

Hart Children's Centre Cluster

Woodlark Children's Centre, School Lane, Yateley, Hart, Hampshire GU46 6NW

Inspection date		12–14 March 2014	
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 children's centre group is good.

- Staff have an impressive understanding of the needs of families who live in the area. Their innovative and positive work with partners such as health has increased both registration and engagement rates, especially of those families who are most in need.
- The cluster has made significant progress in engaging with Traveller and service families, resulting in well-coordinated support for the most vulnerable families.
- Children in need and those at risk of harm are well supported and receive rapid and effective help.
- Skilled family outreach work provides individual and intensive support to families at times of crisis. Families receive early help that improves their well-being and ensures they receive the support they need.
- Strong and effective leadership and governance are shown by the commitment and drive of all staff who seek to improve their own performance. Centre leaders develop, empower and motivate their staff.

It is not outstanding because:

- Front line staff do not always evaluate the difference activities and services make to individual families.
- Some staff do not model good talk; they miss opportunities to introduce new words and infrequently ask questions that will encourage children to think. They do not always stop children throwing or mishandling books.
- Some of the good work done to engage families who are most in need is very new.

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 Little Saplings and Wisteria Children's Centre; Turners Wood, Fleet Fireflies and Wild Rose Children's Centre; Woodlark and Water Lillies Children's Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with with leaders and managers of the cluster, cluster partnership board members, centre staff, the local authority, childminders and childminder coordinators, headteachers, the volunteer coordinator, social care staff, parents and volunteers, partners from health, family learning, Homestart and Jobcentre Plus, the padre and social care staff from RAF Odiham and partners who work with Traveller families.

The inspectors visited Little Saplings Children's Centre, Wisteria Children's Centre, Turners Wood Children's Centre, Fleet Fireflies Children's Centre, Wild Rose Children's Centre, Woodlark Children's Centre, Water Lillies Children's Centre, The Bungalow on Penny Hill Traveller Site and St George and St Michael's Church RAF Odiham.

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

Inspection team

Denise Blackwell	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Charalambos Loizou	Her Majesty's Inspector
Graham Saltmarsh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Hart Children's Centre Cluster covers a very large geographical area of about 80 square miles. It consists of three children's centres based over seven sites. The sites are small buildings, with a lot of the work of the children's centres offered on an outreach basis. Just under a third of the population of Hart live in the more affluent rural parts of the reach area. There are currently 5,703 children under five years of age served by the children's centre cluster. The children's centre cluster is run by Action for Children on behalf of Hampshire County Council. The three children's centres within the cluster have individual partnership boards and individual practitioner and parent forums.

Almost all of Hart's reach area is within the 20% least deprived areas in England, with Hart being consistently identified as the least deprived district in England. The proportion of children living in poverty is significantly lower than the national average. The vast majority of the population is White British with no significant minority ethnic groups in the reach area. There are significant numbers of service families and Traveller communities within the area that the cluster serves.

Unemployment rates for the area are lower than the Hampshire and national average. The area is served well by both train and bus links with easy access to motorways leading into London, which is about 40 miles away. Hart has a larger proportion of working-age residents with higher level qualifications and a lower proportion with low or no qualifications than Hampshire, the south-east and England as a whole. Hart has a low number of Job Seekers Allowance claimants and lone parents not in employment. The vast majority of children are at or above expected levels of development on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision. Out-of-school provision is run from three of the centre buildings with five of the seven centre buildings being located on school sites.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency with which all staff promote children's language and communication skills by:
 - demonstrating good practice to parents, so that they know how to introduce new words and talk to children in ways that encourage them to verbalise their thoughts in increasingly complex ways.
 - modelling how to handle books carefully and explaining why books should not be thrown.
- Increase the precision and usefulness of the monitoring and evaluation carried out by front line workers by:
 - helping them to be clear about the purpose and focus of the activities they deliver to families
 - ensuring they check the quality of activities they provide
 - improving their understanding of the difference the activities are making to the lives of those who attend
- Continue to build on the good links established with Traveller and service families:
 - to ensure that shared information is used to plan carefully targeted provision
 - to ensure the participation of target groups in centre services and activities is sustained over time.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The good joint working with the midwifery service is fundamental to the success of the support and engagement of almost all young families. Teenage parents living in the reach area regularly attend their dedicated support groups. Those few families who are not routinely accessing services are identified and contacted to encourage their participation in relevant activities.

- Strong partnership working, especially with health, has resulted in over 90% of families registering with the cluster. Family support programmes are successful in increasing take up of funded early education places for the most vulnerable two year olds. Effective liaison with social care has resulted in almost all children who are on child protection plans engaging in centre services and receiving additional support.
- Outreach work with families in their own homes and communities is particularly effective in engaging service families and Traveller communities, enabling them to benefit from the full range of services and support provided. However, this work is still in the early stages and they are not yet able to show that engagement is sustained over time.
- Centre staff attend multi-agency risk assessment conferences to gather information and offer support to families affected by domestic violence. Information gained is used effectively to identify the kind of help needed by families and inform risk assessments.
- Midwifery and health visitor services are routinely delivered from centre buildings helping to introduce expectant and new parents to centres early on. This results in effective information sharing so that services are closely matched to identified needs.
- Although Jobcentre Plus services are no longer delivered in centre buildings, Jobcentre Plus and centre staff work hard to maintain their partnership. As a result, regular information sharing demonstrates that those lone parents in need of additional support receive the help they need.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Parents are helped to improve their parenting skills through evidence based programmes such as 'Parents Early Education Partnership (PEEP)' and 'Incredible Years'. Sessions are delivered at times to suit parents, for example 'Incredible Years' is currently being delivered in the evening for parents who work during the day. As a result, a large majority of parents who access courses complete them, and many parents told inspectors how this had improved their relationships with their children and understanding of how to support their development.
- Case files show some exceptionally good work is happening with some complex cases. Case files are maintained to a high standard and are regularly audited. Lessons from cases are shared to help improve family support and outreach workers' knowledge. Health and social care partners, including the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airforce Families' Association (SSAFA), comment that the quality of support for case work is strong and effective particularly for teenage parents, service families and Traveller families, complementing the support partners provide.
- The cluster provides a wide range of both universal and targeted services. As centre staff move towards the provision of more targeted services, effective arrangements are developing for greater community involvement in providing universal services. These include the affiliation project which ensures the quality of local parent and toddler groups delivered in centre buildings. Work with Hart Voluntary Action has resulted in the recruitment of several volunteers, which enhances the sustainability of quality services and activities.
- The cluster works closely with the Family Learning Service to ensure parents are able to access learning opportunities that will improve their own knowledge and help them support their children. An agreement is in place that ensures each centre has time set aside for the delivery of family learning opportunities, including numeracy and literacy courses. As a result of this partnership, priority is given to target families for places on courses such as early years mathematics and English workshops.
- Support and intervention programmes, such as speech and language programmes, complement and enhance the early education provision in local schools and pre-school settings.
- Inter-agency working with key partners has helped to develop the range, availability and quality of services, especially the delivery of health programmes, so that health targets are met.
- Centre staff do not always show to parents how to communicate with children and extend their children's language. They miss opportunities to introduce new words, model correct sentence structure and ask questions that encourage children to think. They do not always stop children from throwing books around so some children develop bad habits that are likely to disadvantage them

when they go to school.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Staff work across all the centres so they know the needs of the whole area. They use their knowledge of families' needs well to deliver consistently good activities regardless of which centre building they are delivered in. Family support and outreach workers take lead roles depending on their expertise, enabling them to develop a good understanding of the vulnerable groups they work with such as service families across the whole of the reach area.
- There have been significant changes in staffing since April last year, with 80% of the staff team new to the cluster. Action for Children have put a strong support, training and supervision programme in place. Centre leaders develop, empower and motivate staff. This has resulted in a dedicated and cohesive staff team who provide families with a professional and warm welcome.
- Procedures to safeguard and protect the welfare of children and vulnerable adults are robust. Good links with social care and SSAFA ensure centre services complement the work of other agencies, especially in the support of children subject to child protection plans. Risk assessments are thorough and ensure staff and centre users are kept safe when attending activities and services on centre sites and in outreach venues.
- Leaders and managers make good use of limited resources. They successfully and increasingly target the work of centre staff to support families in most need of their help, while increasing the involvement of volunteers and community groups in the delivery of universal services. There are clear lines of communication that enable families to contribute to the work of the centre, with parent representatives on each of the three partnership boards and two of these being chaired by parents.
- The local authority and partnership boards provide a good level of support and challenge to the cluster. The local authority undertakes quarterly visits where actions are set and progress with previous actions reviewed. Partnership board members question cluster leaders about the information they provide at meetings, using their knowledge of the local area and the needs of families who live there to effectively challenge leaders and managers about the progress they are making against the targets set by the local authority.
- Effective self-evaluation at leadership level is based on measurable outcomes that are informed by data, careful analysis of parents' and partners' feedback and tracking of families to ensure that the impact of services is sustained. Leaders monitor the quality of activities and services through observations of practice and case discussions during supervision sessions. As a result they have a good understanding of the quality of services provided by partners and any support or training needed by staff.
- Family support and outreach workers and volunteers are required to monitor the quality of the services and activities they provide and track the impact of services on the families they work with. However, most staff are still relatively new to this work and the quality of their evaluation is variable. Some monitoring reports and evaluations are not precise enough to enable senior leaders to easily identify or pull out information that evidences their impact, particularly for target groups.

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

Unique reference number	80117
Local authority	Hampshire County Council
Inspection number	440176
Managed by	Action for Children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	5703
Children's Services Manager	Liz Morley-Smith
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01252 877624
Email address	Liz.Morley-Smith@actionforchildren.org.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- Little Saplings and Wisteria Children's Centre
- Turners Wood, Fleet Fireflies and Wild Rose Children's Centre
- Woodlark and Waterlillies Children's Centre

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