

Green Oak Children's Centre Group

Cheam Resources Centre, 671 London Road, North Cheam, Sutton, SM3 9DL

Inspection dates	21–22 May 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not applicable	
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.

- Parents are given a warm welcome to the group's activities, which are well organised with good quality resources. Improvements to the hub's premises promote high quality learning outdoors.
- The group has established a strong presence in the area. A large majority of families now use its services, and there is good help for those who are in need of most support.
- Parents value the care, guidance and support they receive from centre staff. They say that there is always someone on hand to talk to and share concerns with.
- Centre staff work closely with professional partners to identify and address any difficulties families and children may have, as early as possible.
- Take-up of the entitlement to free early education places for two-year-olds is good, and helps to prepare children well for their next steps in education.
- Strong leadership, management and governance ensure that self-evaluation is rigorous, accurate, and used to plan the group's next steps. As a result, the group has the capacity to sustain the rapid rate of development it has achieved since it was created.

It is not outstanding because:

- The local authority has not made sure that the information from strategic partners is shared well enough for the centre group to know about and support more families in need of most help.
- There is not enough encouragement for parents to chart their child's learning development during centre activities.
- The number of families from workless households using the centre is lower than for other groups. There are too few opportunities for adults to acquire skills that will improve their chances of gaining employment to improve the well-being of their families.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- The local authority should ensure that the information available from partners, including social care and health services, is shared effectively so that centre staff have the full knowledge they need to plan services and support more families in need of most help.
- Incorporate more opportunities in centre activities for parents to chart the development of their child's learning and development for themselves.
- Develop a stronger partnership with providers of training for literacy, numeracy and work-related skills in order for adults, particularly those from workless homes, to improve their chances of gaining employment.

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 children's centre group manager, centre staff, representatives of the local authority and advisory board, parents and users of the centre and representatives of the organisations who work in partnership with the centre.

The inspectors visited a range of services taking place at the main hub and at venues used by the group, including Cheam Library, Worcester Park Library and Cheam Park Farm Infants' School.

The inspection covered both the centres represented in the group. These are the Stonecot and Worcester Park, and Nonsuch and Cheam centres.

Inspectors observed the group's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including self-evaluation documentation, the group's action plan, safeguarding policies and a sample of case files.

Inspection team

Helen Hutchings	Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Patricia Collis		Additional inspector
Jean Cook		Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Green Oak Children's Centre Group comprises two children's centres which were previously designated in 2010. The centres began working together as a group in December 2012, with one manager of the group. A main hub was established at Cheam Resource Centre which is also used by community mental health and occupational therapy services. Activities are run at the group's hub and at activity points across the locality, including at Cheam and Worcester Park Libraries, Cheam Park Farm Infants' School, Maple Lodge Community Hall and Sutton Life Centre. The group is managed by the local authority, supported by an advisory board. Since October 2013, the manager has been seconded on a part-time basis to provide support for the development of children's centres across the local authority.

Oaklings Pre-school, which provides day care on three days each week, opened in the main hub in January 2014 (EY469468) and is managed by the group manager. It is subject to a separate Ofsted inspection, and, when inspected, the report will be available at www.ofsted.gov.uk. The centre provides drop-in groups for all parents and children, family support services and learning courses. Midwives and health visitors run clinics in the hub and at a number of other activity points used by the group.

The group serves an area with a population of approximately 2,600 children from birth to five years old. The large majority of families are from White British backgrounds, with the next largest group being Sri Lankan. There are 32 local areas, none of which fall within the most deprived nationally, although there are pockets of deprivation in some areas. Levels of unemployment are below average. The main priority groups identified by the centre group are: young parents, lone parents, those who live in workless households and children identified as having developmental difficulties or delay. When they start early years provision, children have skills and knowledge in line with those expected for their age.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families Good

- Since the group was established, staff have been proactive in promoting its services. Consequently, registration and engagement rates have doubled compared with the previous rates of the two contributory centres. At 81%, most children and families in the locality have taken part in at least one activity.
- Staff have used their local knowledge well to build up relationships with a wide range of community groups across the locality, so that the majority of families identified as being in need of most help are registered with it. However, the level of engagement with families in workless households is lower than for other groups.
- The group's activities are coordinated efficiently with other centres in Sutton so that resources are shared well, with centres taking lead responsibility for identified priority groups. Consequently, some groups, which the centre has identified as needing support, regularly attend activities, either in the locality or at other centres. This includes the large majority of teenage mothers, children with disabilities and families with complex needs. Their involvement with the centre effectively helps to reduce isolation and they develop the confidence to seek advice when it is needed.
- Staff do not have sufficiently detailed information at a strategic level, particularly from health and social care partners, to be fully aware of all the families in need of the most help. However, at an individual level, partners communicate well with centre group staff so that referrals are swift and most families are supported successfully. For example, health professionals refer children to the children's centre when the two-year-old health checks identify delay in their development, such as speech. Often, the centres effectively integrate support for families who need the most help within activities that are offered to all, and this helps to reduce inequalities.

- Experienced staff provide good quality support and guidance, sometimes in the home, to ensure that families have the individualised help they need, particularly at times of crisis. Parents speak about the trust they have in centre staff and feel able to share concerns at an early stage. As one parent commented, 'I cannot speak highly enough of the staff, the activities and the new garden.'
- Most three- and four-year-old children attend free early years provision. As a result of the centres' encouragement of families to take up places, and the opening of the attached pre-school to promote high-quality care, a large majority of eligible two-year-olds have taken up their early years place. Families are pleased with the rapid improvement in their children's learning and development.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The centre's services are responsive to the needs of the community it serves. The group acts as a hub for many families and has successfully engaged with partners to provide a range of activities which support families well. Parents value the care, guidance and support they receive from centre staff and partner organisations.
- The 'Chatterbox' programme is successful in supporting children who have delay or difficulties in their language development, an identified weakness across the area. Parents are very positive about the rapid improvements in children's language and communication skills. The promotion of language is a key focus of all centre activities, including in the 'Play and Stay' sessions for Sri Lankan families, and helps to prepare children for school.
- The quality of activities is good, and includes professional but friendly support for parents. This was evident in 'Baby Play and Stay', when parents new to the group were welcomed and quickly encouraged to join in the very wide range of stimulating activities for babies of different ages. Activities at the Cheam Resource Centre make excellent use of the new garden area, which provides lots of good opportunities for children's physical play.
- Staff are good role models and support parents well to extend their child's learning at home. For example, parents have high quality prompt cards in and around the activities to help them to understand their child's development, and are given further information to take away. All activities are planned with stimulating, high-quality equipment and materials. The centre supports individuals in difficult circumstances to extend their range of equipment by helping them to borrow from the local authority toy library.
- Staff plan effectively to ensure that there is enhanced provision for those whose attendance at universal activities is based on a specific need. They record the development steps of these children to check that they are making the intended progress. The centre has not given as much emphasis to encouraging all parents, including those whose child is being given specific support, to improve their parenting skills by recognising and recording their child's development and next steps.
- The centres ensure that families have timely support from other services when it is needed, including workshops and one-to-one advice about benefits and welfare reform, and workshops to help parents into employment. However, currently the group does not have a strong enough partnership with services to help more adults to improve their literacy, numeracy and work-related skills, and hence their employability and ability to support their children's learning.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre manager has brought vision and determination to build a strong, experienced staff team and to plan and develop the new hub and services within a short time. Her high expectations are shared by other staff, and this is reflected in parents' regard for the impact that the new provision has on their lives. For example, families value the fact that they feel safe to leave their children in crèche facilities while they attend other activities which help their parenting skills.
- Local authority line management arrangements have generally ensured that the group manager has been supported and challenged, but staffing changes have resulted in a delay in the group's annual external review. However, the manager and staff have a good knowledge of the group's strengths

and weaknesses because they routinely review what works best and how improvements can be made. Nevertheless, their planning is not always based on accurate information, particularly from health and social care services, because the local authority has not ensured that this is shared effectively.

- Parents contribute effectively to decision-making about future developments. Staff regularly seek parents' views during parent forum weeks and in their systematic evaluation of all group activities. In addition, parents are well-represented on the advisory board.
- The local authority has overall governance of the group and, together with the advisory board, has maintained oversight of the centres' performance successfully. The advisory board is firmly established in its role, and checks regularly on the group's effectiveness and that it is improving outcomes for children and families. Parents and the group's partners are well represented on the advisory group, which means that information is shared to link provision across a number of services.
- Staff are supervised and supported well. They are well qualified and experienced for their roles, and regularly share ideas and practice. The group is outward looking, for example researching practice elsewhere in partnership with the educational psychology service. This has resulted in a new programme to improve parenting skills which will be shared more widely across the local authority.
- Procedures to ensure the safety of families and staff, including lone working, are fully in place and consistently implemented. Regular update training about child protection matters ensures that these are clearly understood by staff. There is swift intervention for children identified as in need of additional support.
- The group's referral procedures, including for those subject to child protection plans, and the use of the Common Assessment Framework processes, help to ensure that children are kept safe from harm and that other partners are involved when necessary. Children who are looked after by the local authority are supported by a specialist service, and some also attend group activities.

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.

Group details

Unique reference number	80334
Local authority	Sutton
Inspection number	442820
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2600
Centre leader	Sarah Duggan
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	020 8408 1927
Email address	greenoakchildrenscentre@sutton.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- URN 80334: Green Oak Children's Centre, incorporating Stonecot and Worcester Park Children's Centre and Nonsuch and Cheam Children's Centre

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