

# Hampshire Test Valley Children's Centre Group

Smannell Road, Andover, Hampshire SP11 6JP

**Inspection date** 4–6 March 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
	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 successful transition from single stand-alone children's centres to the existing cluster model is as a result of the skilful and experienced leadership at all levels. Leadership and governance are consistently strong and are constantly driving improvements for the benefit of children and families.
- At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, many more children in the area achieve a good level of development than seen nationally. They make good progress in their learning because they access good quality children's centre services. The very large majority of early childhood provision in the area is at least good. Family support workers and key early years partners play a critical role in supporting early childhood settings as they journey towards 'Getting to good'. Consequently, several settings have been judged good or better at recent inspections.
- Engagement with children is very high at 86%. There are also impressive levels of routine and regular engagement with target families, including teenage parents, fathers, lone parents, armed forces families and children with disabilities and special educational needs. Consequently, outcomes for the large majority of families are good and consistently improving.
- Highly effective partnerships with key specialists and organisations, such as health, adult education and family learning and early childhood providers, are pivotal to the continued success of the centres. Through innovative and resourceful planning and collaboration across agencies, the centres are having significant and positive influence on the life chances of children and families in the area.

### It is not outstanding because:

- Adult and family learners do not access formal advice and guidance services to help them further their careers and education and training. Therefore, some learners are not aware of further education and employment opportunities available to them.
- In the centre's early childhood services, such as 'Play and Stay' sessions, children's learning journeys lack detail, including the written accounts of the progress that children make over time and the next steps in their learning.

## Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group 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 Acorns Children's Centre, Little Oaks and Sunshine Children's Centre, Poppies and Water Meadow Children's Centre and Spring Meadow Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with: the children's service manager, the centre coordinators; senior leaders from the local authority and health; family outreach workers; volunteers; health and social care practitioners, Jobcentre Plus, adult education and commissioned services; parents and centre users; and representatives of the centre partnership boards and parents forums.

The inspectors visited a range of services offered at each of the centres, and at venues located within the communities. Activities observed included adult learning courses, such as 'Family Learning Maths', NVQ Level 2 Children and Young People Workforce, First Aid for early childhood practitioners, and 'Cook 2 Share'. Activities observed included 'Stay and Play', 'PEEPs' groups, the Young Parents group, health clinics, 'Listen Together', 'Family Links' and 'One Step Ahead'.

The inspectors visited each of the four centres and conducted joint observations of activities with centre leaders.

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

## Inspection team

Deborah Udakis, Lead Inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jonathan Palk	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jameel Hassan	Additional inspector
Marinette Bazin	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the group

There are 54 children's centres in Hampshire. Test Valley Locality Children's Centre group was established in 2012 and is one of 13 groups run by Action for Children which operate across the county. The group is led, on behalf of the local authority, by Action for Children. The leadership team consists of the children's services manager, the lead practitioner and two centre coordinators. The children's centre group works together, sharing many services.

This group consists of four children's centres: Acorns Children's Centre, Little Oaks and Sunshine Children's Centre, Poppies and Water Meadow Children's Centre and Spring Meadow Children's Centre. Each centre delivers a range of services, including early childhood services, adult learning, parenting support, health services, speech and language therapy and family welfare. Governance arrangements for the locality are provided by Action for Children and the three centre partnership boards.

Spring Meadow, the hub children's centre for the cluster, serves areas of significant disadvantage. However, there is a great difference in the social and economic prosperity of people living across the locality. There are 49,143 dwellings in Test Valley; the cost of housing is higher than the county and South East average. Over two thirds of households are owned either outright, with a mortgage or under shared ownership.

The group covers a large geographical patch in a predominately rural area, with the market towns of Andover in the North and Romsey in the South. Test Valley has the second lowest population density of all districts in Hampshire. There are two main urban areas located in the north and south of the borough and a substantial rural area in between. It is a very rural area and the specific needs of families who have limited access to services and who are at risk of isolation are a key priority for the centres. There are centres and services suitably located in the rural areas.

The area served by the centres includes a significant proportion of children aged under five years from White British families. The Test Valley group of centres serve a small multicultural population. Very few families attending the centres speak English as an additional language. Services within the group are targeted specifically at teenage parents, lone parents, fathers, children with disabilities, families living in the most deprived areas and children being supported by social services. An increasing number of children live in workless households, particularly in Spring Meadow. However, the figure for the whole locality remains well below the national average.

Some 6,259 children under five years of age live in the group's reach area. Children's skills and understanding on entry to early years provision are generally at expected levels for their age.

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

- Improve parents' access to formal advice and guidance to help them consider suitable options for further training, and to help them re-enter paid employment.
- Develop the children's learning journeys compiled at the children's centres to ensure they provide a detailed, evaluative account of children's progress over time, including the next steps in their learning.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Parents routinely access good quality information, guidance and advice regarding the range of services provided across the locality. Most (86%) children eligible for early education funded places take up their entitlement in early childhood settings.
- Children with disabilities and special educational needs are well supported and access good quality universal and targeted provision to meet their specific needs.
- Careful planning and effective use of information are used to find new ways to engage with those families who prove difficult to reach. For instance, staff set up a family choir on a local army base. As a result, 300 more families are regularly attending centre services.
- Careful mapping of all the families in the area the centre serves helps leaders at all levels understand the most urgent priorities. This has been essential to ensure those families living in the Poppies and Water Meadow areas do not succumb to the disadvantages of rural isolation.
- Engagement with targeted groups of families is strengthened because of the highly skilled centre staff, including outreach workers and partners who develop successful relationships with families across the locality. Family support workers act as fine role models and regularly visit groups across venues to promote the work of the centres, engage with families and monitor the quality of services.
- Health partners support family needs very well, especially those of the very youngest children and babies. Health professionals, working jointly with centre staff, are proving successful in tackling the health inequalities that exist locally. Information shows that almost all children in the locality get a good and healthy start to life.
- The large majority of targeted families attend the centres on a regular basis. For instance, all teenage parents access activities supportive of their personal learning and living needs and those of their child. The 'Dad's Group' is also hugely popular, with around 80 fathers attending the Saturday sessions with their children.
- In the Acorns children's centre and Poppies and Water Meadow children's centre areas, access to regular and affordable public transport is a problem for some families. Determined centre staff arrange alternative transport for families to ensure they can attend targeted support groups.

### The quality of practice and services

Good

- Most children make good or better progress in play and learning sessions. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the gap between the lowest-achieving 20% of children and their peers in the locality is much narrower than seen nationally. More children who have attended children's centre services achieve a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage than do their peers.
- The learning journeys used at the centres to record observations, planning and assessment lack written detail to clearly show children's progress and their next steps for learning. However, across the locality in early childhood settings this is a strong aspect of provision.
- The centres are successfully reducing the levels of disadvantage experienced by the most vulnerable families through a range of good quality targeted and universal services, groups and activities in each area.
- Each centre targets its focus on the needs of their individual communities. For instance, Little Oaks and Spring Meadow children's centres have developed strong links with local adult education providers to promote parents' learning and future employability, in areas of higher unemployment.
- High numbers of parents and carers attend a wide range of good quality adult and family learning activities across the locality. They enjoy the learning activities and arrive punctually and ready to learn. Tutors make good use of information to demonstrate positive learning outcomes and to monitor the learners' progression towards qualifications.

- Learners report high levels of satisfaction. They explain how they apply the new skills they acquire during their involvement in parenting programmes and adult education in their everyday family or work lives.
- There are good opportunities for parents to access meaningful work experience through volunteering, to develop their employability and practical skills. However, parents have limited access to formal advice and guidance to help them explore their future options for further learning, training and employment.

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

Good

- Shared aims, targeted at improving the life chances of all families in the locality, and consistently good leadership, management and governance are key to the success of this cluster of children's centres. Each of the centres is equally well led and managed, and each centre effectively addresses the needs of families.
- Evaluation and business planning is very effective and targeted at those families in greatest need. The local authority and Action for Children work effectively together to monitor and evaluate the quality of resources and services provided.
- The involvement of parents, partners, members of the partnership board and other key professionals in the evaluation and target-setting processes ensures that their views and knowledge are fully taken into account when planning future developments and service delivery.
- Leaders gather and share information, including information from key partners such as health, education and social care. They use this to analyse the needs of the communities and to plan and deliver good quality services to improve outcomes for children and families.
- Staff morale is very good across the teams. There are clear lines of accountability and reporting. Performance-management arrangements and processes prove very effective at identifying and recognising good performance as well as dealing with aspects of underperformance.
- The small team of well-qualified, skilled and experienced staff are highly committed to the ongoing success of the centres. They work seamlessly with other providers, partners and professionals to ensure resources are targeted at the right children and families and in the right location, at the right time. Safeguarding procedures and policies and their implementation across the locality is robust. There are excellent links with partners and this leads to swift signposting to early help and support for children in need and families in crisis.
- Highly effective multi-agency working arrangements ensure that children on child protection plans, looked-after children and those in receipt of early help are monitored and supported well through close working with children's social care services.
- Commissioning arrangements of key packages of support, including speech and language therapy, Homestart and portage, are straight-forward and effective.
- Thorough quality-assurance audits and checks are carried out by leaders and are well embedded. Case studies provide convincing evidence of the high quality ongoing supervision, monitoring and support provided to staff to ensure that engagement with children and families, at times of difficulty, is life changing. The use of assessment tools is well embedded to support safeguarding practice and the effective monitoring of children at risk of harm.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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>	80204
<b>Local authority</b>	Hampshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	430093
<b>Managed by</b>	Action for Children

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	6,259
<b>Centre leader</b>	Tina Monaghan
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
<b>Telephone number</b>	01794 834740
<b>Email address</b>	Tina.Monaghan@actionforchildren.org.uk

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

Little Oaks and Sunshine Children's Centre  
Poppies and Water Meadow Children's Centre  
Spring Meadow Children's Centre  
Acorns Children's Centre

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