

EH10 Churchfields Children's Centre

Abel Smith School, Churchfields, Hertford, SG13 8AE

Inspection date 16–17 January 2014

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

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Some families who might benefit from support from the centre are not using the services on offer. Strategies to encourage more families from target groups to take part are not yet fully effective. As a result not enough families access the centre and regularly engage with relevant services.
- The centre and local authority do not use data to monitor participation rates of target families and the impact of the centre's work carefully enough. This reduces the centre's ability to plan for the needs of target families and to set precise and measurable improvement targets.
- Case files are not maintained to a sufficiently high standard in order to fully track and demonstrate the progress and outcomes achieved by families. Supervision records do not clearly show how support from managers helps staff improve their performance.

This centre has the following strengths:

- The centre manager's honest and dedicated leadership has created a strong team of staff who share her passion for meeting the needs of families. The manager, lead agency and the advisory board have high aspirations for the centre.
- The centre provides good opportunities for parents to volunteer and gain skills which improve their opportunities to gain employment.
- The centre prioritises safeguarding and the work of the team of outreach workers who provide good quality one-to-one support to the most vulnerable families and children.
- The centre's effective support for families has a positive impact on developing parenting skills, contributing to children's development and improving the lives of families who use the centre.
- Staff and childminders benefit from the effective training opportunities provided to them.

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.

This inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with senior staff from the local authority, Abel Smith School and staff from the centre. Inspectors also met with a range of partners including childminders, those from educational and voluntary organisations, social care and representatives from the advisory board and the partnership board. They listened to the views of parents.

The inspectors observed activities in Abel Smith School including 'Stories and Rhymes' and 'Baby Massage' and visited 'Fun with Drums' in The Mission Room, Vicarge Causeway in Hertford Heath.

The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. They looked in detail at a number of case files of children subject to child protection plans, those deemed to be children in need and others in receipt of outreach support, including those subject to Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Jean-Marie Blakeley

Additional inspector, Lead inspector

Georgina Beasley

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Churchfields Children's Centre is a phase 3 children's centre, which is situated, in a separate building, on the site of Abel Smith School. The school manages the centre on behalf of the local authority. An advisory governance board, a sub-committee of Abel Smith School governing body, oversees the work of the centre. The board includes representation from school governors, partners and parents. The centre manager receives line management from the headteacher of the school.

The centre is located near the town centre of Hertford. It serves a mainly affluent area but increasing numbers of disadvantaged families are being identified. The reach area includes three social housing estates Hornsmill Estate, Pinehurst Estate and Newland Gardens and the affluent areas of Queens Road, Mangrove Road and Brickendon.

There are 1035 children aged under five living in the reach area. Children enter school with the skills and knowledge expected for their age. The very large majority of families are of White British heritage. A minority of families live in workless households.

The centre offers a range of services from its central hub building on the site of Abel Smith School and uses community venues across the reach area. It provides a range of services to meet the core purpose including health services, parent and child activities and outreach support.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Work with partners in order to better target services to increase the regular engagement and participation of target families.
- Ensure leadership and management is at least good by working with the local authority to improve
 - the accuracy and use of data to set specific and measurable targets, particularly relating to the engagement of target groups
 - the consistency and rigour in monitoring and evaluating the impact of the centre's work.
- Improve the quality of practice by ensuring that case files and records of supervision more clearly demonstrate:
 - the progress and impact the centre has on improving outcomes for families
 - how support from managers helps staff improve their performance.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Most young children and their families in the local area are registered at the centre and key groups are identified for support. However, the centre has not found ways to ensure that the large majority of these families meaningfully and regularly engage with the centre and benefit from its services. Partnerships with health services improve access to services for expectant mothers and the small number of disabled children and adults and teenage parents engage well with the centre.
- Partnerships with health services, social care and early years providers ensure that families who are in most need of additional support are referred to the centre. Outreach work is matched to the needs of families and children so that care, guidance and support makes a positive difference to their lives.
- The centre's partnerships with local schools and early years providers support children and parents well when children, particularly those with disabilities or other identified needs, are starting school.
- The large majority of children take up the two, three and four year old funded places. However, the centre does not know, or have contact with, children who are not accessing two and three-year old places. As a result, the centre is not able to support these children to access good or better provision.
- In order to engage more families the centre uses additional venues in target areas to offer services and activities to support those in most need. During the holidays a broad range of activities helps attract families who currently do not use the centre. However, overall strategies to improve sustained levels of participation are not yet appropriately targeted. For example, the centre has not been successful in attracting sufficient families from minority ethnic groups, workless households or those living in the most deprived areas.
- Families using the centre appreciate the welcome and support offered by the centre manager and staff. The centre promotes information on its services and on other sources of help and advice through its attractive displays and posters.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- There is a suitable range and variety of groups provided by the centre or outside agencies in order to meet the interests and learning and development needs of children. 'Stories and Rhymes' and 'Fun with Drums' develop children's listening and attention skills particularly well. However, sessions are mostly universal for all families and there are not enough that target and engage particular groups based on a thorough analysis of local need.
- The centre is starting to track progress of children but the analysis of the progress of different groups is at an early stage. The gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is narrowing and below that found nationally. However, the proportion of boys exceeding expected levels in reading and writing is much lower than boys nationally. Some early years partners do not sufficiently understand their roles and therefore do not fully contribute to improving the proportion of children achieving a good level of development.
- Outreach is targeted effectively to the most in need families. Outcomes for families' personal lives and well-being are positive as a result of the good quality care, guidance and support the centre provides. There is a good focus on increasing the attendance of families receiving one-to-one

support at group activities in order to widen their social skills. However, too few families from target groups access services overall.

- Case files detail assessments and actions that need to be taken to support families. However, case files are not sufficiently well-organised or monitored in order to clearly demonstrate the progress families make or the outcomes they achieve. The number of child protection cases is not rising.
- The centre's good quality services and support for families have a positive impact on developing parenting skills, contributing to children's development and improving the lives of families who use the centre. Children and adults who attend groups make good progress in their personal development and in their learning. Staff and partners who lead activities effectively guide parents in how to support their children in doing things for themselves, for example cutting and colouring, playing rhythm sticks and drums, joining in with actions for songs and stories.
- The centre provides good opportunities for parents to volunteer; write their CV and gain skills which improve their opportunities to gain employment. In the previous year, 14 parents volunteered at the centre and 16 parents gained employment.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The centre sets priorities and targets for improvement. However, the current targets, in the development plan lack the precise use of data to set specific measures of success in relation to the centre's identified key priorities. As a result, the centre cannot fully measure its success in relation to its progress against targets.
- The advisory board is strongly supportive of the centre. It challenges the centre through questioning and interrogation of available data. However, the evaluation and challenge of both the board and the local authority is limited by inconsistencies in the collation, analysis and presentation of key data.
- Parents are regularly asked to evaluate services. They have a high regard for the activities and the support they receive from the centre which has a positive impact on their lives. Parents have an influence on governance including through their participation in the advisory board which also includes a good range of partners providing expertise in areas such as health, education and business.
- The centre manager has a clear vision and high aspirations for the development of the centre and its services. Her honesty and integrity means that unless she is fully confident that a family is regularly and meaningfully engaged with the centre, she will not add them to the centre's engagement data. The manager is a highly experienced early years practitioner and acts as an excellent role model for her team.
- Effective safeguarding policies, procedures and practices are in place and implemented. The centre uses the Common Assessment Framework well and prioritises support for children identified as in need or subject to a child protection plan. Case studies demonstrate that information is shared well between partners in order to help keep families safe. However, records of supervision do not clearly show how support from leaders and managers helps centre staff improve their performance.
- Resources available to the centre are adequate to meet the needs of families. Staff and childminders benefit from the good training opportunities provided to them. In addition, childminders are well-supported by the advice and resources the centre provides which helps them effectively support the learning of children in their care.

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 details

Unique reference number	21069
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	430194
Managed by	Abel Smith School on behalf of the local authority.

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,036
Centre manager	Jenny Turner
Date of previous inspection	Not Applicable
Telephone number	01992 583244
Email address	jturner@abelsmith.herts.sch.uk

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