

Sandwell - Rowley Regis Cluster

C/O Rowley Springfield Sure Start Children's Centre, Dudley Road, West Midlands, B65 8JY

Inspection date		18–20 March 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.

- A large majority of the families, including those who have the highest levels of need, engage in the wide range of mainly good quality services that the group provide. As a result, the group is working very successfully with its main target groups of children in most need, those living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and is particularly accomplished at engaging with fathers and teenage and young parents.
- Good local knowledge and use of other community information ensure that the programme of activities meets families' needs well. It offers the right blend of group sessions, such as 'Baby Massage' and 'Cookwell and Fabtots' sessions, as well as carefully planned home visits that support individual families, particularly in times of crisis.
- Parents value the warm and friendly environment at the centres and really appreciate the very good care and support which they receive from the leaders and staff.
- Leadership and management are good and as a result the centre is continuously improving. The staff are well qualified and work well together as a team. There are good opportunities for them to develop their skills further and they are well supported by their managers, who make sure they have time to reflect on the important work they are doing with families.

It is not outstanding because:

- Work is well on its way to make sure the group have all the right information they need to help with their plans. However, formal agreements to share some information from health and the local authority are not yet in place to ensure that the group receive data on new births and two year old children who are eligible for free nursery education.
- Systems to track progress and monitor how the group is making a difference to families' lives are not yet well established across all aspects of the group's work. Quality assurance measures are not consistently in place across all services, which means there is a variance in the quality of the provision offered.
- Parents are continuously consulted and their views are used to shape services. However, there is currently no parent representative on the advisory board or an active parent forum.

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. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Rowley Springfield Children's Centre, Rowley Hall Children's Centre commonly known as Happy Faces Children's Centre, Cradley Heath and Old Hill Children's Centre and Tividale Children's Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with: the children's centre cluster manager; the strategic lead, chief executive officer for Murray Hall Community Trust, director for Health for Living; local authority lead officer for children's centres; early intervention officer responsible for the co-ordination of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF); the data and monitoring officer; and the co-ordinators working across all four centres. Inspectors also talked to specialist staff including health visitors, a midwife and a representative of the Citizens Advice Bureau. Inspectors spoke to staff from across the universal groups service and family support service, as well as partners from voluntary agencies, health agencies, children's social care, adult education, primary school and linked nurseries.

The inspectors visited the four children's centres, Young Persons Children's Centre, Oakham Library, St Johns Ambulance site, Oakham Primary School, St James Church, and Rowley Springfield Primary School.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including case files, the centre's self-evaluation and development plans, parent evaluations, key policies and the centre's equality and safeguarding procedures.

Inspection team

Sue Crawford Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Deborah Udakis	Her Majesty's Inspector
Qaisra Shahraz	Additional inspector
Judith Elderfield	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Services for children and families in Sandwell are delivered in four locality areas. The Rowley Regis locality children's centres service is managed by Health for Living on behalf of the local authority. The locality advisory board covers the whole of the cluster, comprising of most key partners and assists in the group's governance.

There are four children's centres in the locality that are managed by the children's centre cluster manager. The Rowley Regis locality covers the wards of Cradley Heath and Old Hill, Blackheath, Rowley and parts of Tividale and Oldbury. The group has been established since August 2012 with three phase one centres and one phase two centre. Services are shared across all of the children's centres and the centres are open five days each week.

There are approximately 4200 children under five years of age living in the locality area. Data demonstrates that the population is mainly White British with a small Asian community who are a priority group within the children's centre locality. The vast majority of the areas are ranked amongst the 30% most deprived nationally with some small areas of high affluence. High numbers of children under five years of age are living in families that are claiming benefits and who are in workless households. Levels of obesity among children are high in some areas. Children's skills, knowledge and ability on entry to school are below levels expected for their age.

The centre offers a range of services for families and children under five years. These include child health services and family support, including outreach and signposting for those seeking employment. The centre runs a crèche for some of its activities. The services are run from the centres and different community venues, including Young Persons Children's Centre, Oakham Library, St Johns Ambulance site, Oakham Primary School, St James Church, and Rowley Springfield Primary School.

Two centres have registered early years provision, which are subject to a separate inspection. The reports can be found on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the effectiveness of the monitoring of the centre's performance by:
 - undertaking more direct observations of provision in order to ensure consistency in the quality of children's centre activities, to ensure children and adults make good progress in their learning
 - establishing a system to follow up how well adults make progress when they access activities, courses or programmes and use the information gathered to inform the planning of future services.
- Work with the local authority to increase the rigour with which leaders evaluate the impact of the centre's work and focus their drive for improvement by:
 - clarifying and strengthening the role of the parents so that they provide better challenge and have a voice on the advisory board
 - working with colleagues in the health service and the local authority to ensure the centre receives accurate and up-to-date information about families living in the reach area so that leaders can more effectively identify families and monitor the impact of the centre's work.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The centres are central to the community and easily accessible to families, including those expecting children, from across the reach area, The group offers fully integrated services and activities take place in a wide range of venues, including local libraries. This is important because the area is very hilly which makes accessibility difficult, particularly for parents who maybe pushing a pushchair so it is important that services and activities are close to where families need them. The group has developed services to meet families' needs.
- Effective family support work, supported by close joint working with health partners, has led to a significant increase in the number of families registered and engaged with the group. The group is aware of the target families and where more work is required to further break down barriers to engagement. The large majority of target groups are now engaged with the centre.
- The group has been highly successful in encouraging parents to take advantage of available funding for nursery places for the very large majority of all eligible two-year-olds. In addition, at 98%, almost all children take up the three- and-four-year-old entitlement to early year's education. However, the local authority does not routinely provide the centre with details of those children who are eligible for 2 year old funding.
- New birth data is not made available to the group so the local authority and children's centre leaders in the borough have developed a system with health visitors so that these new mothers are identified and their details are passed on to the group. A subsequent visit and assessment is undertaken to every new mother and baby to ensure their needs are identified and met.
- The group closely monitor access to services, attendance and participation. Attendance and participation rates are good.
- The group are successful at reaching specific groups. For example families who have suffered from domestic abuse and vulnerable children including children who are subject to a child protection plan are known and contact is made and where appropriate services are provided. This ensures that these children and families are kept safe and their life chances are improved.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The group provides very good care, guidance and support to all parents, particularly those who are most vulnerable. This is achieved through effective one-to-one support, parenting programmes, and other opportunities for parents to gain necessary skills and knowledge and to build self-confidence. This has resulted in parents' greater resilience and support to their children. For example, in managing their child's behaviour, eating and sleep routines.
- Staff signpost families well to the expertise of partners to support and advise them about financial matters, benefits and routes into employment. The majority of parents have engaged in courses and groups, such as first aid, food hygiene and 'Job Club'. The system to track adults' progress and measure the centre's effectiveness in this area is under-developed.
- Through close partnership working with health services the group is improving health outcomes relating to obesity rates of children, infant mortality and breastfeeding. The group provides a vast range of activities and services to promote and encourage families to lead healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating and physical and mental well-being through activities such as 'Soft Play' and the 'Emotional Well Being Group'.

- The children's centre activities are not consistently monitored.. Leaders do not routinely visit activities and as a result, the quality of activities is not fully assessed to ensure that the quality of teaching is at least good and in order to identify what improvements may need to be made.
- Assessment of families with the most needs is accurate, rigorous and based on reliable information. These families receive good quality care and timely early help and support from the centre and its partners including social care and health professionals. Case tracking and case reviews show that the centre and its partners make a significant and positive difference to those families in difficulty. For instance, families in most need are often supported in their own home by centre staff who provide timely help to overcome a range of challenges, including domestic abuse, mental ill-health or a breakdown in relationships.
- The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers in the locality is narrower than seen nationally. Through the tracking of children who have attended children's centre services it is evident that they achieve a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage against those who do not have any involvement with the centres. This is one indicator, among many, of the high impact that services have on reducing inequalities and making sure that children are ready for school.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Leaders have skilfully guided the centre group through an extended period of re-organisation of key personnel and services, whilst continually improving service delivery and up-skilling the staff team.
- The local authority checks the group's performance through contractual arrangements with Health for Living, which manages this group of centres, and via regular performance contract meetings and submission of a quarterly report. This ensures that the group continues to target key areas and sustain good levels of performance
- Governance arrangements are effective. The advisory board both challenges and supports the centre and keeps a close eye on engagement rates and service delivery planning. Self-evaluation processes are effective and accurately identify the centre's strengths and areas for improvement.
- Parents are not currently represented on the advisory board but their views are considered and acted on to help shape services. The well attended 'Dads Pads' group put forward a proposal to develop a 'Garden and Chicken Project' which has been established at Springfield Children's Centre with the arrival of the chickens during the inspection. The fathers have been instrumental in developing opportunities to teach their children and others about the outdoors and the importance of being eco-friendly. Volunteers working at the centre gain key skills that enable them to support the life and development of the centre before moving on in life.
- Staff feel valued and well supported in their roles and say that supervision arrangements are a positive feature of management. They keep abreast of best practice, undertake useful training to extend their expertise and are well qualified. The recent announcement of further financial cuts has not impacted on the service that the staff provide to their families. Staff make good use of the high quality resources to provide a variety of groups including the use of venues in the community.
- The needs of children subject to a child protection plan and children in need are particularly well met and Common Assessment Framework processes are used well to coordinate effective early help for families. Well-organised preventative work with partners, such as those from social care, enhances the group's ability to help keep families safe. All the required policies and procedures are in place to ensure effective safeguarding practice across all aspects of the centre's work, including those for recruiting and vetting staff.

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	80610
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	430104
Managed by	Health for Living on behalf of Sandwell Council.

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	4,217
Centre leader	Paula Ralph
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	0121 559 9916
Email address	paula.ralph@healthforliving.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20846 Cradley Heath and Old Hill Sure Start Children's Centre
- 22570 Rowley Hall Sure Start Children's Centre
- 22571 Rowley Springfield Sure Start Children's Centre
- 23327 Tividale Sure Start Children's Centre

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