

# Wirral – Birkenhead CC Group

c/o Rock Ferry Primary School, Ionic Street, Merseyside, CH42 2BL

<b>Inspection dates</b>	28–30 April 2015
<b>Previous inspection date</b>	13–15 May 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
Access to services by young children and families		<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
The quality of practice and services		<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>

## Summary of key findings for children and families

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

- Despite increased take-up recently, not enough families regularly use the centre group's services. This includes those families identified by the leaders and local authority as needing the most support.
- Tracking of the progress of children and adult learners is at too early a stage to clearly show the difference the centre is making to children's school readiness or to adults' employability.
- Not enough adults complete adult and community learning opportunities.
- Too few children enter school at a healthy weight, and not enough mothers continue to breastfeed.
- The local authority and centre leaders do not use data well enough to accurately measure the difference they are making to local families, often under-counting the numbers of families they help.
- There are some variations in safeguarding practice across centres in the group. For example, in the quality of case records and in the extent to which children's views are taken into account. Some risk assessments, such as those linked to outings to the urban farm, do not cover all potential risks.

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

- The leadership, management and the local authority has helped the group to improve rapidly, especially since January this year. The local authority now holds the manager very closely to account for the quality of services. As a result, the group's capacity to improve is now strong.
- The manager checks the quality of staff practice and knows the group's strengths and weaknesses.
- The improved advisory board now offers suitable support and challenge to the group manager.
- Services offer a good balance of those open to all and activities specifically for those most in need. This is helping to increase the numbers of families using services.
- Leaders and staff focus their time and efforts well on meeting the group's improvement targets and strengthening the families who need the most help. Relationships are productive at every level.
- The quality of services to promote children's and adults' learning is generally good. Parents also appreciate the useful information, advice and guidance and the kind, welcoming staff.
- The centre group is effective at supporting the large majority of parents who wish to improve their parenting skills, and their ability to manage their children's behaviour.
- Close working with the fire service, together with the 'Safe and Sound' assessments and the provision of safety equipment, is improving families' awareness of how to keep their children safe. Health professionals say that this has led to a noticeable reduction in accidents.

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

- Increase the numbers of families who are meaningfully engaged with the centre group services, both overall and including the families the leaders have identified as needing the most support.
- Improve quality and impact of provision by:
  - working with school colleagues to continue to improve the tracking of children’s achievements and progress, in order to better demonstrate the contribution the centre group is making to children’s readiness for school
  - working with adult and community learning partners to increase and track the numbers of adults completing adult and community learning courses in order to support their immediate learning needs and their longer-term employability
  - working with health partners to implement the plans that have been developed to bring about more rapid improvement of health outcomes such as increasing the numbers of mothers who breastfeed their babies, and increasing the number of children who enter school at a healthy weight.
- Improve governance, leadership and management by:
  - analysing data more accurately to demonstrate the impact of the centre group’s work on improving outcomes for local families
  - embed the improvements to safeguarding to ensure that the group’s policies and procedures are implemented consistently across all centres, for example when completing case files, including recording the views of children and when risk assessing outings, to ensure that potential risks are identified and where possible, eliminated.

## 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: Birkenhead and Tranmere; Brassey Gardens, (also referred to as Bidston St. James); Claughton; Prenton and Rock Ferry.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the parents, centre leaders, representatives of the local authority and partner agencies, for example, health, education and social care, and the advisory board.

The inspectors visited all of the centres in the group, and a range of other venues, such as a local urban farm. Inspectors carried out joint observations of activities provided for adults and children.

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

## Inspection team

Linda Mclarty, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Qaisra Shahraz Ahmad	Additional inspector
Susan Walsh	Additional inspector
Sarah Drake	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 are managed on a locality basis with one Early Years Manager and four outreach coordinators, who manage the day to day running of the centres and their respective teams.

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 of 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. 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 communities 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 6,060 children aged from birth to four years living in the communities around the five centres. The majority of children enter school-based, early years provision with skills and knowledge well below those typical for their age.

The centre group has identified children with a child protection or children in need plan; children referred through the Family Common Assessment Framework process; children who are looked after by the authority; children living in the 1% most deprived areas in Birkenhead or the 20% most deprived areas in the more affluent area of Prenton and children from black or minority ethnic backgrounds as most in need of their support.

Levels of deprivation vary across the communities served by the centres. Rock Ferry, Birkenhead and Tranmere and Brassey Gardens centres serve communities generally within areas ranked 20% most deprived nationally. However, Oxton in Birkenhead is a pocket of relative affluence, ranked within the top 60%. Prenton also serves a more affluent community within the 70% deprivation levels. Claughton serves a community of 38% deprivation, although some families within Claughton live in an area ranked 5% most deprived nationally. Unemployment in the area is high at 21%. The centre group data cites 29% of children under five years of age as eligible for free school meals, indicating that high levels of families are in receipt of benefits.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

### Requires improvement

- The centre leaders have significantly improved how they use data to identify the needs of families who are most in need of their support, such as those from the minority ethnic communities, those living in the 1% most deprived areas and in the 20% most deprived part of Prenton, families with children with a child protection, or children in need plan, or children being looked after by the local authority.
- They now target their services on these families from pregnancy onwards, thus helping to reduce inequalities as early as possible in a child's life.

- The large majority of adults in the area are now registered with services. There has also been a significant increase in the use of centre services, including by those families identified as needing the most help. Despite this leaders at all levels know that not enough families in the area, including the families who would most benefit from the centres' services, are using them.
- Services are continually reviewed and adapted, in order to ensure that the balance between focussed and open-access services meets local needs. Well-managed outreach work brings services to families unable or less likely to access the centre buildings. This is also increasing the numbers of families using centre group services.
- The needs of local families are identified increasingly efficiently using information from the local authority, supplemented well by local knowledge of the outreach workers and the centre group's partners. The increased use of the Family Common Assessment Framework is helping to identify families' needs accurately.

### The quality of practice and services

### Requires improvement

- The leaders have rightly identified that tracking of learners of all ages remains an ongoing priority for improvement. The use of the tracking systems purchased last year has been hampered by delays in implementing the upgraded information technology systems in Wirral. Not enough has been done to find alternative ways to work with school learning partners to measure the difference the centres make to children's readiness for school.
- Nevertheless, local headteachers say that the children who have attended the centre group's services are much better prepared for schools than those who do not. Centre group activities are carefully planned to improve children's skills in language, communication and early reading and writing. There is some variability in the quality of sessions, though most are generally good. Local childcare providers report good support from centre staff.
- In response to the weak achievement at the end of Reception Year of those children who are looked after, the centre group is working closely with the local authority's fostering service to improve the provision. 'The children's centre was the turning point for the young child in my care' said one foster carer who greatly appreciated the support given.
- Not enough was provided to support children from minority ethnic families last year. However, the leaders are now working closely with the Minority Ethnic Achievement Service to improve this, and have made this a key priority for the use of centre group resources.
- Greatly improved partnerships with adult learning providers and Jobcentre Plus provide good quality adult and community learning and volunteering opportunities, including English and mathematics courses. However, too few adults take up these opportunities, although attendees say that the courses are helping them gain the skills they need for future employment. The adult and community learning partners do not work well enough with the centre leaders to track how many adults access courses or their progress towards improved employability.
- Effective referrals and information sharing between social care and health colleagues is enabling the majority of families to be assessed promptly and to receive the help they need quickly. The majority of children identified through the two-year-old checks are supported well to receive the help they need.
- Care, guidance and support from the group and its partners is helping parents to feel valued and supported. Parents report that this reduces feelings of isolation and depression, and helps them promote their children's well-being, health and safety well. Good quality information, advice and guidance are helping to reduce inequalities for families who might otherwise be at risk of achieving less well.
- The staff work in partnership with health colleagues to promote healthy lifestyles from pregnancy. Immunisation rates are good, but the numbers of mothers who continue to breastfeed and the numbers of children entering school at a healthy weight are well below national averages.
- There is some variability in quality between case files completed by different staff. However, scrutiny of 27 records raised no concerns about the safety of children, although the views of children are not always recorded. This is a big improvement since the previous inspection. It is now

possible to identify the children's specific needs, the chronology of events and the different roles and actions allocated to the different professionals involved.

- The blend of generally good-quality focussed and open-access services is meeting the needs of increasing numbers of families. This includes families identified as most in need of additional support.

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

### **Requires improvement**

- Governance, leadership and management have improved in the last year, including in the management and use of resources. However, from June until December 2014 the rate of improvement was too slow despite the local authority funding consultancy support to accelerate this. Improvement was further slowed by significant staff changes arising from the concurrent review of Early Years and Children's Centre services.
- Since January the pace of improvement has rapidly gathered speed. Leaders at all levels are dedicated, hardworking and enthusiastic, and have successfully rebuilt the morale, confidence and focus of the team. Staff are now much more effective at meeting the needs of the families they have identified as needing most support.
- Although greatly improved, the use of data to measure the centre group's impact on all families, including those most in need, remains an ongoing challenge. This is further hampered by Wirral-wide problems implementing the new data systems. The local authority and group manager have identified this as a continuing area for improvement.
- Performance management has improved, and there is now a shared sense of urgency and responsibility to drive improvement. Staff take the improvement targets into account when prioritising their work.
- The local authority now provides extremely thorough, detailed challenge, and the group manager and coordinators have risen to this. Strong leadership at strategic level is clarifying the scope of the task still facing the staff teams, if they are to become highly effective centres.
- The centre group staff team are now seen as equal partners with social care professionals in the work to safeguard children's well-being and safety. One Family Support Service professional commented that, 'The children's centre is the mainstay of support for under-fives.'
- Safeguarding procedures are clear and staff receive appropriate training so that they know how to respond correctly when concerns arise. Referral arrangements have improved since the previous inspection. These now allow centre to staff concentrate on those families with children aged under five years old, which further enhances their safety.
- Staff are swift to respond in times of crisis. The work to support those experiencing domestic abuse remains strong. The centres provide a safe environment for supervised access for those children who are in care.
- The Common Assessment Framework is used sufficiently as a first step towards identifying needs. Proposed actions are clear, and there is clear evidence of regular staff supervision by managers. Families with children subject to child protection plans, or identified as children-in-need or looked after children, are suitably overseen.
- The quality of services is monitored regularly, to check that there are sufficient resources and services available to meet the needs of families, especially those identified as being most in need of centre group support. However, an outing to the local farm was not risk-assessed well enough to identify and prepare for the full range of possible risks.
- Parents' views are taken into account generally well, for example, in the full service review. Leaders are already adapting existing consultation processes to improve how they gather and use parents' views about the development of services to better meet their needs.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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>	455026
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	6,060
<b>Centre leader</b>	Tracy Rimmer
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	13–15 May 2014
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 652 1916
<b>Email address</b>	tracyrimmer@wirral.gov.uk

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

- 20312 Birkenhead and Tranmere
- 23745 Brassey Gardens
- 20747 Claughton
- 22416 Prenton
- 22541 Rock Ferry

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