

D9 The Lanes Children's Centre

St Paul's VA C of E Primary School, The Common, Chipperfield, WD4 9BS

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| Inspection dates | 4–5 November 2014 |
| Previous inspection date | Not previously inspected |

| Overall effectiveness | This inspection: | Outstanding | 1 |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| | Previous inspection: | Not applicable | |
| Access to services by young children and families | | Outstanding | 1 |
| The quality of practice and services | | Outstanding | 1 |
| The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management | | Outstanding | 1 |

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is an outstanding centre.

- The centre is highly valued as the hub of the community. It directly provides a wide range of high quality services, and supports many other providers to deliver services that meet the needs of children and families living in the area extremely well. As a result, most families access services regularly and participation rates are high.
- Without exception, parents spoken to by inspectors were very appreciative of the care, guidance and practical 'hands on' support they receive from the centre which has helped them to make positive and long lasting changes to their lives. Comments such as, 'family life is much better now', and 'the centre staff are always there, and I call them first', sum up the very high regard that parents have for the centre's work.
- Extremely effective leadership, governance and management ensure that the centre's high expectations and aspirations for families are relentlessly pursued. Centre staff are exceptionally committed and work tirelessly to find ways to improve their practice further, and to broaden the range of services they can offer to families, including those associated with Her Majesty's Prison, (HMP) The Mount.
- Partnership working is very well established and exceptionally strong. This ensures that almost all children in the area are registered. Links with health partners are particularly good and allow the centre to identify children and families in need of help and to respond very quickly.
- The centre tailors the support it provides for its target groups extremely well, so they make rapid progress. For example, lone and young parents develop their parenting skills confidently.
- The centre welcomes feedback from parents and works very creatively to meet their requests. Parents' skills are recognised and volunteering is promoted but the numbers currently involved in this way is small. Consequently, opportunities for parents to support the centre's work, and to maintain or improve their employability skills, particularly for those who are workless, are not being maximised.
- Almost all children take up their entitlement to free early education and the centre's detailed tracking shows that those who attend the centre are extremely well prepared for school.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Develop further opportunities for parents, including those who are out of work, to become volunteers and use their skills to support the work of the centre to help them improve their employability skills.

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 the children's centre manager and centre staff, representatives from the Pre-school Learning Alliance (PsLA) and Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) The Mount, a health visitor, members of the centre's Advisory Group, parents, childminders, pre-school and school staff, volunteers and a representative from the local authority. They held telephone discussions with parents and the County Council lead for Children's Services.

The inspectors visited a range of activities and sessions held at outreach sites including a music session held alongside a baby clinic at Bovingdon Memorial Hall, and a parent and toddler group held in Chipperfield Village Hall.

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

Inspection team

Alison Cogher, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Ann Janssen

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The Lanes Children's Centre opened in 2010 and provides services directly, by commissioning them from a range of partners, and by working in partnership with health professionals. Services are delivered at the centre's own premises, at venues within the community including village halls, and within HMP The Mount.

The centre is managed by the Pre-school Learning Alliance (PsLA) on behalf of the local authority. The PsLA run nine children's centres on behalf of Hertfordshire. The centre manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre. She is supported by an advisory group that consists of representatives from partner organisations, key stakeholders that work with the children's centre and the local authority.

There are approximately 497 children under five years of age living in the reach area. The very large majority of the families living in the area are from White British backgrounds with the remaining families representing a wide range of other backgrounds. No communities within the centre's area fall within the 30% most deprived areas nationally. Levels of unemployment in the community are low and few children under five live in households dependent on workless benefits.

When they start early years provision, most children have skills and knowledge that are typical for their age. The personal, social and communication skills of a few children are below those usually found.

The key target groups identified by the centre are young parents, lone parent families particularly those reliant on workless benefits and parents with mental health issues. The centre works very closely with HMP The Mount to support visiting families of prisoners as an additional priority group.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Outstanding

- Very strong links and excellent communication with partners ensure that the centre is able to identify the needs of children and families in the area extremely well. All those involved in the work of the centre are clear who the target groups are, and work tirelessly to ensure that they access relevant services.
- Almost all children in the area are registered because information sharing between partners is extremely good. Parents expecting children are identified quickly by midwives and health visitors, and those most in need are supported to access health services delivered by the centre staff such as help with breastfeeding, weaning and healthy eating for the very young.
- The centre works alongside health visitors to sustain the engagement of families. For example, the very well attended, and much enjoyed, 'Under One' music group is held in a room next to the baby clinic run by the health visitor. Attendance at both groups is high because they are held simultaneously.
- The centre uses multiple ways to ensure families' engagement with the centre is sustained. Personal invitations are given to targeted families, and in some instances, centre staff provide individual support in a family's home if they are initially reluctant to attend centre-based services. The centre is considered 'the first port of call' for families when they need advice and support. At 97%, the participation rates of targeted families is extremely high.
- All eligible two-year-olds have been helped to take up their free education place at a good or better quality early years setting, and most three-year-olds also access their place. The centre is very quick to help parents secure specialist support for their child if they have a specific need. For example, access to speech and language support, or help to join a group for parents of disabled children or those who have special educational needs, is timely and effective.
- The centre establishes very strong and supportive contact with all targeted families including those assessed under the Common Assessment Framework. Systematic and detailed recording of communication between agencies means that these families receive very prompt and sharply focused support that meets their needs quickly.
- Parents with mental health issues are provided with practical, and if necessary, specialist support. Centre staff are alert to those parents who 'are displaying anxiety about parenting' and respond rapidly to help them resolve issues quickly.
- The centre's work with HMP The Mount is innovative and provides an outstanding service for prisoners and their families that helps them to sustain positive relationships with each other, and to access services in their home areas.

The quality of practice and services

Outstanding

- The centre is at the heart of its community. It provides a wide range of very good quality services which ensure families and their children make good and often rapid progress in gaining the skills they need to ensure their safety, improve their well-being, and to raise their aspirations for their futures.
- Care, guidance and support are exceptionally good. Centre staff are trusted to 'give the right answer, or find out quickly if they don't know'. Families express great confidence in the centre and have no reservations about asking for help.

- Procedures for tracking the progress of targeted families and children are very thorough. They include a review procedure that records all actions taken from when an issue is identified through to its successful resolution. Parents' views and their confidence in taking what they have learned forward into their everyday lives is recorded and celebrated.
- Working with HMP The Mount has made a significant contribution to sustaining family cohesion for prisoners. Over the last year centre staff have engaged with 847 children during prison visiting times and have sent 323 letters from children to their fathers. Wives or partners of prisoners have been helped to register for services at the children's centre near their home, and some have been supported into education that has led to the gaining of qualifications and employment.
- Very effective partnerships with childminders, pre-schools, schools and parents ensure that children are supported extremely well to be ready for school. Courses delivered by the centre help parents to support their children's learning at home. Comments such as 'I never knew I could do so much maths work with my daughter in a supermarket' exemplify the very positive impact these courses have on giving parents the confidence and skills they need to help their children to learn.
- All courses planned by centre staff have an element linked to improving the health of families. This very effective approach contributes significantly to the below average obesity rates in young children in the area.
- Keeping children safe is threaded through all activities delivered or supported by centre staff. Staff talk to parents constantly about how to keep themselves and their children safe in and out of the home environment, including the use of mobile telephones.
- The centre provides exceptional and timely support for families, including lone and young parents, to access courses such as 'About Boys' and 'Parenting Puzzle' to help improve their parenting skills. Those seeking to improve their employability are helped to access adult education and training. There have been some notable successes as parents have secured qualifications and jobs.
- Volunteering is encouraged and the contribution made by those who work with the centre is highly valued. However, the centre is not promoting volunteering enough to enable parents to contribute fully to the centre's work, or to improve their employability skills particularly of those who are not in work.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Outstanding

- The PSLA as the lead agency, the local authority and the centre manager are very clear about what the centre does well and what could be improved further. They are highly ambitious for families and unstinting in their efforts to reduce any inequalities or barriers that may be getting in the way of families making and sustaining improvements in their lives. The focused action plan provides a clear structure for leaders, and those responsible for governance, to check the progress being made towards achieving the centre's targets for improvement.
- Excellent use is made of all the information available, including data, to identify those most in need of the centre's services and support, and to direct resources to best meet their needs.
- Members of the advisory group bring extensive expertise to their role and information sharing is exemplary. They are very well informed and able to challenge the centre to improve. Parents have a strong voice within the advisory group so the centre is able to respond to their views and ideas

quickly.

- Feedback from parents is welcomed by staff. They take speedy action in response to the information they receive from centre users to ensure that services and activities continue to meet their needs very well.
- Staff are very well qualified and seek continually to broaden their personal skills and knowledge. This approach has resulted in staff acquiring the professional skills necessary to deliver a wide range of courses to support parenting and child development which keeps the cost of running courses down. This provides excellent value for money because parents, including those from targeted families, can afford to attend more of the courses as they seek improve their parenting skills.
- Arrangements for monitoring the work of the centre and the performance of individual staff is exemplary. Challenging targets are set, met, and in some cases exceeded, which results in the rapid improvement of the centre's services and the impact they have on families' lives. Staff are very clear about how well they are doing, and about their roles and responsibilities within what is an extremely strong team.
- The centre manager has a very good oversight of case files which are reviewed frequently to check the progress being made by families. Safeguarding has the highest priority and staff are very well qualified and trained. Families assessed under the Common Assessment Framework, including children subject to child protection plans, those in need, or looked after are discussed fully, with detailed reasons given for opening and closing cases. Working practices and information sharing between agencies are extremely good and supported by very robust policies and procedures that are understood by all.
- Parents are unstinting in their praise of the centre staff and actively spread the word that the centre is the place to go to for advice and guidance about anything. Comments such as the centre has been 'a life line' and 'attending has been invaluable and given me confidence and friendships' reflect their typical, extremely positive views.

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

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| Unique reference number | 20902 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 447489 |
| Managed by | The Pre-school Learning Alliance on behalf of the local authority |
| Approximate number of children under five in the reach area | 497 |
| Centre leader | Zoë Hier |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Telephone number | 01923 262640 |
| Email address | thelanes@pre-school.org.uk |

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