

SA1 Lamer Fields Children's Centre

Beech Hyde Primary School and Nursery School, Nurseries Road, Wheathampstead, AL4 8TP

Inspection dates	5–6 November 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.

- Registration and participation rates have significantly improved. This is due to a range of successful approaches, including strong partnerships with a wide range of professionals and leaders' better collation and use of data. As a result the large majority of children and families sustain their involvement with centre services.
- Almost all two-year-olds are taking up the offer of a free place in early years settings that provide good or better quality early education.
- Families have access to a very welcoming, albeit small, centre with high quality resources.
- Parents speak highly of the centre. They value the good quality care, guidance and support provided by centre staff.
- The advisory board, which is led by a parent chair, is effective in holding the centre to account.
- Staff and leaders work together well as a team; they have a clear vision and are committed to improving the centre's services and outcomes for the families they are supporting.

It is not outstanding because:

- The sharing of information is not always as effective as it could be, due to the fact that the health service and social care partners use different information systems. This sometimes delays the recording and transfer of relevant information.
- There are not enough opportunities for parents to attend work-related training or volunteering programmes to help them improve their opportunities for better future economic well-being.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Work with local authority, social care and health partners to provide access to robust and timely information to avoid any duplication of effort and delays in information sharing regarding children and families most in need.
- Improve opportunities and access for parents to develop their economic and social well-being, particularly those who are workless, through better access to training and take up of volunteering opportunities.

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 centre manager, headteacher, centre staff, officers from Herts for Learning, health and education professionals, parents and representatives from the advisory board.

The inspectors visited The Hillydyke Community Centre which is used to deliver some services. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including self-evaluation form, action plans and data, safeguarding policies and procedures and a sample of case files.

Inspection team

Joan Cawdron, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Anthony Mundy

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Lamer Fields Children's Centre delivers services from a centre attached to Beech Hyde Primary School (URN 117301). The Centre provides outreach services across the villages of Wheathampstead, Kimpton, Peter's Green, Blackmore End and Gustard Wood, all of which are located more than 4.5 miles from the main town of St. Albans. These villages cut across two local authority areas, North Hertfordshire and St. Albans. Outreach services are offered in the Hillydyke Community Centre which is in the heart of the most deprived area, and Kimpton Memorial Hall, situated in one of the more isolated villages.

The children's centre is staffed by a centre manager, outreach workers, a play worker and an administrator. The local authority, Hertfordshire County Council, have commissioned responsibility for the governance of the Centre to Beech Hyde School. The children's centre has an advisory board which includes partners, parents and members of the local community.

There are approximately 610 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach area which is mainly affluent with pockets of disadvantage. Most families are White British. Accommodation in the most deprived areas is mostly social housing, including two and three bedroom flats. Many houses on these estates are occupied by local families made vulnerable through their circumstances, with a high proportion of lone and young parents. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are generally below those typical for their age.

In close partnership with other local agencies and providers, the centre offers services which include early childhood and family support, health and adult education, with crèche facilities where needed.

The centre's main priority groups are: children and families living in the areas of highest deprivation, children living in workless households, lone and teenage parents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Most children and families in the area are registered with the centre and have good access to the wide range of services that are offered. Active engagement in the local community including partnership work with health professionals, schools and the local community centre ensures that staff are aware of families' needs, including those expecting children.
- Staff work hard to involve families who fail to participate regularly. This has resulted in a significant improvement in the number of families accessing the services regularly including new mothers, lone parents, and those who are living in the areas where there is the most economic hardship.
- Families' needs are assessed accurately and thoroughly. Multi-agency meetings are used well to ensure support is carefully matched to meet children's and their families' needs. Outreach work is highly effective and tailored to meet the varied and difficult issues facing many families.
- Assessment at the age of two is used very efficiently to identify children who need additional support from outreach workers. Staff work hard to make sure that parents are aware of all the help which is available to them, including their children's entitlement to free early education when relevant. As a result of this work almost all children who are eligible are accessing places in good quality provision. Similarly, all children aged three and four take up their free entitlement to early education.
- Satisfaction rates are high. Parents speak highly of the support they have received from the centre. Some, who could not come to speak to inspectors, sent emails to ensure their views were heard. One parent commented that the help she received, when medical conditions made feeding her new baby difficult, was so encouraging and empathetic it made a world of difference to how she coped.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- A wide range of good quality and relevant activities is delivered by the centre staff team and their partners. These include activities open to everyone and those available to priority groups. New parents access the 'Bumps and Babies' group and the 'Jolly Welcome' session and this results in their regular participation in other groups as their children get older.
- Centre activities support children's learning and development well. The number of children in the area who achieved a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage this year, although lower than last year, is above the national average.
- Parents comment on the 'brilliant' support and 'unfailing welcome' they receive both in the centre and through home visits. One mother told inspectors that 'the centre is a blessing and staff are always helpful'. There are a few children with disabilities in the area and they are well supported through other services and also have access to the toy library in the centre.
- Care, guidance and support provided by centre staff is good. Outreach work is effective and well recorded. Services demonstrate the positive impact of their work on improving families' well-being.
- Case files and records are maintained to a high standard on the centre's own data base. The local authority, health service and social care partners use different information systems. Communication therefore between the centre and its partners relies on personal or written contact notes. This poses challenges for the centre and slows down the process of information sharing between partners.

- Good progress has been made over the last year in achieving health targets. The proportion of mothers who keep breastfeeding for at least six to eight weeks is above the level seen nationally. Obesity in children under five years of age is low and below the district and the county levels. Parents participate in healthy eating and exercise programmes, and weaning is discussed during sessions with new mothers.
- Health visitors no longer hold the weekly baby weighing clinics, and the centre is now providing opportunities for mothers to weigh their babies themselves and to access information and advice through the centre team. Drop-in support sessions for those who experience low mood or post-natal depression take place and provide caring help.
- Some parents have engaged in adult learning and followed courses, such as career development. Recently improved links with Jobcentre Plus now provide better job search activity. English and mathematics courses are provided by the local college and first aid training is also available. These courses are improving the employability skills of those who participate. However, there are too few opportunities for parents to attend work-related training programmes or volunteering to better prepare parents for their future.
- Parents benefit from parenting courses, gaining an improved understanding of how to manage their children's behaviour and promote their well being. Access to these programmes is shared between children's centres across the wider locality. Where required transport is provided by Wheathampstead Community Group which helps to help reduce barriers to accessing services.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre manager leads by example and has ensured that there is a very well motivated staff team. They share her high aspirations through full involvement in decision-making and in setting and reviewing the targets and direction of the centre.
- Performance management and supervision are well established and methodical. They include direct observation of sessions and interactions such as home visits. Staff training and appraisal procedures are carefully linked to centre priorities.
- The highly skilled team successfully focuses its efforts on having the maximum impact on reducing inequalities, tackling discrimination and improving the well-being of local families. The professional discussions that occur between members of the advisory board and the centre team contribute well to improving the outcomes for local families.
- Staff take their duties relating to safeguarding very seriously. Policies and procedures are thorough and the Common Assessment Framework process is used well to assess need and coordinate support for families, including those at risk of harm, children subject to child protection plans, and those in the care of the local authority.
- The centre's own effective information system is supported by data that is now being provided by the local authority from the newly implemented management information system. This information allows the centre to analyse its performance and to monitor the performance of all target groups and to compare their performance against others.
- Leaders are well aware of where the centre needs to develop further. They work well together to set goals and ensure that resources and services are available to meet the needs of young children and

their families.

- Members of the advisory board are drawn from partners and parents and have detailed knowledge of the day-to-day work of the centre. The chair of the advisory board is also a parent. The board reports to the school's governing body who have ultimate responsibility for governance matters.
- The centre is warm and welcoming and has many interesting and informative displays. Staff make good use of high quality resources which is evidenced in the delivery of well-targeted services and the on-going work with partners to meet both the apparent and less obvious needs of families in the area.

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	22603
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	447493
Managed by	The Headteacher and governing body of Beech Hyde Primary School on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	610
Centre leader	Sherry Roberts
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01582 834758
Email address	manager.lamerfields@hertschildrenscentres.org.uk

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