

Rickmansworth Children's Centre

Shepherd Primary School, Shepherds Lane, Rickmansworth, WD3 8JJ

Inspection date 10–11 October 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:

- Procedures to evaluate how good the centre is are not used as effectively as they could be to plan improvements to the centre's practices and services.
- Leaders do not collect and use data as well as they could to identify target groups, therefore quality assurance and evaluation is not informing improvement of practice.
- Opportunities for parents to improve their education and employability skills are limited.
- The area has a significantly higher than average proportion of children in the Reception Year who are obese.
- Occasionally, sessions are cancelled or not provided due to poor uptake by parents or limited staff availability during school holidays.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Outreach work is effective in supporting those families who are referred to the centre and identified as in most need of help.
- Children make good progress in their learning and development which prepares them well for moving on to school.
- Excellent partnership working with health means that the centre quickly knows new parents and those families new to the area.
- The centre provides good support for childminders and other early years providers, enabling them to prepare children well for school.

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority lead officer for children's centres and the improvement adviser for Hertfordshire, the lead agency headteacher, the children's centre manager, health and education professionals, partner agencies, outreach workers, play workers, early years practitioners, volunteers and representatives from the advisory board. They also spoke with parents, and looked at outcomes of satisfaction surveys. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation, development plan, data, the local authority quality assurance records, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures and children's development records.

The inspectors visited activities taking place at the main centre and at Maple Cross Community Centre. A visit to an activity at Maple Cross Community Centre was undertaken jointly with the centre manager, who also attended all of the team meetings.

Inspection team

Joy Law	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Anne Ashworth	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Rickmansworth Children's Centre is located on the site of Shepherd Primary School (URN: 117096) in Mill End, Rickmansworth. It covers an area including Maple Cross, Mill End, West Hyde and parts of Rickmansworth central.

The centre is a phase two centre and was designated in November 2007. The centre serves a community in which there are pockets of deprivation and disadvantage among relatively more advantaged areas. The area is served by a number of local amenities, including five primary schools, seven early years' providers, 20 childminders and six parent and toddler groups.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a range of services for families, working with other partner organisations and by referring parents and children to other specialist providers. The centre does not provide full-time early years provision but offers advice and guidance to parents on the daycare and childminding facilities available within the local community. Most children who attend school in one of the areas of highest deprivation, start early years provision with skills below what is typical for their age. Communication and language, and mathematics are their weakest areas.

Rickmansworth Children's Centre serves 922 children aged under five years. There are 13% workless households with children aged under five years. There are approximately 380 lone parents in the area in receipt of child tax credit with at least one child under the age of 16 years of age in the area. The large majority of children are of White British origin. The remaining population is Asian, of mixed heritage and an increasing number of Eastern European families.

The centre is managed by Shepherd Primary School on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council. The centre has an advisory board which is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development.

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

- Improve and embed systems to quality assure, track and evaluate the success of the centre's work.
- Review the adult learning provision to ensure that adults have good opportunities to develop employability skills and to progress to further education, including access to accredited learning opportunities.
- Collect and analyse data more effectively to ensure target groups are identified.
- Increase opportunities for parents to improve their understanding of living healthy lifestyles in order to help reduce the number of children in the Reception Year who are obese.
- Ensure that all planned sessions run by improving staffing levels during holidays and persevering even if uptake by parents is low.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires Improvement

- The very large majority (84%) of children aged under five years are registered with the centre. The proportion of those engaging is 68% (35% through the centre and 33% through accessing two-, three- and four-year-old funded places).
- The centre does not know how many of the families accessing services are from the target groups. Those families that do benefit from its services value them highly.
- The number of families currently being supported by family outreach workers is low. Those families that do access these services receive timely, good quality support. Parents and carers reported that in times of difficulty the centre had been 'a God send' and that they 'would have been lost' without having the centre to turn to.
- Health, education and early years partners report positively on how the work at Maple Cross is improving the lives for some of the most hard to reach and vulnerable families. The recent move to larger premises for the 'Positive Play' sessions has seen a significant increase of families accessing services (up to 48 families per session), including those from out of the reach. However, staff resources are overstretched. Consequently, some of the most vulnerable families are not benefiting from this service.
- The centre provides good quality training and support for early years providers and childminder networks. Childminders are very active in the centre. They share their views through the advisory board and hold 'meet a childminder' sessions to introduce their services to families. Termly meetings with all maintained and early years settings ensure that information is shared effectively regarding families known to the centre and identify families who are in need of support.

The quality of practice and services

Require Improvement

- The centre does not provide sufficient access to accredited adult learning programmes to improve the skills, knowledge and employability of adults who are out of work. Consequently, levels of unemployment are not reducing quickly enough in the area. The limited access to crèche facilities at the centre is also having an impact on parents' accessing the service. Nevertheless, there is a very good range of parenting courses available, such as baby massage, first aid, weaning and 'About boys'.
- Staff plan enjoyable, high-quality learning experiences for children. Sessions such as 'Stay and Play' help children become better prepared for the transition to school. Data for the local area show that children's attainment across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile is good overall at 78%. However, the gap between those who do well and those who do not is not narrowing quickly enough.
- The centre is committed to improving children's and families' health. However, insufficient focus has been placed on supporting and encouraging parents to develop their knowledge of healthy eating and the benefits of physical activity. Good breastfeeding support provided by health and centre staff means that breastfeeding rates are higher than the district and county level at 54.1%. Excellent provision such as 'Dinky Dancers' promotes children's fitness while incorporating the Early Years Foundation Stage within the dance sessions.
- The effective partnerships with health partners, schools, childminders and early years providers mean that children with additional needs are identified early and have tailored packages of support.

- An adequate range of services are provided overall. Some sessions particularly those aimed at target groups are not well attended. Occasionally, sessions are cancelled or not provided due to poor uptake by parents or limited staff availability during school holidays. However, universal services and clinics are exceptionally well attended and having a positive impact on improving children's well-being and the lives of families.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Require Improvement

- The centre manager has introduced initiatives and has high expectations. However, much of the new documentation and processes are not sufficiently embedded. Nevertheless, staff and partners report there have been notable improvements in the quality of provision and the numbers of families accessing the centre's services.
- The centre's self-evaluation is broadly accurate. However, the action plans for improvement do not include all of the identified priorities. Consequently, the centre is not well placed to improve as quickly as it could.
- Governance requires improvement because parents are not sufficiently involved in the development of the centre. Some key partners are not members, such as social services and Jobcentre Plus. Members' attendance at meetings is variable. Meetings are mainly used to share professional expertise and information. Although the manager is asked questions about the services provided, members do not have access to robust data to enable them to question how well the centre meets the needs of target groups. Nevertheless, good links are in place between the advisory board, local partners and the local authority.
- Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Although the centre does not have a named link social worker, well trained and qualified staff act quickly and the recording of their work in relation to child protection is detailed and can be linked back to agreed interventions, ensuring children are protected well.
- Appropriate performance management and professional supervision are in place. New documentation has recently been developed to ensure that these systems are applied consistently across the centre. Case files are closely monitored and maintained to a good standard.
- The centre manager is supported by a hard-working and skilled team who share her vision and commitment. 'Brilliant, friendly, very approachable, I can't praise them enough' are just a few of the comments made by parents.
- The local authority provides robust quality assurance of the centre's work. However, the monitoring systems currently implemented by the manager are less robust and not routinely carried out. Systems to assess and track adults' progress, and families referred to other services are underdeveloped. As a result, the centre is unable to confirm how many parents completed training, achieved qualifications or moved on to employment.

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/Children's Centre Group details

Unique reference number	20011
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	427586
Managed by	Shepherd Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	922
Centre leader	Anne Cheveralls
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01923-772094
Email address	manager.rickmansworth@hertschildrenscentres.org.uk;

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