups, staff and partners.
- The advisory board members lack a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They have no involvement in the centre's self-evaluation and target setting, and have not been trained to support their role.
- Safeguarding arrangements are poor and the associated local authority policies and procedures put in place to protect children and families are not implemented consistently. Although the centre group is not directly responsible, there have been serious safeguarding breaches within an affiliated childcare provision. Additionally, a review of one case file confirms that there was a failure to follow local safeguarding board procedures by a childcare provider and a family support service following disclosure by a child, placing that child at risk of harm.
- The system for recording the ongoing suitability of staff, and the staff training records vary in quality across the centres in the group. In some cases, there are gaps within the single central record. The

local authority policies and procedures fail to provide a clear directive in relation to the frequency with which the Disclosure and Barring Service checks are updated, or confirm how ongoing suitability is maintained and assured.

- Too few parents take an active role in decision-making about the group's services. Parents have limited representation on the advisory board, and there is no formal route for them to have an authentic input into decision making. The centre staff are at an early stage of gauging children's views.

**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**

|                                |                     |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 80435               |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Wirral              |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 446066              |
| <b>Managed by</b>              | The local authority |

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| <b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b> | 6059                     |
| <b>Centre group leader</b>   | Sue Bignall              |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                                 | Not previously inspected |
| <b>Telephone number</b>  | 0151 637 6258            |
| <b>Email address</b>   | suebignall@wirral.gov.uk |

**This group consists of the following children's centres:**

- URN 22541 Rock Ferry
- URN 20312 Birkenhead and Tranmere
- URN 23745 Brassey Gardens also referred to as 20295 Bidston St James
- URN 20747 Cloughton
- URN 22416 Prenton

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