

Knowsley - Halewood

Lichfield Road Halewood, Knowsley, Merseyside, L26 1TT

Inspection date 30–31 January 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.

- Registration rates are high and the large majority of local families with young children use the services in the centre. The centre is particularly successful in the way it supports lone parents and parents of disabled children or those with special educational needs.
- Friendly and supportive staff work hard to build trusting relationships with families. They have a good knowledge of the varied issues facing families in their community. The parental comment that 'Staff go above and beyond and are invaluable' reflects the views of many who use the centre.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used exceptionally well to inform parents about the work of the centre and where they can access further information and additional support if it is needed.
- The uptake of funded early education places is very high. This, together with highly effective partnerships with local schools, childcare settings and targeted sessions for some families, is ensuring that gaps in educational achievement are reducing.
- There is an extensive range of opportunities for adult and family learning that is carefully tailored to local needs and helps to improve their chances of employment and life style.
- Leaders and the advisory board frequently review the quality of services and drive forward improvement at a good pace. They work well with a wide range of partners to secure good quality services that help to improve the lives of local families.

It is not outstanding because:

- Data are not always analysed in a way that gives a clear picture of the impact of the centre's work on the lives of families. The development plan does not contain sufficient measurable targets and milestones against which success can be determined. Record keeping does not always reflect the good quality work that happens in the centre.
- The centre has had insufficient impact on reducing child obesity or sustaining breastfeeding rates beyond six-to-eight weeks.

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 Oak Tree Children's Centre and Cherry Tree Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the leader of the two centres and his deputy. They also spoke to other staff who work in the centres and representatives from the local authority as well as members of the advisory board. Conversations took place with staff from partner agencies including a range of health professionals and staff from the adult and family learning services. Inspectors also spoke with staff from Jobcentre Plus, headteachers and other educational professionals and staff from Big Life, a group that provides families with additional support. Discussions with parents took place at different times during the inspection and inspectors looked at their written evaluations of the centres' services.

Inspectors observed the centres' work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centres' self evaluation documentation and development plan.

Inspection team

Susan Walsh, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Tara Street	Additional inspector
Philip Ellwand	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Knowsley-Halewood Children's Centre group comprises Oak Tree Children's Centre and Cherry Tree Children's Centre. There is one manager who leads a team of staff who work across the two centres. There is one advisory board providing shared governance for both centres. The local authority is directly responsible for monitoring the work of the centres.

Halewood is a community of mixed owner-occupier and social landlord housing. Approximately, 22% of children in the area next to Oak Tree Children's Centre live in households in receipt of workless benefits but that number falls to 11% in the area served by the Cherry Tree Children's Centre. Most families are of White British heritage and there are a small but increasing number of families from a wider range of backgrounds, including families of Polish heritage. The group offers access to health services and family support plus links to other services such as Jobcentre Plus. The Adult Learning Service is co-located with the Cherry Tree Children's Centre and works in partnership with this centre. The target groups identified by the children's centres include lone parents, young parents and families where there are disabled children or children with special educational needs.

Children in the reach area of the group enter early years provision with skills that are below those that are typical for their age.

There is childcare provided at both children's centre sites. This provision is inspected separately and the reports are available on our website: www.Ofsted.gov.uk.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve the rates of sustained breastfeeding and have a greater impact on reducing levels of obesity amongst children in the area served by the centre by:
 - setting targets for improvements to health, including rates of breastfeeding and levels of obesity in children
 - accelerating the implementation of new initiatives designed to bring about improvement to breastfeeding rates
 - developing more activities designed to encourage healthy lifestyles.
- Enhance the impact of leadership and management by:
 - making more effective use of data to measure the impact of the group's work
 - making sure that the development plan contains measurable targets and regular milestones against which progress can be measured
 - tightening up administrative procedures so that record keeping more effectively captures the quality of the centres' work.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Good use of new birth data, and effective partnerships with a range of professionals and community partners have all played key parts in ensuring high rates of registration and making certain that a large majority of local families, including those who are expecting children, access the services offered by the centre. Additionally ICT is used as a very effective means of communication so that families have up-to-date information about the activities and support available at the centre.
- Secure systems make sure that information about families who may be in need of extra support is quickly shared between partners and staff at the children's centres. This ensures that families

in challenging situations usually receive carefully tailored support from the agency that is best equipped to meet their needs. Information sharing in the centres between those staff that implement Family First support, other children's centre staff and those that work for the Big Life group is good. This makes certain that families are supported by those staff that have the most appropriate skills.

- The group is particularly successful at involving lone parents in its work. It has recognised that there are an increasing number of families from minority ethnic groups and in particular from Polish backgrounds. Staff have encouraged a good number of these families who live near the Oak Tree Children's Centre to attend activities at the centre. They have now turned their attention to making sure that those that live near the Cherry Tree Children's Centre attend in equal numbers and further enhancing provision for young parents and fathers.
- The group works effectively with health partners to make sure that regular health checks for babies and children, including those at the age of two, identify children who need additional support. The vast majority of children from target groups take up the entitlement to free early education when it is offered.
- Disabled children and those with special educational needs and their parents are well supported through regular contact. This can be through access to the well-resourced sensory room, attendance at the Sunrise Club or through more intensive personal support.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Families benefit from a good balance of targeted support and access to the universal services offered by the group and its partners. Those who use the centres speak highly of the friendly, supportive services they receive from staff who work hard to build trusting relationships and ensure everyone is included irrespective of their background. The comments of two parents sum up the views of many, 'The centre is a relaxed, calm, warm, friendly and welcoming atmosphere, we are all encouraged to talk about our experiences and it's comforting to know we won't be judged' and 'the help you get is great, feel like I am not alone anymore'.
- Highly effective partnership work with local schools and early years settings, such as the regular cluster and network meetings and the school readiness project, help the children who use the centre to make good educational progress. Targeted family learning sessions including the 'speech enrichment programme', 'Chatterbox' and 'Baby Massage', have a good impact on improving children's skills. As a result, gaps in their achievement are reducing and children are well prepared for school with about 62% showing a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Families who use the centres have access to a wide range of family and adult learning opportunities, including advice about parenting. There is good information and guidance and additional signposting to funding and support for courses through close working with the lone parent advisers from Jobcentre Plus. The group exceeds its targets for the numbers of adults accessing courses both accredited or non-accredited and every opportunity is taken to provide access to gaining additional qualifications and improve life chances. Good training and support for volunteering provides opportunities for users to extend their skills and gain valuable experience that enhances future chances of gaining employment.
- The group's impact on the health of local families is restricted by a lack of targets that relate directly to health factors. Nevertheless, the centre knows that although rates of breastfeeding at six to eight weeks after birth in the reach area may seem positive compared to the rest of Knowsley, they are almost half of that seen nationally. In the last six months there has been a stronger emphasis on breastfeeding support and those mothers who attend the 'Bosom Buddies' groups find the support invaluable, but a significant increase of breastfeeding rates has not yet been secured.
- Staff are also aware that there is more to do to reduce obesity rates in children. Although there is a general regard for promoting healthy lifestyles there are relatively few activities that robustly promote the importance of a healthy diet and an active lifestyle.

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

- Resources are used well to make certain that families' needs are met. The two children's centres share the same staff, leadership team and advisory board and provide a range of services that are carefully tailored to local requirements. Performance management and supervision are well established and thorough.
- The annual conversation between local authority and leadership team in the centres provides an effective level of challenge. It is supplemented by regular interim reviews of the group's performance. The local authority sets appropriately challenging targets for most areas of the group's work including how it is closing the gap in educational achievement for children and reducing inequalities in their life chances. The group often exceeds these performance measures.
- Improvements are driven by the pioneering advisory board. Those involved understand the performance of the group and the quality of practice and services. Discrete groups look closely at specific areas of the work of the two centres and are not afraid to challenge and hold staff to account for diminishing inequity in the local area. Parents and children are consulted about their needs and also contribute to decision making about key priorities. For example, it has been identified that grandparents are an important group of users who occasionally need support.
- The data that the centres hold are not always used in a way that provides a clear picture of the impact of the group's work on local families including those in target groups. This limits the way that the group can evaluate its performance. Additionally, the development plan does not contain clear measurable targets or interim mile stones against which the group can measure the rate of improvement.
- Responsibilities relating to safeguarding are taken seriously and children's well-being is central to the group's work. Staff are vetted and trained. However, records that relate to this vetting and training are not always well organised and occasionally there is a lack of clarity in the recording of this good work via case files. The Common Assessment Framework process is used appropriately to share information between agencies and much is done to address issues such as domestic violence. The centre is not always routinely engaged with children living in the area who are subject to a child protection plan or identified as being in need. When concerns are de-escalated, the centre becomes involved rather than personnel from social care and provides appropriate support that has a positive effect on these children's well-being.

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	80502
Local authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	430118
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	912
Centre leader	Gerry Allen
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	0151 443 2191
Email address	gerry.allen@knowsley.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- Oak Tree Children's Centre [URN 22219]
- Cherry Tree Children's Centre [URN 20669]

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