

The Brooks Children's Centre

Balmoral Avenue, Crewe, Cheshire, CW2 6PL

Inspection dates	24–26 September 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

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 is a good centre

- Four fifths of all young children living in the centre's reach area are registered with the centre and the large majority of families from most priority groups regularly use the services of this centre, or one of the others in the locality collaboration.
- Almost all eligible children are now accessing free early education at ages two, three and four.
- The centre manager and staff's understanding of data is good. They use data well in a relentless drive to maintain and further increase the number of families, especially those identified as most in need, engaging with the centre's services.
- A close collaboration and good relationships with the neighbouring primary schools is helping to improve children's school readiness.
- Well-designed programmes to help perpetrators of domestic violence to reform, in addition to the more usual support for victims, feature highly in the centre's response to domestic violence.
- The centre works closely with partners to provide a good range of services which meet the needs of families in the area well. These include adult education, parenting programmes and health services.
- Highly skilled and reflective practitioners provide good quality, care, guidance and support for families both in the centre and in their home environments.
- All leaders, managers and staff, and those responsible for the centre's governance share its ambitions and drive for continued success. The centre has a positive history of improvement.

It is not outstanding because:

- The shared advisory board has yet to reach its full potential when it comes to challenging the centre, and holding its leaders to account.
- Case files do not always record each aspect of a home visit in the same way. In particular, they do not routinely capture the child's presentation.
- The number of mothers who are still breastfeeding six to eight weeks after childbirth is too low.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve the rigour with which the advisory board holds the centre to account and challenges leaders to improve further by ensuring that board members receive appropriate levels of training to enable them to fully understand their roles and to interpret data and other reports from the centre.
- Ensure that case file documents are completed consistently to the quality of the best.
- Work with health partners and breastfeeding support groups to encourage more mothers to initiate and sustain breastfeeding by identifying their reasons for not doing so and providing a more compelling case for the advantages.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. It was carried out at the same time as other children's centres, which were Oak Tree Children's Centre and Nantwich and Rural Children's Centre from the same locality collaboration.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the locality manager, centre and other family service managers, centre staff, local authority officers, partners, early childhood providers, headteachers of local primary schools and members of the advisory board. They also met volunteers, parents and centre users.

The inspectors visited the three centres being simultaneously inspected; The Brooks, Oak Tree and Nantwich and Rural Children's Centres as well as the Ethel Elks Family Centre and a number of outreach and community centres. They visited a range of services offered including adult education, baby and toddler sessions and a range of support groups.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including a wide range of case files and casework, and carried out joint observations with centre leaders. Inspectors took into account the views of parents obtained in conversation and from the records of programme evaluations.

Inspection team

Cliff Rose, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Deborah Udakis	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sarah Drake	Additional inspector
Parm Sansoyer	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Cheshire East County Council has 11 children's centres organised into two stand-alone centres, and three groups of collaborations.

A review of the local authority's children's centres in March 2011 led to the creation of The Brooks Children's Centre. The main site for the centre is located on the Pebble Brook Primary School site. The majority of services are delivered from The Brooks Children's Centre, but additional outreach is delivered from The Brooks Shavington site and from other community venues and host schools across the locality.

The Brook Children's Centre is one of four centres in the Crewe Locality collaboration. The centre is led, on behalf of the local authority, by a family service manager (FSM). Together with the FSM, the locality manager holds responsibility for each of the four centres. Some 2,216 children under five years of age live in the centre's reach area.

The centre delivers a range of services, including family support, early childhood services, adult learning, parenting support, health services, speech and language therapy and family welfare. Governance arrangements, via an advisory board, are shared by the four centres. Registered early years provision is co-located at the children's centre. The most recent inspection reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The locality covers a wide area and includes areas of significant deprivation with a predominance of social housing and private rented accommodation, as well as a number of more affluent rural communities. There are specific areas that fall into the top 30% levels of deprivation nationally. The largest area falls in the top 10% of deprivation.

A smaller proportion of children under five years of age are living in homes dependent on workless benefits than seen nationally. The majority of families living in the area are White British, with approximately 12% of families from different minority ethnic backgrounds. There is a long-standing Polish community which has grown in population in recent years. A number of families have more recently come from Eastern European countries, many of whom speak English as a second language.

Services within the group are targeted specifically at those living in the areas of highest deprivation and those who are identified as being in most need of help and support: families from minority ethnic backgrounds, children at the edge of care, looked after children and two-year-olds eligible for funded childcare.

Children's skills and understanding on entry to early years provision are below typical levels for their age.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Registrations are rising and now exceed 80% of all families with children under five years of age living in the area. The very large majority of children and families, including those expecting children and from priority groups, are registered.
- A recent steep rise in the number of eligible two-year-olds taking up their free education places resulted from well-focused outreach work. When combined with the already high number of three- and four-year-olds taking up their entitlement, this has resulted in almost all eligible children attending a good-quality early years setting.
- The centre works closely with health professionals to amass information about families with young children, particularly those in most need of support. Consequently, despite the lack of available new

birth data, centre staff have a very good knowledge about their area and the families living there. They then work hard to contact any families who have either not registered or who have ceased to access the centre's services, using repeated telephone calls and home visits.

- All children targeted for priority support and services are known to the centre. Leaders talk with confidence about those children who are in the care of the local authority, children identified as in need, and children with disabilities and special educational needs. Those few children in these priority groups who do not regularly attend the centre are being well served by key partners and organisations. The leaders continue to monitor the children's progress and development in consultation with key partners to ensure the children continue to thrive.
- The centre is easily accessible for families and is sited next to the area of highest deprivation in Crewe. The entrance foyer, which the centre shares with a private nursery, is welcoming and contains comfortable seating, a supply of age-appropriate toys and books, an open and approachable reception desk and a wealth of information for parents about the centre's services.
- Staff take the initiative to overcome barriers to service access. For example, they regularly deliver programmes on a one-to-one basis in families' homes for those who are unable to attend the provision in the centre or its outreach venues. One parent whose job involves international travel was able to access his support using a wireless televisual communications programme.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The centre combines a variety of programmes available to all, which staff also use to identify those who need further support, with programmes specifically designed to meet the needs of priority groups such as those supporting children with disabilities and special needs. Programmes also include a variety of activities planned to appeal to male carers.
- The centre offers a number of programmes led by centre staff, such as 'Stay and Play', designed to promote good-quality early learning and 'Bumps and Babes', designed to monitor and assist early development, which are open to all. Staff and parents use learning journals to record the progress children make during sessions. The centre uses qualified childminders, who also monitor the children's development well, to run its crèche support for adult education and parenting programmes.
- A close partnership with speech and language therapists results in effective, targeted provision for parents and those children identified as having, or at risk of having, delayed communication and language development.
- The centre works strongly in partnership with midwives and health visitors to engage expectant and new mothers early and to deliver key health messages. Staff and partners use themed sessions within programmes well to promote healthy weaning, healthy eating and the importance of exercise and safety. Although the numbers initiating breastfeeding is in line with local and national averages, the sustained rate is well below.
- Staff are adept at the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The children's centre has recently taken responsibility for the support of children with disabilities and, by using the CAF process, staff are able to identify the support needs of the whole family as well as the specific needs of the child with a disability.
- The local authority lifelong learning service delivers an appropriate range of accredited and non-accredited adult learning courses in the centre. The courses engage and meet the needs of parents with previous poor academic experiences or lacking the confidence or qualifications to help them secure employment or enhance their life chances.
- Success rates are particularly high. For example, 95% of learners on both accredited and non-accredited courses complete their programmes, achieve all the course objectives and gain their intended qualifications. Mathematics and English courses are effective, with learners progressing from entry levels through to Level 2 and some now progressing to functional skills qualifications.
- In the summer holidays, the centre runs an innovative and successful programme at two local primary schools to prepare children better for entry to school. For example, two children in one group who were still wearing nappies at the start of the programme were appropriately toilet trained by the start of the academic year. Parents are made aware of their responsibility for their children

being in school and the consequences of their non-attendance.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The locality manager supervises all the centres in the collaboration well so that all the FSMs contribute effectively to locality-wide provision as well as the day-to-day running of their centres and the supervision of their core staff. The enthusiastic, well-qualified staff at the Brooks centre give their manager their full support and constantly put forward ideas to further improve the services on offer and the support they can provide to the families most in need.
- The annual conversation process by which the local authority holds the centre to account is robust and thorough. It enables the local authority and managers to conduct a rigorous scrutiny of the centre's performance. The inclusion in the process of the locality manager from the authority's other Southern area children centre collaboration adds further objectivity and helps to share good practice across all the local authority's children's centres.
- Parental contribution to the management of the centre is strong. Parents are well represented on the locality centres' steering group and advisory board. Three of them attend the advisory board, which one of them chairs. They actively represent the views of the centre's own parents' forum. Parent volunteers are active in outreach provision and other roles in the centre. Newly recruited and trained parent champions are actively promoting the centre services in the community.
- The advisory board provides strong support and a degree of challenge to the centre manager. However, it has only met four times since the reorganisation of the children's centres and although there is good representation from professionals and parents, not all of them possess the necessary expertise or confidence to challenge the manager more robustly. Members of this locality board have not had access to the training offered by the local authority to its neighbouring locality advisory board.
- Safeguarding is central to the ethos of the centre and the focus of much of its work. Its policies, procedures and practice all meet requirements. Staff regularly undertake safeguarding training at levels appropriate to their work. They are alert to the signs of possible child protection issues.
- Staff closely monitor children in need, those subject to a child protection plan and those on the edge of care. They make expert use of the Common Assessment Framework and multi-agency referral processes, and take swift and appropriate action to protect children from risk of serious harm.
- The centres make good use of case studies for each case closed. The case studies summarise the case, identify good practice, clearly express the voice of the child and record lessons learned. Staff use them very well to reflect on what they might do differently. Case files and case management overall are good but all staff do not use each of the subheadings designed by managers for home visits and this has not been picked up at audit.

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

Unique reference number	22344
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	447559
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,216
Centre leader	Lyn Carter
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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