

# WH7 Birchwood Children's Centre

Birchway, Crawford Road, Hatfield, AL10 0PD

**Inspection date** 24–25 July 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
		Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Access to services by young children and families		<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
The quality of practice and services		<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a good centre.

- The centre is firmly established at the heart of the community and offers a good range of high quality services across its reach area and the wider community. All activities are carefully planned and tailored to meet the diverse needs of children and families in Hatfield. As a result, the majority of families in the reach area are keen to attend the services. The centre is particularly successful in working with those families which it has identified may require additional support, especially those who are not coping well or who maybe at risk.
- Strong leadership, governance and management has driven improvement at a rapid pace over the last year. Staff are constantly finding different ways to reach families who are most in need of support. All who work at the centre are determined to do the very best they can for families and provide a warm and friendly welcome to those seeking help.
- Efficient systems for monitoring families' involvement with the centre and for evaluating the impact of services, show that children make good progress and are well prepared for moving on to daycare and nursery school. Adults also make significant gains in their personal, social and emotional development and parenting skills.
- Parents are full of praise for the centre and speak highly of the quality of support and encouragement they receive to raise their aspirations and improve their economic well-being. One parent said 'I've got my dreams back and I'm planning to go to college'.

### It is not outstanding because:

- The speed of recent improvements is impressive but some of the changes such as some of the new partnerships are not yet sufficiently established to be fully effective.
- Development planning for adult education and training is at an early stage and has yet to meet all identified needs especially for parents who are keen to get more qualifications and improve their English language.

## **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 head of centre, deputy head of centre, family outreach worker, community development co-ordinator, local authority representatives and a range of partners. These included representatives from health services, education, housing, voluntary sector, employment and other adult learning and training services. They also met with parents, volunteers and representatives of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited activities both at the centre and in the community and senior leaders attended all the meetings of the inspection.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the self-evaluation form, service improvement plan, a sample of case studies and files, parental satisfaction surveys, safeguarding policies and procedures and a variety of assessment files for the range of activities delivered.

## **Inspection team**

Catherine Stormonth

Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector

Peter Towner

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

The centre became operational in 2005 as one of Hertfordshire's original phase one stand alone children's centres. The centre operates from a purpose built site attached to Birchwood Nursery School (URN 117069) and The Birches Daycare (URN EY148153), both of which are both subject to separate inspection arrangements. The reports can be found on the Ofsted website.

The centre serves the Birchwood area in the town of Hatfield. It is governed by an advisory board of key partners and parents. The headteacher is the head of centre and line manages the deputy centre manager. The centre meets the core purpose by providing early education, childcare and health services, family support and adult learning courses. Most children enter early education with skills that are lower than those expected for their age, especially in communication and language development.

The centre's reach area includes 987 children under five years of age, the majority of whom are White British. The largest ethnic minority groups are from Poland, Albania and Romania and there are smaller numbers of African and Asian families. The area is very mixed socially and economically with pockets of deprivation. For example, three of the lower super output areas are amongst the 30% most deprived in England. Data shows that 10% of children live in workless households, 14% are lone parents and there is a high number of low income families. Key target groups include vulnerable children and mothers especially those on child protection plans, those living in poverty and victims of domestic abuse, expectant teenagers and teenage mothers and fathers.

### What does the centre/group need to do to improve further?

- Improve adult learning and training further by:
  - increasing the number of parents taking part in learning
  - increasing opportunities for parents to gain qualifications especially in literacy and numeracy
  - providing more opportunities for families to improve their spoken English language

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

**Good**

- Good use of new birth data and excellent links with the key partners have helped the centre achieve high registration rates and the majority of families in the reach area are benefiting from the centre services. Attendance rates have increased and the centre has been successful in working with greater numbers of lone parents, workless families and the local migrant population.
- The Family Outreach Worker provides highly effective approaches that quickly build trust and encourage families who are normally reluctant, to come to the centre and join relevant programmes to support their needs. These help to significantly improve the quality of their family life and encourage these parents to try other programmes, socialise and engage more fully.
- The Teenage Midwife works with all expectant and young teenage mothers in the Housing Foyer project supported by the centre which provides additional services like Baby Massage to develop important early attachment bonding.
- When the Queensway Medical Centre closed for refurbishment the ante-natal and post-natal services moved to the centre with high numbers attending clinics up to 9pm each week. Eye clinics

and the one and two year development assessment checks are carried at the centre and referrals are made for early help when needs arise. The breastfeeding drop-in offers excellent arrangements which have helped to boost sustained breastfeeding rates to above both local and national levels.

- Local nursery schools and daycare pre-school settings confirmed how confident they are to refer families to the centre when families are in crisis such as housing and debt problems. The large number of referrals are dealt with 'brilliantly' and one headteacher said she 'couldn't praise the centre enough for how well families were rescued'.
- The centre works with pre-school settings to make sure all children take up their free entitlement to early education locally.

### **The quality of practice and services**

**Good**

- There is a good range of carefully planned targeted and universal services which are a good match to most identified needs. Improving parenting and early childhood learning are a key focus.
- Two-year-old assessments have identified speaking and listening difficulties and short concentration spans and behaviour as consistent issues. Consequently three speech and language therapists are commissioned each week to support the 'Positive Beginnings' and the 'Play and Talk' programmes. Themed creative activities that stimulate conversations cause some wonderful reactions from the children. Use of the school water, sand, messy play areas and excellent outdoor resources also improve children's physical development.
- Local information identified a need to reduce the number of overweight and obese children. In response, the centre has devised many enjoyable activities including healthy cooking at local schools and the recent successful obesity week provided many activities such as 'Dinky Dancing' and leaflets with 'Ten Top Tips' for a healthy lifestyle. Obesity rates are declining faster in the Birchwood reach area as a result of the high quality support and guidance given.
- Children are helped to get a good start in their early education and getting ready for transition to pre-school daycare settings and nursery school. The Early Years Foundation Stage profile results for the reach area show an improving picture to levels above those seen nationally and a significant narrowing of the achievement gap between the lowest attaining fifth of children and the rest.
- Many targeted families are able to extend their parenting skills through nurturing and safety awareness programmes such as 'Baby Milestones' and 'Parent Puzzle'. Parent surgeries give one-to-one help and support with benefits, financial management and housing advice.
- The development of adult learning, education and skills is rightly seen as a priority. A small number have taken the literacy and numeracy courses backed up by good crèche facilities. There is signposting to local colleges and training centres for courses like developing computing skills and for learning English as an additional language but the numbers are low.
- There are some limited opportunities for work experience by recruiting volunteers but this aspect is underdeveloped. Jobcentre Plus provides guidance for getting jobs and helps to improve employability but this service is restricted mainly to lone parents.

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and**

**Good**

## management

- There is great commitment by staff to improve the lives of local families and they work as a hardworking, cohesive team devoted to help the most in need families often in very difficult and challenging circumstances. They are very successful in this regard and are admired by an appreciative community.
- Centre leaders are highly skilled and knowledgeable. Together with effective support from the local authority they have brought about some ambitious recent improvements. There is more planning in the pipeline reflecting the rigorous drive for continuous improvement. Governance is good and key partners play a full part in shaping the direction of the centre. Parents are well represented and have been able to channel parents' views to make improvements in resources and programmes.
- There are some excellent strategic partnerships with local schools and other pre-school settings to promote the work of the centre really well. Voluntary sector partners offer respite and help in family homes with an extensive Home Start programme and also provide accommodation in the town centre for outreach services such as the 'Space' project for teenage parents to access computers for seeking work.
- The centre carefully analyses data and monitors all activities and uses evaluations to extend programmes further. For instance building on protective behaviours programme into a more intensive programme for domestic violence victims. Self-evaluation processes are also used effectively to set challenging, whole centre improvement targets.
- Safeguarding is a key strength with some outstanding policies, procedures and practice. The centre works successfully to reduce the risk of harm to the large number of children on child protection plans and other families on multi-agency support plans. Staff know how to implement the Common Assessment Framework together with some excellent partnership working to ensure the best possible outcomes for children.
- Staff benefit from good professional development arrangements and feel well supported in their work particularly in times of stress. Other resources are used efficiently and effectively to meet locally agreed priorities and the needs of targeted children and families living in the area. The centre provides a well maintained, colourful, attractive safe haven to all who seek help.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	23561
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	423063
<b>Managed by</b>	The Local Authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	987
<b>Centre leader</b>	Kerry Robinson
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01707-262648
<b>Email address</b>	kerry.robinson@birchwoodchildrenscentre.herts.sch.uk

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