

The Wharf Nursery School and Children's Centre

Woolsack Way, Godalming, Surrey, GU7 1JG

Inspection date 22–23 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Not enough families with children under five are benefiting from the services, advice and support of the centre, including in Ockford Ridge, an area where the centre has highlighted that families need particular support at the current time.
- The centre is not systematically tracking the long-term impact of its works on children's learning and development or on improving the parenting skills of adults.
- Parents do not have enough opportunities to take part in adult learning and training leading to qualifications or to volunteer in the centre. They do not get all the advice and support they need about returning to work to improve the economic stability of their families.
- Over time the advisory board has not had enough impact on the centre's work. Under the leadership of the current Chair, the revitalised board has not had enough time to show its impact on supporting improvement.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- This is an improving centre, with an effective leader, staff team and governing body, which is clearly focused on improving the lives of families in the area. As a result, more and more families are benefiting from its work, especially in Aarons Hill, an area it has identified where parents are most in need of support.
- The centre works well with its partners to provide a range of good quality services which effectively support children's early learning and development and the parenting skills of adults.
- The centre's work with families in their own homes is very effective in supporting those most in need of help to improve the lives of their families and in keeping children free from harm.
- The centre is very important to the community and offers high levels of care, guidance and support. Parents find the centre staff unfailingly warm and welcoming, and 'non-judgemental' as one parent said.

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 leader and staff and representatives of the local authority. They also met with the headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body of the linked school. Inspectors held discussions with key partners, either in person or on the telephone, including health, social care, housing, adult education and early years providers. They also talked to parents informally and in meetings.

The inspectors visited activities on the main site in Godalming and in the Eashing Building, a satellite venue within the grounds of Green Oak Church of England Primary School.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including information about the numbers of families attending the centre, policies and procedures related to the safeguarding of children and the centre's plans for improvement. They also considered surveys of parental satisfaction.

Inspection team

Graham Lee	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Additional Inspector
Clive Blanchette	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The Wharf Nursery School and Children's Centre is a stand-alone centre, which opened in 2009. On its main site in the town centre of Godalming, it provides integrated services with a 48 place maintained nursery school (URN: 124913). The nursery provision was not part of this inspection. The centre also provides services at the Eashing Building, which is located within the grounds of Green Oak Church of England Primary School and Nursery (URN: 125185). The previous reports of the nursery and school are available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Eashing Building also serves as the administrative hub of the centre. The headteacher and governors of Wharf Nursery School and Children's Centre manage the centre on behalf of the local authority. On a day-to-day basis the centre is led by the centre leader. The centre provides early childhood services, parenting courses and health services in conjunction with its key partners. It supports families in need of most help in their own homes. The centre also helps to put parents in touch with the right people for advice about issues such as housing, benefits and the management of debt.

The centre serves the town of Godalming and surrounding villages. There are currently approximately 1545 families with children under five in the area. Most families are of White British origin although about 13% are from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of children under-five living in workless households and those dependent on benefits is relatively low but rises in the two areas where there is a significant amount of social housing in Aarons Hill and Ockford Ridge. Children enter early years settings with levels of skills and understanding which vary considerably but are broadly typical for their age.

The centre has identified families living in Aarons Hill as in need of particular help because this is a location where financial hardship and unemployment are significantly higher than in other parts of the centre's area. It has also highlighted families in Ockford Bridge as needing additional support. This is a location where families also experience some financial hardship. The centre's final priority group is those families referred to them by key partners as being in need of targeted support.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Find ways to increase the number of families with young children in the area benefiting from the centre's work, especially in the Ockford Ridge area, where families need support at the current time.
- Develop effective systems to track the impact of the centre's work on children's learning and development and the parenting skills and of adults.
- Work with key partners to provide more opportunities for parents to take part in adult learning and training leading to qualifications, to volunteer and to benefit from advice about future career paths in order to improve the economic stability of their families.
- Develop the role of the advisory board so that it is able to make a full contribution to the work of the centre and is instrumental in bringing about improvement.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Access to services requires improvement because not enough families in the area are yet benefiting from the services and support of the centre. While registration has increased significantly since the centre leader arrived, a minority of families, including those expecting children, are not yet taking advantage of what the centre has to offer.
- The centre's concerted efforts in Aarons Hill, the location of greatest hardship in the area, have been very successful in making contact with more families with under-fives in that location. As a result, most of these families are now registered and taking advantage of the activities, support and

advice provided by the centre. This includes a number of lone parents and households where no adult is working.

- Ockford Ridge is a more recently identified priority area because of the uncertainties facing families in that area. The involvement of families with young children has increased only slowly to date. As a result, nearly half of these families, including the households where no adult is working, are not yet involved with the centre.
- In collaboration with key partners, the centre works very well with families in their own home, when they might otherwise be reluctant to get involved. As a result, the centre is able to help the families referred to them to access the services and support they need to make improvements.
- In Surrey, the allocation of places for children entitled to free two-year-old education is managed centrally. All these children have been offered places in good quality early years settings and most take them up. The centre plays an important role in supporting families with their choices and helping children to make the most of their early education.
- Systems for checking the attendance of families and the regular participation of those identified as in need of help are becoming increasingly robust, enabling the centre to have an accurate picture of the support provided for families in the area.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The impact of services requires improvement because the services provided by the centre are not yet benefiting the large majority of families in the area, including those the centre identifies as most in need of help.
- The centre provides a range of good quality, well-attended services, such as 'Play and Learn' sessions for children of different ages, to support their early learning and development and help prepare them for school. This is supported effectively by strong partnerships with schools and early years providers in the area.
- As a result, outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are above the national and Surrey averages and the gaps between the mostly financially disadvantaged children and the rest are closing. However, the centre has only just begun to track the long-term impact of its work on these children and cannot, therefore, easily demonstrate its contribution to this positive picture.
- The centre has good partnerships with health professionals, and clinics are run by health visitors and midwives from the centre. This leads to good sharing of information so that the centre can work with families expecting children and those identified as in need of help. The centre has helped parents to improve the health of their families through, for example, stopping smoking and improving their family's diets.
- There are a range of good quality services to promote parenting skills. As a result, there have been clear improvements in children's behaviour and the emotional stability of families. However, the centre is not yet systematically tracking the long-term impact of this work on the well-being of families.
- Families where adults are out of work are a key part of the reason why Aarons Hill and Ockford Ridge have been identified as being in need of particular support. A number of adults have made it clear that they would welcome additional training and careers advice. In spite of this, there have been limited opportunities for parents to access adult learning and training leading to qualifications and information about job opportunities through the centre's partnerships with providers.
- A few parents have had the opportunity to volunteer at the centre and in the community which has improved their confidence and chances of getting a job. However, very few currently volunteer on a regular basis.
- A real strength of the centre is the high levels of care, guidance and support provided by all the staff. Unanimously, parents told inspectors how friendly, warm and welcoming they find the staff. They also say 'they are there for them' in times of crisis: for example, helping with fundamental and immediate practical needs such as food parcels, visits to the Guildford Furniture Project, and providing transport enabling them to get advice on issues such as housing and benefits.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre leader has worked very effectively over the past two years with staff, the local authority and the headteacher and governors of the school to bring about marked improvements in the centre's work. All are united in their commitment to improving the lives of families in the area. As a result, the registration and involvement of the families have increased considerably from a low base.
- The centre leader has established a united and committed staff team. They are well qualified and understand their roles well. Arrangements for the management of performance and supervision of staff are robust and help staff to develop alongside many opportunities for training.
- The local authority and headteacher and governors of the school know their roles well and challenge the centre leader to improve the involvement of families and quality of services. Governors know what is happening in the centre, and understand how the information about the area is showing that families most in need are getting the support they need.
- The advisory board is made up of representatives from key partners. However, in the past the attendance has been spasmodic and the board's role in challenging the centre to improve has not been clear. However, under the leadership of a new Chair the board has been revitalised and is much clearer about its role. However, it is not yet able to demonstrate the impact of this clearer focus.
- The centre is using information about the area it serves increasingly well to identify the families that need support the most. Aspects of the centre's performance and services are checked regularly by the centre leader, governors and local authority, leading to improvement. Together with clear plans for improvement in key areas, this shows that the centre is focused well on the aspects that need improving.
- The protection and safeguarding of children is a priority for everybody at the centre. Procedures and policies for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of young children are robust. The centre works very effectively with health and social care to ensure that looked after children, children subject to a child protection plan and those in need are well supported. Children assessed as needing additional support through Common Assessment Framework processes are kept safe and improvements are made to their family life and well-being.
- The centre is very well resourced at both sites. Creative use is made of staff and the two sites to meet the needs of all families and those in need of particular 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	23566
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	451685
Managed by	The governing body on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1545
Centre leader	Dawn Bellman
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01483 415220
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