

W5 Sunshine Children's Centre

Oxhey Early Years Centre, Eastbury Road, Watford, WD19 4RL

Inspection dates	23–24 September 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.

- The large majority of children and families from priority groups engage well with the centre.
- A range of good quality services are located at community venues across the reach area, which is a huge benefit for many families who cannot easily travel to the centre building.
- The centre's services and practice have a measurable impact in helping parents to build confidence and manage their children's behaviour positively.
- The volunteering programme is well structured and provides an effective pathway to paid work for some parents. Large numbers attend English for speakers of other languages courses, and the centre plays an important part in promoting community cohesion.
- Safeguarding matters are given high priority; work with partners is very effective in reducing the risk of harm to children. The centre's support for families in greatest need is timely, well-coordinated and helps reduce inequalities.
- Parents' views are canvassed regularly to inform centre priorities and help shape services.
- Leadership, management and governance are effective. Self-evaluation is accurate, and staff are committed to positive change. As a result, there is good capacity to make improvements.

It is not outstanding because:

- Not enough two-year-olds, particularly the most vulnerable, are accessing services to support their development and readiness for nursery.
- Work with some early years partners lacks focus on narrowing the achievement gap and on tracking the progress of children in danger of falling behind.
- There are too few opportunities available, especially for workless parents, to enhance education and skills.
- Case files are not maintained to a good enough standard; this detracts from otherwise high quality family support.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the sustained engagement of two-year-olds, particularly the most vulnerable, so that most benefit from services that will support their good development and readiness for nursery.
- Work effectively with early years partners to close the gap in achievement between children in danger of falling behind and others and strengthen the checks being made on their progress over time.
- Enhance the opportunities available for parents, especially those who are workless, to improve their basic skills, and increase participation in appropriate employability training.
- Make sure that there is rigorous management oversight of all family case files to ensure best practice in assessment and recording; and that the impact of the centre's actions are fully evaluated.

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 centre manager, acting head of centre/lead agency, local authority officers, partners, parents and members of the children centre committee and partnership board. The centre manager and acting head of centre/lead agency attended all team meetings.

The inspectors visited a number of activities held in the centre and a town centre supermarket's community room, including Tums and Tinies, Play and Learn and a baby clinic.

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 also looked at a wide range of documentation.

Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Christine Blowman	Additional inspector
Steve Nelson	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre group

Sunshine Children's Centre is a stand-alone centre that was opened in September 2007. The centre is managed on a day-to-day basis by Oxhey Early Years Centre on behalf of the Local Authority. A children's centre committee and partnership board are established to support governance. The staff team consists of the manager, a receptionist/practitioner, administrator and an early years' practitioner. A recently recruited family support worker is soon to take up her post. The centre delivers services from a range of community venues to help meet local needs, including Centrepoint Community Hall, St John's Church, the Community Room of a local supermarket, 'The Barn, a community venue owned by a local Charity' and Wellspring Community Church in Watford Fields.

Sunshine Children's Centre serves a large socially and economically mixed area; this includes Watford town centre and a local residential area known as Riverside, which are the most disadvantaged communities. The centre works in partnership with other children's centres because families sometimes choose to attend a centre nearer to where they live.

There are 1,314 children under the age of five years living in the reach area. Data suggest that about ten per cent live in poverty. The majority of families are White British or White Other with a number of families from various minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly Pakistani. A high number of families are quite transient and often move out of the area, either back to their country of origin or into social housing located outside the centre's reach area. When children join the Early Years Foundation Stage their skills and knowledge are on average below those expected for their age.

The centre's assessed priority groups are: children and families living in the most disadvantaged areas, lone/workless parents, children in receipt of two-year-old funding, children in need, looked after or subject to a child protection plan.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families **Good**

- Registrations are rising and currently stand at 85% due to the centre's effective actions to extend its reach. The centre has been successful in encouraging the large majority of children and families in its priority groups to use its services, including those who may typically be less likely to do so. This has been accomplished by the staff's effective work to overcome the barrier of the centre's location, which is some distance from where many families from priority groups live.
- Nearly all three-and four-year-olds access their funded education place. However, data show that only the minority of two-year-olds have attended the centre more than three times in the past year. Additionally, only two thirds of those eligible to take up their fifteen hours of free education do so. These features are weakening the centre's otherwise positive work to help children get off to a good start in education.
- Activities such as the Nurture group, which takes place from one of five community venue

used by the centre, enable families who most need support to easily access appropriate services. The clinics held at a supermarket in the town centre widen access for expectant and new parents, who benefit from health advice and timely family support as required.

- Children and families in greatest need have contact with the centre through effective one-to-one support, or from centre-coordinated specialist services, until their needs are met. The centre works effectively to promote equalities, and has been successful in engaging with the large majority of Pakistani families living in Riverside.
- The information provided by the local authority about the level of engagement is currently slower to come through than previously. This is because of teething problems related to the changeover in management systems. The centre and local authority are working collaboratively to overcome this temporary hiccup.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- An appropriate range of well-located services are offered to children and families. A sensible balance is achieved between those available to everyone and those targeted at priority groups. The strategy to take services out into the community and to where they are needed most is proving successful in helping improve the lives of families.
- The centre's support for children and families in greatest need is timely and well-integrated. Effective one-to-one work supports the large number of parents experiencing abusive relationships. Case files include a range of useful information, but not all are maintained to a high enough standard.
- Parents enhance their parenting skills and increase their understanding of how to keep their children safe by attending specific courses such as first aid. One parent commented about how much more they understand about boys' behaviour after attending the 'About boys' programme. Weekly 'Chatterbox Tots' sessions, run by the speech and language therapy team alongside centre staff and parents, ensure that children with communication needs receive well-coordinated support.
- Outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are improving, but the gap between the lowest achieving twenty per cent of children and the rest is not closing quickly enough. Partnership work with the outstanding co-located early year's centre includes tracking the learning and development of children who have accessed centre services. This is not the case for children who transfer to other early year's settings; this limits the centre's ability to help all children prepare well for their transfer.
- The volunteering programme is well-structured. Volunteers are supported positively in developing their planning and delivery skills, which enable them to run sessions for parents under the supervision of centre staff. For example, two volunteers recently planned and ran a five-week cookery course for parents, focusing on cooking healthy family meals on a budget. A number of past volunteers have successfully moved into paid work.
- Target families that attend adult learning sessions make good progress from their starting points in their social and educational development. The large majority, including the very high number of families who speak English as an additional language, make significant progress in developing English language. However, the breadth of courses available to

support parents' mathematics, ICT and employability skills development is too narrow. The centre is not yet tracking the take up of services by workless families closely enough.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The enthusiastic small staff team are well led by a manager who shows strong determination to move the centre forward. The team has a firm grasp on what is going well and where development is needed, with well-conceived plans assisting the drive for positive change. Supervision arrangements work well and link closely to staff appraisal and their on-going professional development.
- Governance arrangements are securely embedded. There is a clear flow of information between the governing body as lead agency, the children's centre committee, and partnership board. The children's centre committee members keep a close eye on the centre's performance and ask probing questions which add rigour to decision-making.
- Support from the local authority includes quarterly monitoring and improvement visits. Reports show the good progress the centre is making over time. They also highlight the actions required to further reduce inequalities and ensure that the most vulnerable children are helped to achieve a good level of development.
- Resources are managed efficiently. The use of some community buildings is free of charge, including a partner school's community room in the heart of the town. These add value to the centre's tight budget.
- The safeguarding and welfare of children is the number one priority for the centre. There are robust checks to ensure that staff, partners and volunteers are suitable to work with young children. All policies and procedures meet requirements, including e-safety which is promoted with parents. Effective use of agreed early help procedures, including the Common Assessment Framework, reduces the risk to children, including those subject to a child protection plan, in need or in care.
- Family support work is of high quality, but very recently the management oversight of case files to ensure best practice is consistent, has slipped. This is because the centre manager has been carrying the full caseload while awaiting the start of the new family support worker, and this has led to some gaps in assessment and recording. A useful tracking tool has been devised to support this work in going forward.
- Parents and children have plenty of opportunities to put forward their views, which the centre listens to carefully and uses to help shape services. For example, parents asked for session times to be reviewed and this was taken on board in the new programme. The centre is currently looking to extend its use of social networking to support marketing and publicity.

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.

Centre details

Unique reference number	23430
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	447494
Managed by	Oxhey Early Years Centre on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,314
Centre leader	Helen Walsh
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01923 482842
Email address	manager.sunshine@hertschildrenscentres.org.uk

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