

# Hertfordshire - Hertsmere:Potters Bar Group

Oakmere Primary School, Chace Avenue, Potters Bar, EN6 5NP

**Inspection date** 28–29 January 2014

| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                               | <b>This inspection:</b>     | <b>Good</b>              | <b>2</b> |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------|----------|
|  | <b>Previous inspection:</b> | 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 children's centre group is good.

- Most children living in the group's reach area are registered with the centres. A high number of families, who receive targeted support, including support in their home, continue to access centre services independently once their personal support comes to an end. The centre is very successful at enabling most priority families to use its services regularly and reducing inequalities.
- The group has a strong focus on children's learning and development, and works effectively with partners to support children's readiness for school. By the time they are five years old a higher proportion of local children than seen nationally achieve a good level of development.
- Parents benefit well from the courses they attend and are helped to build confident parenting skills and to manage their children's behaviour positively.
- Most parents successfully complete adult education courses which help them to enhance their skills and life choices. Volunteering opportunities provide parents with work experiences and support their future employment prospects.
- Leaders and managers have an accurate view of the centre's effectiveness, and are well-focused on pinpointing the main areas that require further attention. The local authority keeps a careful watch on the centres' performance. Governance is well embedded and the advisory board supports and challenges the centre to do even better. As a result the centre is improving strongly.

### It is not yet outstanding because:

- Further action is required to ensure that more eligible two year-olds take up free early education.
- The proportion of workless and lone families using services regularly is not as high as for other priority groups.
- Parents have not attended the advisory board since June and the attendance of some partners is patchy. This restricts the board's otherwise good work to hold the centre to account.

### **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. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are H1 PB1 Children Centre and H2 Furzefield Children Centre.

This inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the senior leaders and managers, staff, local authority officers, partners, parents, centre users and members of the group's advisory board.

The inspectors visited a number of activities held at the centres, one jointly with staff.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a wide range of relevant documentation.

### **Inspection team**

|                 |                |                      |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------------|
| Christine Field | Lead inspector | Additional inspector |
| Sandra Teacher  |                | Additional inspector |
| Peter Towner    |                | Additional inspector |

## Full report

### Information about the centre group

The group, which consists of two centres, opened in 2008. H1 PB1 children's centre, a phase two centre, shares a site with Oakmere Primary School (URN 117371) which is inspected under separate arrangements. The report is available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). H2 Furzeffield children's centre, a phase 3 centre, is located as part of the leisure centre in Potters Bar.

The centres are managed under contract by Hertsmer Leisure, a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee which manages leisure facilities in Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire as well as being the lead agency for eleven children's centres. Hertsmer Leisure was commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council to be the Lead Agency for H1 PB1 children's centre in 2006, and for H2 Furzeffield children's centre in 2009.

The group's governance is overseen by a board of trustees. A senior management team, led by a chief executive, is responsible for overall operation, management, and strategic direction and reports direct to the board of trustees. Supporting this governance structure is an advisory board made up of local partners and parent representatives. The team leader, appointed in January 2014, oversees the management of both centres and their staff teams.

There are 1,152 children under five years of age living in the reach area, which is socially and economically diverse. The majority of families are of White British heritage with a growing number from different ethnic minority backgrounds, including families from Eastern Europe and the Traveller community. About a fifth of children are assessed as living in poverty and 16% of families are eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Children's attainment on entry to early years provision is broadly at the level expected for their age.

Services to meet the group's core purpose run from both centres and a range of community venues in South Mimms Village Hall, Elm Court Community Centre, St Mary's Church, and in partnership with a number of local schools.

Target groups have been identified as: vulnerable children, families in temporary accommodation or social housing, lone parents, workless families, Traveller families and families from minority ethnic backgrounds.

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

- Increase the proportion of eligible two year-old children taking up their entitlement to free early education so that most if not all receive the very best start to their education.
- Further increase the engagement of workless and lone parents who use the centre or sign-posted services.
- Strengthen the work of the advisory board by reviewing its terms of reference, and consider the location and timings of meetings to ensure that they are well supported by partners and parents.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The good partnership with health services and close sharing of information mean that the centres can follow up new births very quickly and this results in most expectant mothers engaging well with the centre. . At 90% the group has one of the highest registrations of children under one year in the county.
- The large majority of children living in the reach area, including those who live in the most deprived

communities, access services regularly. All young children from Traveller families living in Furzefield locality use centre services, as do most families from minority ethnic groups and the large majority of those living in social or temporary housing.

- Family support work is very effective in helping families through times of crisis, and most build the confidence to access wider group services once their personal support comes to an end. All children under five years subject to a child protection plan are known to the centre and are a focus for multi-agency support.
- At 84% there is good take up of free education by three and four year-olds, whereas only two thirds of two year-olds are accessing their entitlement to fifteen hours of early education per week.
- Despite a high proportion of lone and workless families being registered with the group, currently only a minority use centre services regularly.

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

Good

- The group undertakes careful analyses of needs as well as the views expressed by centre users to plan a varied programme of activities for local families, including those from specific target groups.
- Working with its partners, the group encourages healthy lifestyles, and their effective collaboration is clearly reflected in the lower than average levels of childhood obesity and the above average proportion of mothers who sustain breastfeeding at six to eight weeks.
- Good work has been done to build trusting relationships with the local hostel, and as a result the very large majority of families who live there enjoy the specific sessions organised such as those to enhance their skills as parents and 'Baby Rhythm and Rhyme' sessions open to all.
- Some very well planned work takes place to help families understand the importance of health and safety, for example a specific first aid for lone parents and children includes a 'Wake and Shake' procedure taught to children so that they know what to do if their parent falls poorly. Parenting skills are well promoted, with 138 parents involved in building confident parenting skills, setting boundaries and managing their children's behaviour.
- Parents have overwhelmingly positive trust and respect for staff, especially where families are facing significant challenges in their lives. Case files are appropriately maintained, and show clearly the effective multi-agency work taking place to support all children who are in need, looked after or subject to a child protection plan. Some excellent work takes place to ensure home safety and raise families' awareness about reducing the risk of harm to their children.
- A high number of parents access an accredited course, including literacy and numeracy, or undertake programmes designed to help their return to work, such as volunteering. Most parents successfully complete the courses they start, and the centre's close follow-up plays a strong role in reducing inequalities and enhancing families' life chances.
- Sessions for children, such as 'Little Explorers' and 'Stay and Play', have a clear focus on children's learning and development. A well-established network with early year's partners, coupled with meetings for parents, supports children's transition and helps them get ready for school. At 69% across the group, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development in 2013 is well above that seen across the county and nationally.
- Parents and children's achievements are celebrated in high-quality displays, on the achievement tree

located in the foyer at each centre and by the ward of certificates, for example when families complete the Bookstart Challenge.

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

Good

- Leaders have a firm grasp on what makes the centre's effectiveness good and what needs further work. Self-evaluation procedures are inclusive, with staff and key members of the advisory board providing support and challenge and using their accurate views to focus improvement planning on the right priorities. Local authority monitoring is rigorous and probing, and keeps the centre's performance under close review.
- Parents played a key role in decision-making as members of the advisory board until about six months ago when their children moved onto early years setting. Two parents are currently waiting to attend their first meeting. A handful of members attend regularly but the attendance of some partners is sporadic. The group is rightly reviewing how best it might revise its role and membership in going forward.
- Leaders use a wide range of useful information, much of which they generate themselves, to help shape services that respond to local needs and ensure the efficient deployment of resources. Good partnership work results in families, particularly those most in need, benefitting from good quality practice and services that improve their health and well-being.
- Safeguarding is central to the group's vision. Staff are alert to concerns, such as any mental health or domestic violence issues, and respond with timely early help. They work closely with social care and health partners to give the most vulnerable children and families their full support through the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework procedures. All children under five years subject to child protection plans and children in need are well supported. There are currently no looked after children known to the group.
- Staff feel valued and say that they are well led and managed. Staff appraisal is viewed as a positive process and ties in well to professional development and the group's priorities. Parents and carers speak highly of the staff, and appreciate the way in which their achievements are celebrated. Parents' feedback responses show high satisfaction rates. 'The centre is simply amazing and helped me through a very difficult time' is one comment typical of many.

## 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 Group details

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Unique reference number</b> | 80152  |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | Hertfordshire  |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 430116   |
| <b>Managed by</b>              | Hertsmerere Leisure on behalf of the local authority |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b> | 1,152                                    |
| <b>Centre leader</b>   | Angie Fickling                           |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                                 | Not previously inspected                 |
| <b>Telephone number</b>  | 01707-658547                             |
| <b>Email address</b>   | angie.fickling@hertsmerereleisure.co.uk; |

### This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 21328: H1 PB1 Children Centre
- 21329: H2 Furzefield Children Centre.

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