

The Orchard Children's Centre

Strike Lane Primary School, Strike Lane, Freckleton, Preston, Lancashire, PR4 1HR

Inspection dates	26–27 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 quality of leadership, governance and management is outstanding. Leaders are highly competent and committed to doing their very best for families. They deliver the highest quality services through a small and dedicated staff team. As a result, the overall effectiveness of the centre is outstanding and ensures the best possible outcomes for families most in need. There is excellent capacity for further improvement.
- Most children under five years in the reach area are known to the centre. At least a large majority of families that the centre has identified as in most need of its services and support engage regularly with the services it offers.
- The excellent quality of practice and services is supported by exemplary partnership work. The centre manager and the centre coordinator both attract the highest levels of respect from their professional peers. This is largely because of the excellent quality of support and training they offer to develop early years practice in local settings and schools.
- Much of the provision for adult learning is of the highest quality. However, there remain opportunities for the centre to ensure that provision of linked adult learning is available consistently.
- Staff establish first-class relationships with a wide range of partners from health, schools, social care, charities and other organisations. This enables the centre to provide exceptional services that help families improve their general well-being, their health and to increase their life chances.
- The quality of care, guidance and support is commendable. Centre users are unanimous in their praise for the centre. Safeguarding children and adults is a vital part of the centre's work.
- Parents play a full part in the running of the centre through the active parents' forum and the knowledgeable advisory board. The advisory board comprises a wide range of partners. Members offer high levels of challenge and support in equal measure.
- The local authority provides strong challenge to the centre and maintains equally high ambitions for its continuing development, while recognising the many competencies offered by leaders.
- Although ongoing work is supported well by health partners, breastfeeding data made available to the centre lack accuracy. Currently they show rates of sustained breastfeeding are not high enough.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- In partnership with health colleagues, improve the accuracy of data collected about breastfeeding and so help to increase further the numbers of mothers who continue to breastfeed their babies at six-to-eight weeks.
- Build on existing work with partners to ensure that provision of linked adult learning is available consistently.

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 centre and school staff, leaders and managers, representatives of the local authority, advisory board and parents' forum. They also met representatives from health, employment, education, early years and social care organisations. They spoke to parents, grandparents and volunteers at the centre, at outreach sites and on the telephone.

The inspectors visited a baby group in Lytham, a 'school links' group at Strike Lane Primary School, a 'stay and play' session at Warton and a 'positive steps' adult learning session at a community centre at Lower Lane within the reach.

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

Inspection team

Jane Hughes, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
David Ellwand	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The Orchard Children's Centre operates as a standalone centre. It is co-located with Freckleton Strike Lane Primary School; the headteacher is centre manager. The children's centre coordinator is responsible for its day-to-day running. Staffing comprises two part-time outreach workers and part-time financial and administrative support. Services and one-to-one targeted outreach support are delivered across the reach. 'School links' work is delivered by a commissioned outreach worker across four local primary schools. The centre links informally with other local centres to provide a comprehensive service. The centre has an advisory board which oversees the centre's management and main decisions.

Childcare based on the site is run by an external provider, Blue Bear Nursery and Pre-School. Strike Lane Care Club operates from the centre's community room. It is open every school day and provides before- and after-school care for children aged four to 11. These settings are inspected separately. Their reports are available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The reach is geographically large with some isolated communities. Three of the 10 super output areas are in the 50% areas of highest deprivation countrywide. There are 735 children under five years in the reach; 13.7% live in workless households. Almost all residents are White British.

The centre offers a range of services including family support, 'stay and play' and baby groups. It has identified those in need of its services and support as lone parents and children from low income families.

Children from the reach generally enter early years provision with skills broadly typical for their age.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Outstanding

- The centre enjoys a high profile among families in the reach. Almost one quarter of families who access the centre self-refer. Centre staff do not expect families to 'come to them' but, instead, provide an increasing range of outreach services to attract those who may not otherwise access services.
- Exceptional sharing of information between the centre and its partners ensures that provision is targeted precisely to meet individual needs and attracts families that the centre manager identifies as most in need of centre services and support, namely lone parents and children from low-income families. This is confirmed by partners who say 'The centre is a genuine hub in the community.'
- Most families with young children are known to centre staff. At least a large majority of families most in need of support, particularly lone parents and children living in low income families, are registered and engage regularly with centre services. Most children from these families take up the free entitlement to early education because the centre coordinator has been tenacious in identifying them. Almost all early years providers in the reach offer either 'good' or 'outstanding' provision.
- The leadership knows which strategies are working well to engage families most in need in centre activities, including those expecting children and families who may be less likely to attend. Centre staff go out of their way to ensure provision meets exactly the needs of those families most in need of support. One parent, who is now a trainee with choices of further progress at work after a successful course and apprenticeship, thrives on work and the chance to give back some of the support in crisis that she experienced herself. She confirmed 'Loads of doors are now open for me.'
- Regular referrals from partners, particularly health, enable the centre to register most families. Outreach work is highly effective in supporting families in the groups hardest to reach so that they wish to return to participate in activities either run by the centre or signposted by them.

The quality of practice and services

Outstanding

- Much of the centre's work is specific to individual families, especially lone parents and children living in low-income families. Even so, leaders still retain a key commitment to provide some services aimed at all families. One partner confirmed that the 'centre has a massive culture of equality, which helps parents and providers work well together.' For example, the centre is now a distribution centre for the Fylde food bank. This stems from the excellent partnership working between local children's centres which has a profound impact on families' lives.
- Much work is done to secure first-class transition arrangements across all types of providers from schools to childminders. The centre established the will among local early years providers for a 'transition charter'. All providers subscribe to this, ensuring consistently high-quality, accurate information is passed from one provider to the next. All private providers introduce the centre to new parents at enrolment so that registration follows quickly and parents do not drop out of contact.
- Professional colleagues associated with the co-located primary school confirm that 'the centre has made a massive difference in helping improve attendance and building on good relationships with families.' These benefits help to raise the proportion of children in local primary schools, 72.7% in 2013, who reach a good level of development by the end of Reception. Children in most need of support make just as much rapid progress as other children from their individual starting points. Assessments are recorded for those who attend regularly. For pupils within the reach, the gap in achievement between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest by the end of Reception Year is narrowing rapidly and is smaller than the national average. Focused work continues to help boys to do as well as girls across the reach.
- The centre manager organises a programme of professional development for all early years providers. This is held in high regard and it is common for upwards of 50 practitioners to attend professional development evenings arranged by the centre.
- The centre collects a large quantity of data which is analysed carefully to identify what is working well and why. However, breastfeeding data provided by health colleagues are inaccurate due to inconsistent collation practices. Currently, it is not possible to show enough of an increase to the 29% of mothers who currently continue to breastfeed at six to eight weeks. Obesity in children of Reception age is well below average at 7.9%, immunisation rates are high and smoking at delivery is well below average.
- Outstanding care and support make a profound difference to families' social, emotional and economic well-being. Including at times of crisis, the centre improves users' life chances and the quality of family life, in accessing training and volunteering opportunities and in returning to work. Although there is much work with partners to provide adult learning courses, some of those planned do not always take place, due to issues beyond the centre's control. This leads to some inconsistency for would-be learners.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Outstanding

- Leaders, governors and managers are exceptionally adept at juggling a huge body of knowledge about families in the reach, the skills offered by staff and those available through professional partners. They use all this information each day as they meet the needs of children, families, adults and staff. They pursue excellence in all they do and this results in the highest quality of outcomes for centre users from all areas within the reach. The local authority looks to the centre to disseminate best practice across the district to other centres, early years providers and parents. It checks the centre's performance regularly and shows its ambition for both families and staff as it provides ever increasing challenges to improve still further.
- Staff are proud of the services they provide, saying 'We help so many people, it's a pleasure to help them.' Despite working with a small staff team and a very small budget, leaders direct the flow of information sharing particularly well so that there are no gaps in provision. Relationships with other children's centres are excellent and ensure that there are no barriers to families

accessing the very best provision available within any local centre. For example, disabled children and those with special educational needs are identified quickly and usually helped to access specialist services at another local centre.

- Self-evaluation is detailed and an ongoing improvement tool. Staff supervision is comprehensive and there are exemplary opportunities for professional development both for centre staff and for those in other centres. For example, a 'speed dating' evening allowed over 50 early years providers within the reach to hold 15 minute discussions with professionals and to find out how they could access their expertise during the day. This was an innovative way to help individual providers feel less isolated and to be able to tap into a wealth of valuable experiences.
- Safeguarding is given the highest priority by all staff. Staff are vetted carefully and training is updated regularly. Record keeping is meticulous. Staff are extremely well deployed to squeeze every last minute of time and expertise from every member of this highly cohesive team. Professional supervision is detailed and performance is managed particularly well so staff feel, and are, valued highly.
- Information is shared in an exemplary manner. Collaboration between agencies is closely monitored and is highly effective to avoid duplication of services. Case files documenting outcomes and ongoing support for looked after children, children in need, those supported with a child protection plan and families supported through the Common Assessment Framework process do as outstandingly well as others who access centre services. This is because centre staff work constantly to reduce inequalities. Families who are most in need are nurtured and receive expert support to help them to overcome barriers to success and so flourish. This is because staff empower families to gain independence and to become increasingly resourceful. Partners say 'the centre is the cement that holds together social and health care in the area'.
- Families appreciate thoroughly that the centre is a calm and harmonious place of safety. The plentiful resources are high quality and are valued and cared for very well by families.
- Staff are mindful of the monocultural nature of the local community. They work hard to develop users' knowledge and understanding of diversity and social integration.
- Governance from the advisory board is excellent. Members, including parents, review regularly the centre's data, including how well inequalities are addressed within the reach. They challenge outcomes and management decisions and contribute actively to the self-evaluation process. They appreciate the high quality of practice and services and ensure that the best possible value for money is provided and that resources are used effectively. Parent members communicate views from the active parents' forum.
- Communications are excellent. Staff are very responsive both to families and other agencies. For instance, families who may be reluctant to approach police directly are now very happy to communicate through the centre, so it is easier to identify community problems before they escalate.

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	23227
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	452791
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	735
Centre manager	Sarah Bamber
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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