

3R1 Abbots Langley Children's Centre

School Mead, Abbots Langley, WD5 0LB

Inspection date 6–7 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Good	2
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.

- As a result of effective and committed leadership and management at all levels the centre has improved quickly since it opened in 2009. Strong partnerships and effective systems and processes, including those for tracking the engagement of all target families, ensure that the centre is effectively meeting the needs of the families it serves.
- The local authority provides excellent support which challenges and enables the centre to continuously strive to deliver even better services.
- Leaders correctly identify the centre's strengths and areas for development and staff deliver good quality activities and services which are contributing well to improved outcomes for families.
- Expectant mums access high quality support and advice during their pregnancy through the monthly 'pregnancy club' which is led by a specialist midwife and supported by children's centre staff.
- Staff know the local area well and work effectively with partner organisations to ensure the large majority of children and families are regularly involved with the centre. Good information sharing with health visitors ensure new births are registered with the centre. Target families, especially those living in the areas where there is the most disadvantage, are regularly accessing children's centre services.

It is not outstanding because:

- Although registration and participation rates are good, there are a few children living in the local area who are not yet registered with the centre and accessing its services.
- Although leaders and managers audit case files, and review all family files on a monthly basis, they do not always ensure the quality of all case recording is of the very highest standard.
- The centre's processes for tracking the progress that adults and children make as a result of attending children's centre services are new and have not yet had time to fully demonstrate the longer term impact of the centre.
- There are a wide range of opportunities for adults to learn at the centre, but the number of parents securing qualifications to support them back to work is not yet high enough.

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 three Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the leader of the centre. They also spoke to other staff who work in the centres and representatives from the local authority as well as members of the advisory board and senior members of staff from Hertsmere Leisure. Conversations took place with staff from partner agencies including a range of health professionals. Inspectors also spoke with head teachers and other childcare professionals. Discussions with parents took place at different times during the inspection and inspectors looked at their written evaluations of the centres' services.

The inspectors observed activities including 'Welcome to the World' and 'Baby Massage' and jointly observed 'Play and Stay' with the centre's team leader.

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

Inspection team

Michael Blakey	Additional inspector
Alison Cogher	Additional inspector
Karen Cooper	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Abbots Langley Children's Centre (3R1) is a small standalone Phase 3 centre. The centre is managed on a day to day basis by Hertsmere 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 commissioned by Hertfordshire local authority. There is an advisory board in place and the local authority monitors the quality of the centre's work.

The centre serves a community of 1075 children aged under 5. It meets its core purpose by delivering services from a range of venues, including schools, throughout its reach area. The centre shares a building with Breakespeare Community Pre School, and is within the grounds of Tannerswood School. These are subject to separate inspections and reports can be accessed at www.ofsted.gov.uk

The area that the centre serves is relatively affluent, however there are some pockets of deprivation particular in the Tannerswood and Hazelwood areas. About one fifth of children in the area live in households in receipt of workless benefits.

The majority of families are White British and approximately 40% of families are from a wide range of other ethnic minority backgrounds, including Eastern European. Children's skills and knowledge on entry to early years provision are broadly at the level expected for their age.

Target groups have been identified as: families living in the most disadvantaged areas served by the centre; lone parents who live in workless households; children who are eligible for two-year-old free early education; and families from minority ethnic backgrounds.

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

- Ensure that access to services is outstanding by working with partners to:
 - find and register the few remaining families who are not known to the centre and accessing its services
 - increase the proportion of workless lone parents who are engaged with centre
 - ensure all vulnerable two year olds who are eligible for free early education take up their entitlement.
- Develop a more robust approach to quality assuring case files to ensure all record keeping is always of the highest quality.
- Enhance current tracking processes so that the centre can show the difference it makes, particularly to:
 - ensuring more parents secure qualifications to support them back to work
 - the achievement of children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The proportion of children who are registered with the centre has increased from 60% in 2011 to 94% in 2014. There remain only a few children and families who are not yet known to the centre. Very effective systems to track attendance of children ensure they attend appropriate services on a regular basis.
- Effective partnership working ensures those that are expecting children are well provided for and that 94% of all new births are registered. The 'pregnancy club', for expectant mothers, is well attended by families, including those from the centre's targeted groups.
- At 73%, the large majority of children and families access services. The centre is particularly successful at involving families from minority ethnic groups in its work and in reaching those families who live in the most disadvantaged areas served by the centre. However, although registration and participation rates of target groups are very positive overall, the centre is clear that a greater proportion of workless lone parents need to be engaged.
- The provision of activities in a range of venues in the local area is effective and as a result those families who would otherwise be unlikely to access services are actively involved in the work of the centre. Many children and parents regularly attend 'Play and Stay' activities which are delivered at different venues across the reach area, and tailored packages of support are delivered in local schools according to local needs. Those families whose circumstances make them vulnerable receive effective one to one support in their homes.
- All vulnerable children, including those who are subject to child protection, children in need and children looked after are known to the centre. However, the data provided by the local authority can often be over three months old.
- There are approximately 38 two-year-old children estimated to be eligible for free early education in the reach area and the large majority has been well supported to access good or better provision. There are still over a quarter of children who are not taking up this provision and the centre has correctly identified this as an area for improvement. All three and four year olds take up the entitlement to free early education when it is offered.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The children's centre works closely with a wide range of partners to deliver an appropriate balance of good quality services that are open to all families and more intense and targeted support to those families whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable. There is an appropriate balance between group activities and one to one support including access to counselling that have a good impact on improving families lives.
- The quality of care, guidance and support provided to families is of high quality. Several parents told inspectors how the one to one support they receive was their 'lifeline' in difficult times.
- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has been above national levels every year from 2011 to 2013. Over the same period the achievement gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers has narrowed. However, the centre has correctly identified that, in 2013, the achievement gap between boys and girls was much wider than that seen nationally and therefore a priority for the centre. Although learning journeys are used to track progress these are not used to inform an overview that would

allow the centre to more effectively monitor the impact of its work on children's achievement.

- The centre's contribution to reducing health inequalities, including a wide range of healthy living activities delivered in schools is good. Obesity rates of children in Reception Year have fallen to 6.6% which is below the national average and the proportion of mothers who sustained breastfeeding is broadly in line with national levels despite concerted efforts to continue to encourage mothers.
- The 'pregnancy club' is a good example of innovative joint working with health services and helps to ensure the health and well-being of mums to be and their babies. Activities such as 'welcome to the world' ensure that new parents receive good advice and support in the weeks after the birth of their child. For example, inspectors observed very knowledgeable speakers giving advice on child safety. Parents say they are more confident as a result of effective parenting skills programmes.
- Effective procedures and well planned learning opportunities very effectively engage adults. The 'brighter futures' course is specifically tailored to meet the needs of more vulnerable families. Target families are allocated priority places on adult learning courses. However, too few parents currently gain the qualifications they may need to return to work.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Leaders and those responsible for governance know the local area very well and effectively monitor the performance of the centre. They fully understand the centre's strengths and areas for development and they use limited resources to meet clearly identified priorities very well. Development plans are specific and clear and, as a result, the centre is improving strongly.
- Staff say they feel valued and 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.
- The centre demonstrates very good practice in terms of its very close monitoring of attendance at activities and services. Sophisticated systems to track priority families ensure that good rates of attendance are maintained and that individual families are identified and contacted when their attendance falls away.
- The local authority provides good quality information to inform planning and their monitoring is highly effective and contributes strongly to improving registration, attendance and impact on reducing inequalities.
- The advisory board, which has recently been reorganised, provides effective support to the centre. However, a few members are not sufficiently clear about the centre's data or its comparative performance or priorities to undertake their role as effectively as they could.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are effective. All staff and volunteers are safely recruited and trained to keep children safe. However, although leaders and managers audit case files, and review all family files on a monthly basis, they do not always ensure the quality of all case recording. As a result, staff are not fully challenged to consistently improve their own practice.
- Families who have experienced domestic violence, children who are subject to child protection plans, children in need and those who are looked after are well supported through close working with children's social workers and the Police. Common Assessment Processes are used well and

good partnership working ensures families receive effective early help.

- The centre has implemented relatively new and sophisticated processes that allows leaders to track the longer term impact of services on improving the achievement of children and adults. However, these are too new to fully demonstrate the medium term impact of services.

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

Unique reference number	20009
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	430190
Managed by	Hertsmere leisure

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1075
Centre leader	Jeanette White
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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