

Orchard Head Children's Centre

Orchard Head Lane, Pontefract, West Yorkshire, WF8 2NJ

Inspection date 4–5 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
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 children's centre requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Too few young children and families attend the centre regularly and take part in centre activities. Strategies to encourage more families to take part are not yet effective enough, which results in relatively few accessing the centre and engaging with relevant services.
- The percentage of mothers who sustain breastfeeding for at least six-to-eight weeks is below the national average.
- Few opportunities exist for adults to improve their personal and social skills and, in particular, develop skills that would lead to employment.
- Governance arrangements are not well embedded. The partnership board is not yet driving improvement at a fast enough rate.
- Parents are not involved sufficiently in shaping the centre's programme and contributing to its development and improvement.

This children's centre has the following strengths:

- Work with families in their homes is offering good support for those in most need, helping them to access and sustain their involvement with centre services and seek out expert help.
- Careful tracking demonstrates that children make good progress from their starting points, in groups such as those for babies, and Stay and Play.
- Partnerships with early years providers are well established and lead to effective arrangements for a smooth transition to school.
- Parents appreciate the welcome offered by the centre and the access to good quality resources. Staff are approachable, well informed and help them develop their parenting skills.

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 the children's centre manager, centre staff, and officers from the local authority. They also met or had telephone conversations with health, education and early years partners, representatives from local schools and voluntary organisations, representatives from the partnership board and parents. They looked at the centre's view of its own performance, its development plan, a selection of policies and procedures, a selection of case studies and a range of other relevant documentation. In addition to observing activities at the centre, inspectors observed a Play and Stay session at Halfpenny Lane School.

Inspection team

Wendy Pawson

Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector

Jane Hughes

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Orchard Head Children's Centre is a phase 2 stand-alone centre situated in the grounds of Orchard Head Junior and Infants School and Nursery School. It offers a range of core services, delivered at the centre and at three outreach centres. The centre is under the governance of the local authority and is managed as part of the Children's and Young People's Services, with a partnership board comprised of partner agencies and a family forum.

Orchard Head Children's Centre is based in the Nevison area of North Pontefract, to the north west of the reach area and serves 909 children from birth to five years. A majority of the centre's area has high levels of social and economic deprivation, with 58% of the reach area among the 30% most deprived areas in the country. Only a very small minority of children aged nought to five years olds live in workless households. The housing here is a mixture of social housing and privately rented accommodation. Key issues relate to substance and alcohol misuse and related social issues. Most families are White British, with small but increasing numbers of families from Eastern Europe, in particular Poland. Children are judged to be achieving typically expected levels of skills when they move on to Nursery.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve access to the centre by developing a robust strategy, in conjunction with partners, to improve further the participation of all target groups, particularly male carers and those from the 30% most disadvantaged areas.
- Provide further support to increase the numbers of mothers who sustain breastfeeding for at least six-to-eight weeks.
- With local education partners, develop a fuller programme of activities that develop the personal, social and employability skills of adults within the centre's reach.
- Improve the effectiveness of the partnership board by:
 - working with the local authority to increase membership, clarify the board's terms of reference and introduce clear monitoring processes that ensure an appropriate level of challenge
 - ensuring that parents and families are represented on the board and can, therefore, contribute to the development of the centre.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Effective systems for monitoring access to services, attendance and participation are now established. This is helping to monitor engagement levels and identify target groups most in need of intervention and support. However, too few local families, particularly from the most disadvantaged areas, participate regularly in activities or services offered by the centre.
- In order to improve participation, additional venues now offer services and activities to support those in most need. During the holidays centre staff take activities out into local parks and play areas, which 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 male carers, despite canvassing for ideas and running taster events.
- Successful partnership working has helped the centre to register the large majority of local children aged nought to four years. However, information and data sharing with health professionals is not yet fully established. It does not always lead to a timely identification of those families most in need or to well-coordinated action by the most appropriate services.
- The parent support team understands its community well and offers support within the home to

those families most in need, helping them to access services and seek out expert help from other agencies.

- Assessment at age two successfully identifies children who are most in need of early intervention. The centre works well with families and other agencies to enable most children identified through this process to access the help they need. With the support of staff, this leads to good up-take of free places for early years education. However, the outcomes for vulnerable groups, including at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, fluctuate from year to year rather than consistently improving.
- Users of the centre appreciate the welcome and support offered by staff. Relationships are strong, and the centre involves all in a culture of mutual respect. The centre is becoming a hub of the community.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Partnerships with early years providers are well established, most recently due to the focussed work of the outstanding early years teacher who has raised aspirations in the area. However, the teacher has not been in post long enough to be able to demonstrate sustained improvement in school readiness across the area.
- Some good parenting programmes have been introduced which are appreciated and meet the needs of many vulnerable families. However, other programmes for adults are limited and there are few opportunities to develop basic skills, including literacy or numeracy, or prepare for employment. At present, the training of volunteers within the centre is in abeyance and this further limits opportunities for adults to develop their skills, improve their life chances and, thereby, reduce inequalities.
- The progress of children, from babies to 'stay and play' age, is tracked carefully at six monthly and termly intervals against the prime areas of learning, which supports continued participation and improved match of activity to need. For some groups, however, there is no indication how this information is used to enhance the impact on children. The introduction of a monitoring and assessment tool which will provide useful distance-travelled information is being actively developed.
- The centre and its partners offer good levels of informal and formal support, advice and guidance for all users, including use of guest speakers on such topics as oral health, speech and language, and child accident prevention.
- Despite increased health-related provision and support, the percentage of mothers who sustain breastfeeding for at least six-to-eight weeks is below the national average. No quantifiable health-related targets have been developed by the local authority. This means that there is insufficient evidence about the impact of services offered by the children's centre and its partners on the local community.
- Assessments of need, case files and records are maintained to an appropriate standard. They are up-to-date, include families' views and opinions, and clearly identify the involvement of other professionals. Case files show target children are well protected by centre staff through intervention and prevention work.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Although the local authority now supplies the centre with more accurate data and has recently introduced more challenging targets for participation, performance management is not yet sufficiently effective to drive improvement at a fast rate.
- The partnership board has been restructured to include the role of a family forum. Its members offer high levels of support and provide good opportunities for sharing information, but they do not have access to detailed information on the centre's performance and what is being done to drive improvement. Members are not fully aware of their responsibilities to offer appropriate challenge to the centre to bring about improvement. As yet no families contribute to decision-making about the centre's development through participation in the board.
- Regular meetings take place between the centre and the local authority to monitor performance, but

the lack of clear and measurable targets for improvement hinders the ability to measure progress. For example, there are no specific health-related targets to which the centre can aspire.

- The centre uses evaluation effectively and understands its strengths and the areas it needs to improve. However, the importance of some weaker performance, particularly in relation to participation rates, is not sufficiently recognised. The development plan identifies a small number of key priorities, but strategies to make progress against these within a clearly identified time frame lack rigour and are insufficiently specific or measurable. Centre staff are beginning to explore the use of an assessment tool to measure the progress made by families and children, which is likely to become an effective addition to performance monitoring.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures meet statutory requirements and help to protect children and the vulnerable adults who use the centre. The Common Assessment Framework procedures work well and provide evidence of effective partnership work, particularly for the most vulnerable. However, the policy on mobile phone usage is not followed at all times, with parents occasionally using their mobile phones during sessions.
- The well-maintained and well-resourced centre is much appreciated by the parents who use it. They speak highly of the centre and the opportunities it provides. Staff are appropriately qualified and supported by good staff training. The early years teacher is a very strong role model for early years providers and centre staff and provides high quality leadership to improve early education in the locality.

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	22266
Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	421482
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	909
Centre leader	Elaine Armstrong
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01977 723466
Email address	earmstrong@wakefield.gov.uk

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