

# EH7 Silver Birches Children's Centre

St Catherine's C of E Primary School, Park Road, Ware, SG12 0AW

**Inspection date** 28–29 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:		
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 small, well led, enthusiastic and committed team has the well-being of its families at the heart of everything it does. Good leadership and management is driving the improvement of services at all levels.
- The centre has significantly increased its engagement of local families during its three years of operation so that most young children and families in the area are registered with the centre and the large majority of families access the wide range of services offered.
- Staff work closely with partner agencies to quickly identify families who may need additional support so that the services they need are provided when they need them.
- Children and families that have received extra support, particularly during difficult times in their lives, have benefitted from the high quality care and guidance provided, or accessed for them, by the centre.
- The centre's very effective support, advice and training of early years providers ensures children are well-prepared for starting school.
- Adults speak very enthusiastically about the varied courses the centre provides. These courses help adults to feel less isolated, improve their well-being and become more confident as parents.

### It is not outstanding because:

- The centre is not yet using all the information it has to monitor the attendance and progress of a very small minority of target groups.
- The tracking of children's progress through to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is not yet embedded.
- Attendance by parents and partners at advisory board meetings is too infrequent and the board does not challenge the centre sufficiently, particularly in relation to showing the impact of its work.

## 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 parents, centre staff, members of the advisory board, volunteers, representatives from professional partnerships including health, social care, early years and education, as well as officers from the local authority.

Inspectors observed the centre's work including three activities, one of which was observed jointly with the centre manager. The inspectors visited activities at High Cross village hall.

Inspectors took into account parents views as expressed directly to them during the inspection, as well as through their recorded evaluations about the centre's work.

Inspectors looked at a range of relevant documentation such as the centre's checks on its performance, development plans and data, information relating to safeguarding and a selection of case files.

## Inspection team

Mary Dudley Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Lesley Talbot-Strettle

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

EH7 Silver Birches Children's Centre is a phase three standalone centre, which delivers or supports access to a range of services to meet its core purpose from the centre and community venues within its catchment. It is situated on a shared site alongside St Catherine's Church of England Primary School (URN 117410) which is subject to separate inspection arrangements. The report is available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

YMCA Central Herts manages the centre on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council. There is an advisory board which provides advice and support and a small parent forum. The children's centre manager has responsibility for a very small staff team and the day-to-day running of the centre. The centre provides family support and outreach work, early education, health services and adult learning courses in partnership with other providers and through commissioned services.

The centre is located on the outskirts of Ware town centre, and covers an area comprising urban and rural communities. There are four small villages within this area. A very small minority of children live in workless households and most of the area does not score highly on the indices of multiple deprivation. The majority of families are of White British heritage with a very small percentage from other ethnic groups.

There are approximately 711 children under five years of age living in the community. When they start in early year's provision, the majority of children have skills, knowledge and abilities that are broadly typical of those expected for their age. Families face a varied range of challenges; the centre has identified its main priority groups as children and families with complex needs, and isolated families.

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

- Analyse available data more effectively to monitor the attendance and progress of all target groups.
- Continue to work closely with Early Years providers to ensure the progress of children that have used the centre is monitored to better show the centre's effectiveness in supporting children's learning.
- Strengthen the level of challenge from the advisory board and encourage regular attendance from partners and parents.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

**Good**

- Most local families are registered with the centre and have access to good quality services. The centre is welcoming, well known in the community and has a positive impact on families' lives. Staff know the families well and regularly consult with them so that services are well-matched to their needs. For example, it provides courses and activities such as First Aid and 'About Boys Course', a programme to help parents support boys' learning and development.
- The centre works closely with partner agencies to ensure that they are supporting families in most need of their help, accurately identifying their needs and engaging them in services. Partner agencies know that the families they direct to the centre will quickly get the help and support they need. This has led to the large majority of families accessing services and benefitting from good quality provision.
- Families are supported to access services through home visits and outreach services. Stay and Play sessions are delivered in village communities to ensure families living further afield are able to access services more easily. Staff successfully follow up home visits with support for parents to access centre services and those delivered by partner organisations.
- The centre is not closely monitoring the attendance of a very small minority of its priority groups to ensure that they are accessing the services they need. Good partnership working with health means that the centre knows new parents and families new to the area. However, the centre is only working with the minority of families who are new to the area as it has not been using all available data to check the attendance of these families.

### The quality of practice and services

**Good**

- The centre provides a good range of well-planned activities with an appropriate balance of Universal and targeted services to meet the needs of the community. Activities such as 'Baby Discover' and 'Bumps to One's' focus on babies' early development. Parents use ideas from the sessions in the home, to create a stimulating environment for their children to explore.
- Care, guidance and support provided by the centre is highly effective in helping families improve their circumstances and reduce inequalities. One-to-one support for those most in need helps them overcome complex problems, such as family breakdown, and has a significant impact on improving their well-being. Staff are tenacious in following all avenues of support to ensure the best results for the families they are working with.
- Parents benefit from a good range of courses and activities that enhance their learning and life chances. Parents speak enthusiastically about the difference taking parenting courses has made in their lives. One parent told inspectors: 'There's less shouting' and another said, 'I'm responding rather than reacting now'. The centre has provided support to a few adults to gain qualifications at college and successfully encourages a few parents to become volunteers.
- Children are well-prepared to start school. The centre works closely with early years providers to enhance provision and support children's transition to Nursery, so that children start school with skills broadly typical for their age. Data for the local area show that children's attainment across the early years foundation stage is good overall and the gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers has narrowed significantly over the last three years. However, tracking of the progress of children that have used the centres services is not yet sufficiently well-developed to clearly demonstrate the difference it has made to children's learning and development.

- The centre works closely with the neighbouring children's centre to provide a wider choice of activities for parents in a range of different venues. The 'Baby Days' post natal group, 'Saturdays', and some parenting courses are run jointly, alternating venues to meet the needs of the group, and staff from both centres support the 'Breastfeeding group' and 'Well-baby clinic' in Ware. In this way families benefit from having access to a good choice of activities in a range of different venues.

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

**Good**

- Managers and staff are totally committed to making sure children and families in the community enjoy safe and fulfilled lives and overcome the personal challenges they face. The team has the necessary qualifications, experience and expertise to respond well to families' needs. Performance management is well established and supervision is highly valued by staff. Strong partnership work results in families, particularly those most in need, benefitting from well-located and resourced services.
- The local authority regularly monitors the performance of the centre and provides data to measure how well the centre is making a difference to the lives of families in the community. Together with the centre manager and YMCA support clear actions are agreed to drive the centre's continuous improvement. However, the centre does not currently use all the information it has on a few groups to monitor their progress effectively.
- The parents' forum operates through a monthly informal get together following Friday 'Stay and Play' sessions where parents are asked to give their views on a range of topics. In addition users complete evaluations of activities and courses, and help shape services in this way. Parental satisfaction with centre services is high. Parents have the opportunity to represent their views at the advisory board.
- The advisory board is not well attended and lacks continuity of membership. The knowledge and expertise that parents and professionals can bring to the meeting is therefore not available to support the work of the centre. Although there are good intentions, challenge from the advisory board on how well the centre is doing is not effective enough.
- Keeping children and families safe is at the heart of the centre's work. All safe recruitment checks are undertaken and a comprehensive range of policies and procedures underpins good working practices.
- Good support is provided for families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Staff are well trained to use the Common Assessment Framework and their work with children subject to child protection plans, children who are looked after, or are identified as in need is well planned and effective. Consequently staff develop trusting relationships with parents to help them reduce the risk of harm to their children.

**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>	21075
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	439434
<b>Managed by</b>	The YMCA Central Herts on behalf of the local authority.

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	711
<b>Centre leader</b>	Karen Stagg
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01920 463949
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:silverbirches@ymcacentralherts.org.uk">silverbirches@ymcacentralherts.org.uk</a>

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