

Sythwood Children's Centre

Sythwood Primary School, Sythwood, Woking, GU21 3AX

Inspection date 11–12 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
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 centre has been particularly successful at engaging all of the priority groups across the wide geographic area which it covers, including those living in the least advantaged areas of Lakeview and Old Woking.
- Children who are individually referred to the centre, Traveller families and young parents also make good and regular use of the centre's services because they are tailored well to meet their needs.
- Staff are highly knowledgeable about the local area and proactive in taking services out to the community. They have established very effective links with a wide range of partners. As a result families who require one-to-one support receive excellent levels of care for often complex and multiple needs.
- The centre's programme to support children moving on to nursery and local schools has been highly effective in helping families make the transition to the next stage of their child's learning.
- Very effective day-to-day management of the centre and the good use of resources are highly effective in reducing inequalities in the local area.
- The centre is well placed to continue to improve. Leaders, governors and managers have a clear understanding of the centre's strengths, which groups of families need help, and what still needs to be done so that even more families benefit from attending the centre.
- The local authority and the governing body provide challenge and support to the centre through regular and effective monitoring.

It is not outstanding because:

- Although the centre has registered the large majority of children under five in the area, the registration of new births is inconsistent. This means that some families are not known to the centre.
- Some of the service level agreements with partners are not sufficiently focused on what will be provided and how the service will be evaluated.
- Policies relating to parents' use of mobile phones and e-safety are not sufficiently clear and are not always fully enforced.

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 head of centre, centre manager, community services manager and other staff. They met with a representative of the local authority and members of the governing body and advisory board. They spoke to a wide range of partners including those from health, social care, housing, schools and adult learning.

The inspectors visited the Woking town centre site, Old Woking Community Hall and Beaufort Primary School. They observed several sessions taking place such as 'Play and Learn' at Sythwood centre and 'Nought to Walk' at Old Woking. Three joint observations were conducted with staff.

They looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation and improvement plan, several case studies and safeguarding policies, practices and procedures. Senior centre staff and a representative of the local authority attended all the team meetings.

Inspection team

Joan Lindsay, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Ann Janssen	Additional Inspector
Barbara Saltmarsh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Sythwood Children's Centre opened in 2010. It merged with two other centres in April 2012 following a restructure, significantly expanding the area it serves. It provides family support, adult learning and health services. The hub centre is situated in Sythwood Primary School. Services are also delivered from Old Woking Community Hall, Beaufort Primary School and Woking town centre. The governors of Sythwood Primary School manage the centre on behalf of the local authority. The headteacher is the head of centre with the day-to-day management the responsibility of the centre manager. There is an advisory board in place. Sythwood Primary School is subject to a separate inspection. It recently became an academy, run by The Bourne Education Trust and as such has not yet been inspected. Previous inspection reports for the school and the on-site nursery, which was not part of this inspection, can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

There are approximately 3,116 children aged under five living in the area served by the centre. The area is widespread geographically and covers a very diverse range of socio-economic circumstances. Of the 28 separate defined localities in the area, Lakeview and Old Woking are considered to be in the top 30% least advantaged in the country. A further six are rated in the top 50%. The area is relatively ethnically diverse with approximately 31% of the population comprising families from ethnic minority backgrounds, mainly from Pakistani and East European heritage. White British heritage families account for approximately 60% of the population. The area also includes a Travellers' site.

The percentage of children under five living in workless households is 12% overall, which is above the county but below the national average. There are 15% of families claiming Working Tax Credit in the area served by the group. Children generally enter the Early Years Foundation Stage at levels below those expected for their age although this varies considerably across the area.

The centre has identified priority groups needing most support as: individual children referred to the centre; two-year olds eligible for free early education; low income families in the Lakeview and Old Woking areas; young parents; Traveller families; and those from minority ethnic groups.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Work with health partners to ensure that all new births are notified to the centre so that a far higher proportion of children are registered and have access to services as soon after birth as possible.
- Ensure that service level agreements with partners include more detailed information about what will be provided, the expected outcomes and how the service will be evaluated.
- Provide clear guidance to parents about the use of mobile phones in the centre and ensure there is an e-safety policy that relates more specifically to parents as well as staff. Enforce both policies consistently across the centre's venues.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The centre has successfully overcome the challenge of covering an extensive geographical area by taking services out into the community. This is especially so for the Old Woking area where highly popular groups such as 'Play and Learn' are attended by good numbers of families from priority groups.
- The monthly visit to the Traveller site with the Sure Start bus has been very effective in engaging this community. Young parents attend specific sessions, such as 'Changing Images' in Woking town centre, in high numbers and so engage well with services.
- Careful planning for priority groups' needs, such as providing English language classes and a wide range of adult education, has ensured that minority ethnic groups and adults from the least advantaged areas use the centre regularly.
- Regular post-natal and child health clinics held at Sythwood and Old Woking provide good opportunities for families to access early childhood services. Those expecting children, especially young parents, also have their needs met by being encouraged to attend the Baby Cafe and 'Young Parents' group, with transport costs and lunch provided where necessary.
- The centre has been very effective in supporting families with two-year olds eligible for free early education to take up the offer. All of them do so and most continue to engage well with the centre. The very large majority of three- and four-year olds take up early education.
- There is a system for new parents to be provided with the centre's registration form by health staff but at present, the completion of those forms is inconsistent. As a result, the centre is registering less than half of the local new births via this route.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- There is a good balance between services that are open to all and those designed to support families who need extra help. The centre monitors families' attendance at activities to ensure priority families are using all the services regularly and that they are relevant for their needs. For example, adult learning has a strong focus with opportunities to study GCSE English and NVQ Levels 1 and 2 in childcare.
- Staff deliver good quality sessions and are effective role models, particularly in relation to preparing children to move on to nursery or school. Parents say their children do so with confidence. The centre works closely with most of the local schools and early years settings. The very effective 'School Readiness Project' has led to children entering school being much more independent.
- Tracking of children's progress when they are at the centre is good and inequalities in achievement between different groups are narrowing. Parents become fully involved through the 'Parents' Petals' system of recording children's achievements, and this shows that children make good progress. However, although outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are improving, results overall are still below the national and county averages.
- Support provided by the weekly Baby Cafe helps to ensure that local breastfeeding rates for babies aged six-to-eight weeks at 68% are well above the national average. However, information on other health outcomes, such as healthy child weights, is difficult to measure because it is either too out of date or not narrowed down to the centre's specific area.
- Parenting programmes, adult education and support to help adults back into employment through volunteering have all had a positive impact on a significant number of families. Tracking of adults in the longer term shows they are supported very effectively to progress through various levels of study and on into employment or training.
- Children and families referred to the centre for one-to-one support from outreach workers receive excellent levels of care, guidance and support. Several families described the 'dramatic change on family life' that resulted. Comprehensive and well-kept case records reflect the great lengths that staff will go to to support families with often complex needs such as mental health issues or domestic violence. Parents typically say that staff 'go beyond what they need to do'.

- Families understand how to keep their children safe through attending first-aid courses and structured parenting programmes, for example. However, the centre's policies on the use of mobile phones and e-safety are not highlighted enough throughout the various venues so that occasionally some parents are unclear about why they should not use their phones during activities.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The day-to-day management of the centre is very strong with senior leaders working well together and with the governing body. The identification of families who need most support, combined with the development of services that best meet their needs, has led to a reduction in inequalities and significant improvements in the lives of many children and families.
- Staff are well supervised, with good attention paid to their professional development and training. Regular clinical supervision from an independent provider supports their well-being and helps to safeguard children. All the necessary pre-employment checks are carried out and regularly updated.
- The local authority provides good levels of monitoring and support as do governors, especially through the governing body's children's centre working party. They make good use of information to challenge the centre, which contributes to the centre's good rate of improvement.
- The advisory board currently has an unwieldy number of members, some of whom do not attend regularly. This is something that is being addressed by the centre to enable the board to be more streamlined and so contribute to an increase in its effectiveness.
- Although service level agreements are in place with all key partners, some are not detailed enough in highlighting what is expected from the organisation and how the service will be evaluated. For example the agreement with an adult education provider lacks detail about careers advice and guidance and what expected outcomes are.
- Staff are alert to any concerns in relation to child protection and act swiftly to ensure children are safeguarded. The centre's work with children who are looked after, those subject to child protection plans, children in need and those subject to early help assessments is good.
- Nearly all safeguarding policies are comprehensive but the ones regarding the use of mobile phones and for e-safety are not written specifically enough for parents to support them to understand the possible safeguarding risks.
- Resources, including the staff, are used very effectively to meet the needs of most priority groups in the widespread, diverse area served by the centre. The use of several venues, including the Sure Start bus and local schools, combined with strong partnerships with key agencies, all help to ensure priority families engage well with the centre and benefit significantly.
- Families have many opportunities to voice their opinion and contribute to decision making. They have very high levels of satisfaction with the centre summed up by the comment, 'I would recommend this centre to anybody.'

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 well-being 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	23103
Local authority	Surrey County Council
Inspection number	451661
Managed by	The governing body of Sythwood Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3,116
Centre manager	Kathryn Blackburn
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01483 727900
Email address	k.blackburn@sythwood.surrey.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

