

Lark Hall Primary School and Children's Centre

Smedley Street, London, SW4 6PH

Inspection date

17–18 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
	Previous inspection:		
Access to services by young children and families		Outstanding	1
The quality of practice and services		Outstanding	1
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is an outstanding centre.

- The centre knows the needs and challenges faced by families in the area exceptionally well and reaches out to them to achieve well in their lives. The centre secures the right services to keep families safe and offers a well-balanced programme to support learning and development needs as early as possible.
- The exceptionally effective leaders and managers use broad-ranging data and information from an extensive range of partner organisations to set and meet increasingly challenging targets to engage families in the centre's activities. Staff devise programmes in close consultation with the parents and the centre is enabling almost all the targeted families to achieve outstanding outcomes.
- Together with Lark Hall Primary School, the centre continues to invest in an 'only the best' attitude, providing an excellent learning environment, so children and families thrive when they access services. Children in all priority groups, such as boys and Portuguese speaking children, make excellent progress in their learning and development in readiness for school.
- The quality of work and the design of services to meet families' needs are outstanding. Intensive work with partner agencies helps to keep the most vulnerable families, such as families with young parents, safe from abuse or neglect, and enables nearly all parents to make lasting positive changes.
- Staff adjust the programme continually to meet changing needs of the diverse families who have to move houses in and out of the area. Support for the families is outstanding.
- Parents' confidence improves significantly as a result of many learning opportunities as well as excellent English classes for speakers of other languages. They develop first rate parenting skills through universal stay and play.
- The centre keeps good track of children and families' progress although managers and staff recognise that there is still more to do to focus their plans and evaluate their work in greater detail.

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 the inspection of Heathbrook Primary School and Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with managers, outreach workers and a teacher and with staff from the centre and partner-children's centres, groups of parents and children, and members of the governing body and advisory board. They also met with officers from the local authority and representatives from partner organisations in health, education and adult education, advice and guidance for training and employment, including those in the private, voluntary and independent sector. They looked at the centre's self-evaluation, action planning, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures and a range of other relevant documentation. Visits to activities were undertaken jointly with the centre's senior managers, who also attended all inspection team meetings. The inspectors observed the routines of the day in the main centre premises and at the Lark Hall One O'clock Club.

Inspection team

Christine Davies

Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector

Elizabeth Dickson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Lark Hall is a phase two children's centre, situated in the north of the London Borough of Lambeth. The centre's governance is provided by the governing body of Lark Hall Primary school and an advisory board is established. The centre works in collaboration with two other centres at Heathbrook and Clapham Manor primary schools, both of which are within walking distance. Families make use of services provided at all three centres. Due to the close proximity of the local authorities, families from both Wandsworth and Lambeth use services of each other's children's centres and Lark Hall works in cooperation with Wandsworth's Yvonne Carr Children's Centre. The local authority has commissioned a range of services including Citizens Advice Bureau, adult education, and provision for teenage parents, health services, and breastfeeding support. The local authority has taken part in the Payment by Results trials.

The local community is ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse. A small minority of families in the area are relatively affluent and live in their own homes, but most live in social or private-rented accommodation. The area as a whole is among the 30% most deprived areas nationally and some areas fall within the 10% most deprived areas. Approximately 42% of children live in households dependent on workless benefits and a further very small minority of families have no recourse to public funds. A lone parent, including lone fathers, heads the majority of families. Some 85% of families are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 45% of families speak English as an additional language. The main group speak Portuguese, with other families speaking a broad range of African, Asian and European languages including Arabic, Somali, French, Polish and Bengali.

The population of the centre's reach area under five years of age is 958 and growing rapidly. The centre is located in a purpose-built building but has limited space. It makes use of the community halls, the health clinic, exciting animal farming and planting areas in the adjoining school grounds, and a play pavilion known as the One O' Clock Club. There is no formally linked early years provision in the community, however five private and voluntary sector providers of childcare operate in the reach area.

Lone parents, families dependent on workless benefits or on a low income, fathers, teenage parents and speakers of English as an additional language, particularly Portuguese and young parents, are the priority groups for the centre. Children who are a priority are children in need, or at risk of abuse or neglect and those who are unlikely to achieve well without additional support, particularly those with English as an additional language and boys of Caribbean heritage.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all staff members and managers routinely evaluate the activities and programmes with a stronger focus on the impact on the families, with a clear plan and responsibility for continuous improvement for all staff.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Outstanding

- The centre's exceptionally good use of data and its clear grasp on local needs underpins its excellent work in meeting very challenging targets. For example, it is well on track to exceed the 90% target set for registration, including priority groups. The centre recognises that it needs to further improve access to services by fathers.
- The centre knows of and reaches out to all families. It provides a welcoming environment through the universally accessible stay-and-play programme and drop-in services. Health visitors and other partner agencies as well as other parents encourage other families to attend a variety of services.
- The centre gathers its own information about families' needs when they are registered and offers relevant targeted services. Sensitive information is shared effectively between partner agencies

through multi-agency team (MAT) meetings. Outreach workers ensure children with health and development concerns are referred to appropriate services for assessment and that their families receive tailored support until the children's needs are met and beyond.

- Specialist services for children with social and communication difficulties and autism are a beacon at this centre. With extensive knowledge of services and clear referral pathways the specialist outreach worker makes contact as soon as a need is identified, supports parents through assessment and helps families to access treatments, care and education seamlessly.
- Outreach workers proactively seek out families that are not making much use of the centre in the street, at local events, in the schools and clinics to canvas views and encourage attendance. They engage and support individual children and parents who need more specialised support through home visiting or referral to other services such as adult mental health or the St Michael's Fellowship. Through close monitoring they ensure that the families receive relevant help promptly thus reducing the risk to any child or vulnerable adult in need of protective services.
- Shared information, including from two-year-old development checks, is used to plan carefully targeted provision including for young parents, disabled children and those with special educational needs Black Caribbean boys and those in need of protection. Specialist targeted groups are held to target parents and children who did not access services. For example, the large majority of Portuguese speaking children and their parents now attend One O'clock Clubs, with good improvement in their communication and language development and parenting skills.
- Most children of families from targeted groups take up the free entitlement to early education for three and four year olds. Support for disabled children in finding a suitable placement is excellent. The centre has offered free two year nursery placements to all eligible two year olds and has planned to provide high-quality places directly in the centre for the predicted increase in the number of children.
- The range of expertise available to families is extensive. The centres plan courses and the location of crèches together. As a result, parents have excellent access to courses with a crèche, for example in basic ESOL and functional skills that prepares them well for further training or employment when they are ready.

The quality of practice and services

Outstanding

- Services have outstanding impact on all target groups and on individuals who are most in need of support. Outreach practice is skilled. Practitioners identify individual needs accurately and as soon as they emerge so that families get the help they need promptly so, for example, there is no waiting time for children's speech and language assessment.
- Almost all children attending the centre's stay-and-play or crèche provision make excellent progress from their starting points. Almost all children achieved a good level of development in personal, social and emotional development including positive attitudes to learning and behaviour.
- The detail with which the centre tracks groups of children is exemplary. The centre can drill into different groups and various learning outcomes and plan interventions to improve outcomes. Portuguese speaking children, Black Caribbean boys, disabled children and those with special educational needs and other groups have made exemplary progress to close the gaps with their age group or peers.
- In partnership with Lark Hall Primary School, the centre is successfully delivering training to enhance early language development in childcare settings and among childminders that are not yet good. This is already showing excellent improvement in the levels of children's communication and language development, particularly where targeted children are receiving support from the centre.
- Excellent partnership working with health visitors, Family Nurse Partnerships, nutritionists and community nursery nurses improves families' understanding of health services and health matters. With concerted support from all centre staff and volunteers, immunisation rates are excellent, breastfeeding rates are improving strongly in the area and obesity rates are low.
- Workless and poor families access high-quality advice and guidance from staff and from the Citizen's Advice Bureau. The centre has supported families who are adapting to changes in their

eligibility for benefits. Many parents deal with matters directly after gaining a good understanding of the benefit changes and their rights.

- Parents show a high degree of trust in the centre and many give back time through volunteering, for example the fathers successfully volunteering as reading mentors in the centre and other childcare settings through the Fathers Read Every Day (FRED) scheme.
- All target parents attend parenting courses or receive tailored support to develop and extend their parenting skills. They use this learning well for example by adeptly managing the exuberant behaviour of children, including those with autism, in an Active-stay-and-play group. Parents have learned skills to keep themselves and their children safe by improving their living conditions and family relationships.
- The ESOL classes are well planned and focus strongly on the parents' interests and needs. Parents speaking English as an additional language develop appropriate language skills and gain confidence in their ability to deal with the hospitals, schools and officials. They help their children with greater understanding of importance of play as well as child and language development that improves the rate of progress of the children.
- The large majority of parents improve their employability skills through engaging in a variety of short entry level courses. Some parents have completed the high-quality training to become 'Family Learning Champions' for the borough. This has had a significant impact on personal development and aspirations of parents to become volunteers helping in the community and schools. Some have secured jobs with high aspirations for themselves and their children.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Outstanding

- The centre leaders and managers use all information exceptionally well to identify the needs of the area and shape distinctive services. They set out the expected quality thresholds and level of performance clearly and use data thoroughly to monitor and measure progress. However, some service plans are too focused on performance indicators and not sharply focused on what is intended to be improved for children and their parents.
- Governance arrangements and the advisory board functions are very clear. Highly committed and experienced governors and members of the advisory board including parents provide distinctive challenge and support to the centre manager to fulfil its mission and vision of improving services for the local families. Self-evaluation and development planning is accurate and takes into account a range of levels of data, feedback from stakeholders and comments or representations from parents.
- The centre's programme and ethos are highly influenced by parents' views collected formally and informally. This has led to changes to the times for delivery of sessions, broader content and plans for more outdoor play. The centre has a strong record of improving outcomes for priority groups across all early childhood services, safeguarding and employment and training outcomes.
- Managers have established outstanding partnerships with Lark Hall Primary School and other children's centres to plan and develop services and to avoid duplication. Local authority provides exceptional leadership and support with a strong strategic lead to ensure that the centre's services match extremely well to families' needs. The well-considered commissioned services make a significant difference to the lives of the targeted groups.
- The ambition of leaders, managers and staff to improve continually is exemplary. Professional practice is highly reflective and steeped in the principles of effective early years teaching and learning. To improve the services further, the centre is just embarking on providing a Forest School method of learning about the environment outdoors.
- Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding and reflect the current best practice for training in recognising symptoms and protecting children and vulnerable adults. Staff and volunteers are vetted fully and safely recruited in line with statutory guidance. Partnerships with agencies to protect children are very well developed and embedded in advisory, information sharing and MAT arrangements so that there are no delays in any concerns being dealt with appropriately.
- Staff are well qualified and skilled for their roles so that families have access to a great range of

expertise. They are well supported in their role through training, supervision and appraisals. A good range of high-quality up-to-date resources from many parts of the world in the centre reflects the interests and needs of families in the area.

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	21747
Local authority	Lambeth
Inspection number	427554
Managed by	The governing body of Lark Hall Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	958
Centre leader	David Smithers
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	020 7622 7265
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