

WH6 Howe Dell Children's Centre

Howe Dell Primary School, The Runway, Hatfield, AL10 9AH

Inspection dates

Previous inspection date

14–15 October 2014

Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness

This inspection:

Previous inspection:

Good

Not applicable

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.

- Most families from the area are registered with the centre and have very good access to the services it provides. A high proportion of families identified as belonging to priority groups are known to the centre and benefit from the good support they receive from the staff.
- Highly effective partnerships with health visitors and social workers ensure families receive good advice and guidance. This ensures that parents have a good understanding of how best to support their child's development and any concerns are identified at an early stage.
- Young children from priority groups have a good start to school life, and this helps to reduce inequalities. The 'Butterflies' group is particularly successful in helping parents to understand the many different ways they are able to support their children's learning.
- Centre staff are well qualified and use their good experience effectively to ensure outcomes for all families are improved. Parents can see that staff want the very best for all families. Staff provide positive role-models for parents.
- Leaders and managers within the centre, and the steering group monitor the centre's performance continually and rigorously. As they do this they regularly discover new ways to do things better and take clear action to make improvements when required. As a result, the centre continually improves the quality of its work and its impact on the lives of families.

It is not outstanding because:

- Children's obesity levels are too high and the centre does not track children's weight effectively enough to identify which children require support the most.
- Parents who attend adult education and training courses are not monitored by centre staff so their progress is not recognised, their achievements are not celebrated and encouragement to study at a higher level is insufficient.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Track children's weight effectively so that staff and key partners can identify families who would benefit from support to ensure they have a healthy diet and lifestyle, including making better and more frequent use of the outdoor play area.

Implement more effective arrangements to monitor the progress and success of parents on adult education courses. Provide more encouragement for them to continue with their studies and to be even more successful.

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 two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with parents, centre staff, headteachers of local schools, an advisor from the local authority, members of the steering group, members of the school governing body and representatives from health and early years education providers.

The inspectors visited activities taking place in the centre. Sessions observed included 'Bumps and Babies'. They also observed a staff appraisal meeting, a senior leadership meeting and a core group meeting attended by a local family, a social worker and a health visitor. Parents' views were taken into account from interviews, evaluations and satisfaction surveys.

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

Inspection team

Daniel Grant, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Jackie Cousins

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Howe Dell Children's Centre is located in Hatfield. It first opened in October 2007 and is co-located with Howe Dell Primary School (URN 117220) and Howe Dell Day Care Provision (URN EY361200). The school and day care are subject to separate inspection arrangements and both were graded 'good' at their last inspections. The reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. The school's governing body has management responsibility for the centre supported by a steering group. The centre meets its core purpose by offering a range of services which include family play sessions, parenting courses, and family support. These services are delivered to families from the children's centre building, community venues in the area and through outreach home visits.

There are approximately 738 children aged nought to five years living in the area and approximately 10% of these are defined as living in poverty which is lower than the Hertfordshire average of 14%. The area covered by the centre is mainly urban but also includes a small rural area and the village of Lemsford. The area is largely affluent with all families living in areas considered to be within the 70% least deprived in the country. The target groups identified by the centre are: workless households, lone parents, families living in the areas of greatest deprivation, families with vulnerable two year olds and those receiving other forms of support from the local authority and its partners.

A majority of families within the area served by the centre are White British with the remaining 40% made up of families from Poland, Southern Asia and a number of African countries. Housing in the area is a mix of private-rented and social housing. Levels of unemployment are low, with only a small number of children living in households dependent upon workless benefits. Most children enter early years provision with knowledge and skills that are lower than expected for their age.

Inspection judgements

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

- Effective planning and thorough analysis of data ensure that the centre is aware of a very large majority of families with a child under five years of age that live in the area. Outreach visits are used very effectively to engage families at home and to explain what the centre has to offer. A high proportion of families are registered with the centre because they understand what services are available and how the staff and partners can help them.
- The centre staff have established a strong reputation for providing highly effective support for all families within the area. The centre maintains strong and productive partnerships with community groups, schools and health services. These enable the centre to obtain accurate information about families most in need of support, including lone parents. Staff have a good understanding of how to work effectively with partners, including children's social care, to ensure information is exchanged promptly to help children and families receive the help and support they need.

- Families most in need of services are accurately prioritised which ensures they receive well planned support. Those at risk from poverty and homelessness have good levels of engagement, as do those facing debt and poor health. Staff are particularly effective at encouraging isolated and reluctant parents to get involved in the life of the centre. One such parent told inspectors 'I just needed some encouragement to get me out of the house. Now I'm involved in many activities and I even help to support other parents'. Parents expecting a baby are made to feel particularly welcome at the centre.
- Families benefit from the wide range of well-targeted information and support available. Enthusiastic health visitors hold regular clinics at the centre which are popular with families and very well attended. These clinics are fully integrated with other activities at the centre. This helps parents to learn more about the services on offer. The centre staff are highly motivated and ensure highly relevant services are tailored to individual families' needs and circumstances.
- The staff ensure that most eligible two-year-old children take up their funded place at an early years setting. The vast majority of these places are at settings that are of at least good quality. All of the three- and four-year old children eligible for funded places take up the offer.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The good range of stimulating activities and services provided by the centre is having a positive impact on the families who attend, including those most in need. Staff provide services in the centre, at several community locations including schools, early years settings and in families' own homes. The quality of care, guidance and support offered to individual families is good.
- The centre meets families' individual needs very well. Staff provide effective and focused support such as well-crafted parenting programmes for fathers, strategies for managing boys' behaviour and 'Foster Bugs' a focus group for foster carers. Tracking and monitoring of the progress made by those who attend these sessions clearly demonstrate the benefits and the improvements in family life.
- Breastfeeding rates are high because the centre and its partners are working together successfully to provide effective support, information and guidance. Staff provide good advice on weaning and effective instruction on preparing healthy meals. However, the childhood obesity rate is high and increasing. The centre does not effectively monitor children's weight in order to provide support for those families who need it the most. Insufficient use is made of the well-equipped outdoor play area to promote exercise and active lifestyles.
- Children are increasingly well prepared for school. Data show that children who attend the centre's activities make significant progress in their development. Children's understanding of language is above average because the staff are well trained in developing these key skills.
- Staff use their good levels of knowledge, skills and experience very effectively to model high standards in parenting and children's play, learning and development work. They make

sure all activities are carefully planned so that children and families get the most out of them. Staff make sure that the centre continually improves what it has to offer so that families receive greater benefit. Detailed evaluations show that almost all sessions make a positive difference to those who attend.

- The centre ensures that parents have access to a broad range of good adult learning courses, volunteering opportunities, information about job vacancies and vocational training. However, staff do not track parents to monitor their attendance or their level of progress on courses. Consequently, staff are unable to provide sufficient support to encourage parents to continue learning, focus on achievement or plan the next steps in their learning.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Arrangements for leadership, governance and management of the centre are good. The centre manager and the steering group have a good understanding of the needs of local families. They are aware of the centre's strengths and know what is required to ensure that it continues to provide good services to local families. Inspirational leadership through the school's headteacher promotes effective teamwork. This ensures the centre's resources are deployed efficiently and to full capacity.
- The quality of services and performance of the centre are monitored closely by senior leaders, the steering group and the local authority. Close analysis of data and trends in performance are used effectively by leaders to ensure families receive a good range of effective services. Key members of the steering group visit the centre frequently and demonstrate a keen interest in the good work of the staff, including the way the centre continues to reduce inequalities for local families.
- Parents are fully involved in many aspects of running the centre, including decision making processes. The 'Parents Voice' group is very active and meets regularly to review services. Several parents also make a significant contribution through their membership of the steering group, through their frequent and thorough evaluation of services and through their responses to consultation on new ideas and developments. Local councillors and community group representatives support the work of the centre because they recognise how it helps local families.
- The centre manager has particularly high expectations of her staff and supports the centre team very well. She makes sure that staff are well trained and that their performance is managed thoroughly. Policies and procedures are effective and are understood by all. The centre has received an award in recognition of the way it positively and successfully invests in the people who work there. The centre has a good range of stimulating resources which ensure families get the most out of their time at the centre.
- Staff have good awareness of local safeguarding procedures, which they use effectively to help promote the welfare of children and families. Staff have good experience of working successfully with other organisations to safeguard children. They know what to do if they become concerned for the safety and welfare of those who use the centre. This includes children identified as in need, those subject to child protection plans and looked after

children. Staff make good use of the Common Assessment Framework to ensure families receive planned support. Adults who have experienced domestic abuse receive effective support.

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	21461
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	447495
Managed by	The governing body of Howe Dell Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	738
Centre manager	Penny Briggs
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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