

3R5 South Oxhey Children's Centre

Oxhey Wood Primary School, Northwick Road, Watford, WD19 6NL

Inspection date		12–13 November 2013	
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a good centre.

- The centre has a good knowledge and understanding of the families it serves and is well-established and valued by parents. The centre is inclusive and promotes community cohesion well.
- Almost all young children in the area are registered with the centre and the very large majority are reached by services. The centre is a busy, thriving hub of the community.
- The centre is very active in building good relationships with partners such as health visitors, Jobcentre Plus, adult learning providers, and teachers from local schools and early years settings. Information sharing between partners is good and makes sure that those families that need the most help are able to access services quickly and prevent problems getting worse.
- The staff within the centre are well qualified, passionate and good at what they do. They work together well as a team led by a strong centre manager who is driving improvement in all aspects of the centre's work.
- An appropriate focus on helping children to develop communication and language skills is built in to all of the centre's work. The opportunities for adult learners are good.
- Children's safety and well-being are given the highest priority by all staff at the centre. The quality of family support work is good. The centre is providing a wide range of services that are meeting the high level needs of the families in the area.

It is not outstanding because:

- Despite some good work in the centre, some health outcomes are not improving rapidly enough. Partners are aware that this is a district-wide issue and are working with the centre to bring about improvements.
- Data and tracking show that the children's centre is supporting children to make progress and achieve well by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, overall, not enough children in the locality achieve a good level of development.
- The children's centre has set targets that are appropriate, ambitious and challenging, but not all are precise enough to help the advisory board and children's centre committee identify progress clearly.

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 parents using the centre, the local authority lead officer for children's centres, the children's centre improvement partner, the lead agency headteacher, the chair of governors, the children's centre manager, health, education and social care professionals, partner agencies, early years practitioner and outreach worker, volunteers and representatives of the advisory board. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation, development plan, data, monitoring records, case files, safeguarding procedures and children's development records.

The inspectors visited activities taking place at the children's centre and South Oxhey Library and attended a childminders' network meeting at Ebury Children's Centre nearby. Parents views have been taken into account through their evaluations of services, the work of the parent forum and satisfaction surveys.

The children's centre manager attended all team meetings.

Inspection team

Penny Fisher

Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector

Ann Taylor

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

South Oxhey Children's Centre is located on the site of Oxhey Wood Primary School (URN: 117170). South Oxhey is a suburb of Watford situated in the Three Rivers district of Hertfordshire. It serves families living in South Oxhey and Carpenders Park.

The centre is full-time and there are approximately 960 children aged under five in the reach area. It is a phase two centre, designated and opened in 2007. The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a range of services and activities on a full-time basis, working with partner agencies and organisations and referring parents to specialist providers of services. The centre does not provide registered early years provision, but offers advice and guidance to parents and has close links with providers of early education in the locality.

The centre serves some areas of significant deprivation, with two of the eight lower super output areas within the locality being ranked in the 30% most deprived nationally. These are within the South Oxhey estate where the centre is based. The large majority of children are White British and there is a significant and increasing Romanian and Polish community. The percentage of children living in poverty is high in comparison to figures for Three Rivers and Hertfordshire as a whole. Worklessness is high and there is a high number of low-income families. There are low skill and qualification levels among parents in the area and in the areas of greatest deprivation children are starting school with skills below those expected for their age.

The stand-alone centre is managed by Oxhey Wood Primary School on behalf of the local authority. The school is subject to a separate inspection and the report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. The Children's Centre Committee, which is a sub-group of the school governing body, oversees the work of the centre. An advisory board of partners and parents also meets regularly. The centre has identified teenage parents; children living with domestic violence; those with low educational attainment (adults and children) and children from low income families as their priority groups. A high proportion of families registered at the centre fall into one or more of these groups.

The community is served by established childminders service, four pre-school settings, one of which is on the same site as the children's centre, but is led and managed by a private provider. There are five primary schools with nurseries in the locality, but no secondary schools.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Health partners and the children's centre should continue to work together to increase the proportion of mothers that sustain breastfeeding their babies in order to ensure children have the best start in life.
- The children's centre and local early education providers should continue to narrow the gap between the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in the locality area and their peers in other parts of the county and England as a whole.
- The local authority and children's centre should ensure that all targets within the centre's development plan are precise so that the children's centre committee and advisory board can clearly identify and monitor progress.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Staff are highly proactive in ensuring that families are registered and engaging with the centre. They work alongside health colleagues at clinics in order to ensure families know about the services on offer to them. The very large majority of children under five living in the community are

registered with the centre and the very large majority of these attend activities at the centre or attend partner early education provision in the area.

- There are good levels of engagement with families from the centre's priority groups. All of the teenage parents in the locality are using the centre's services, as are all of those families where there is involvement with children's social care. Staff are persevering with good quality activities in order to further increase the participation of fathers.
- The centre closely monitors access to services and data shows most activities are popular and well-attended. The value of having the health clinics in the centres is clear from the high number of families that like to attend these services in the children's centre environment. Attendance on courses, such as baby massage and parenting puzzle is closely monitored to ensure that families that need these services are engaging regularly.
- Information sharing between partners to enable the centre to identify those families that may benefit from services is generally good. Data from the police shows a high number of incidents of domestic violence in the locality and this is appropriately identified as a priority for the centre. There is good support for those families known to the centre, but the high-level data received is not helping the centre to reach more.
- The centre is providing good support to parents and early years providers to ensure the very large majority of families are taking up their entitlement to funded early education places for two-year-olds. Applications for funding are made by the children's centre and this ensures whole families' needs are assessed thoroughly. For example, parents are encouraged to access other services such as adult education and employability programmes.
- The centre is proactive in developing more good quality early education places, for example, through providing information, advice and guidance to the childminder's network. The centre is investigating why the proportion of three- and four-year-olds taking up their entitlement to early education is slightly below the national average.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- There is a good range of high quality activities available at the centre, many delivered by partners. The attractive, parent-friendly website is up to date and contains a wealth of information. The balance of universal and specialist services is appropriate to meet the needs of the community.
- Regular multi-agency meetings and good liaison means that families most in need of additional support are offered help at an early stage. Committed, experienced and passionate staff are fully engaged in complex work with families which is making a difference, for example, intensive work with families to prevent children entering the care system.
- The centre has well-established and effective links with schools and early years provision in the locality. The 'Leaping Frogs' project implemented in partnership with two local primary schools supports the development of children identified as potentially low achievers. This has enabled some children to make good progress and achieve a good level of development, however overall the proportion of children achieving a good level of development in the locality remains below average.
- As a result of specialist training, staff within the centre are skilled at developing children's speaking and listening skills. Planning observation and assessment systems are effective, building on what individual children know and enjoy. Consultation with children has been used well to inform the development of activities.
- Increasing the numbers of mothers breastfeeding their babies is a priority for partners across the district. Strategic health plans are in place to bring about improvement. The work of the lactation consultant within the centre is having an impact for those mothers attending the service, but levels across the locality remain below Hertfordshire and national averages.
- Effective partnerships with learning providers and the voluntary sector ensure there are good opportunities for parents to access a wide range of adult learning courses. Achievements are tracked effectively and parents are encouraged to take the next step and extend their horizons. Retention and success rates are high.
- Well-attended parenting programmes delivered by experienced providers are having a positive impact. For example, one parent said 'I wouldn't have come out the other side without their support'

and several parents told inspectors that services had made a valuable difference to their lives.

- Healthy lifestyles and physical activities for children are promoted well at the centre. Healthy eating courses, including how to prepare a healthy lunch box, are positively evaluated by parents. The latest data shows that there has been a slight reduction in the number of young children that are obese in the locality, but this remains a priority.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The local authority is monitoring the quality and performance of the children's centre effectively through the children centre improvement partners. Termly visits provide a good level of challenge and support to the centre, which the manager values.
- The children's centre manager is a strong and innovative leader. She initiated the local employment and education programme (LEEP), working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, ASCEND (a local charitable organisation), West Herts College and the Hertfordshire Adult Family Learning Services (HAFLS). This has led to some notable successes for parents.
- The staff and volunteers work together exceptionally well as a team. Staff feel well supported and supervision is regular and effective in ensuring continuous professional development. Individual development plans contain objectives that clearly link to the overall development of the centre.
- The centre's development plan contains relevant priorities that have been agreed between the centre, the local authority, the advisory board and the school's children centre committee. These are based on a sound knowledge and understanding of the locality. However, although targets within the plan are ambitious, they are not always precise enough to enable those in governance to clearly monitor progress and provide further challenge if necessary.
- Safeguarding the welfare of children is at the heart of the centre's work. Policies and procedures ensure that those working with children are suitable and understand their role in protecting children. To this end the centre works closely with parents and colleagues from other agencies, for example through their effective use of the Common Assessment Framework.
- Governance arrangements are clear, with partners and parents being well-represented. There are clear lines of communication between the children's centre committee and the advisory board; both provide support and appropriate challenge, for example, in regard to obesity data.
- The centre is effectively monitoring the quality of all services, including those delivered by partners. Joint observations are being carried out and parents' evaluations are taken into account. This information is used to shape the activities that are delivered, for example, the provision of services for new and expectant fathers.

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	20013
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	427587
Managed by	Oxhey Wood School on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	960
Centre leader	Pauline Peters
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0208 7002203
Email address	manager.southoxhey@hertschildrenscentres.org.uk

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