

NH7 York Road Children's Centre

York Road Nursery School, York Road, Hitchin, SG5 1XA

Inspection dates	25–26 November 2014
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

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 children's centre is good.

- The centre has worked successfully to register the vast majority of families in the area served by the centre. It has worked purposefully with 73% of those living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.
- Leaders and staff plan a balance of services open to everyone. Tailored services match the needs of families well. The sessions delivered are of high quality and are well attended.
- Families value highly the individual support and guidance they receive from staff. This helps parents build their confidence in parenting skills, improve their lives, lead healthy lifestyles and keep their children safe. Safeguarding is given high priority. Case files are maintained to a high standard.
- Children make good progress. The proportion of local children achieving a good level of development at the end of their Reception Year is consistently above the national average. Most two and three year-olds who are eligible for funded early years education take up their entitlement, enabling a smooth transition to school.
- Governance arrangements are effective. The local authority, governing body and the advisory board support and challenge the centre's performance well. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre and play a key role in taking things forward.
- Excellent partnerships, combined with strong leadership and hardworking staff result in outstanding teamwork, improved outcomes for children and families and reduced inequalities.
- Parents' views are considered when planning provision. As a result, satisfaction rates in the services they use are high.

It is not outstanding because:

- There are insufficient opportunities and courses available to improve parents' English and mathematics skills, gain qualifications and help prepare them for employment.
- Systems to track children's progress and the achievement of parents who are signposted to other services are not thorough enough. Consequently, the centre is unable to evaluate accurately the difference it is making to the well-being of these two groups.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the opportunities for further education and training, especially for parents from target groups by:
 - carrying out regular checks on individual education and training needs
 - providing appropriate opportunities for parents to develop their language, literacy, numeracy, computing and employability skills.
- Strengthen the systems to track and monitor the progress of:
 - individual children during centre sessions and when they move onto early years settings
 - parents when they access further education courses or skills training and their pathway towards employment.

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, local authority officers, centre staff, members of the advisory board and parents. Inspectors also met with the acting head of the co-located York Nursery School, the headteachers of local primary schools, members of the early years team, Jobcentre Plus, health and other community partners.

The inspectors visited a range of sessions and activities held at the children's centre. Activities observed included, 'Baby and You', 'Baby Signing' and 'Tots, Toddlers, Toys and Talk'. They also observed activities held at Purwell Community Centre.

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

Inspection team

Qaisra Shahraz, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Tara Street

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

York Road Children's Centre is a stand-alone centre located in Hitchin, North Hertfordshire and opened in 2008. It operates from a purpose-built site attached to York Nursery School. There is also linked day care provision known as 'Yorkies'. Both are subject to separate inspection arrangements and their reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. The centre manager has responsibility for the day-to-day management of the children's centre. Governance is provided by the governing body of York Nursery School on behalf of Hertfordshire local authority. An advisory board is established comprising partners and parents.

There are 962 children under five years of age living in the area served by the centre. The area is mixed with some communities amongst the 30% most disadvantaged in England. Housing is mainly owner occupied, with pockets of social housing and private rented accommodation. Some 5% of families are dependent on workless benefits. The large majority of families living within the local area are White British, however other heritage groups are increasingly moving in and out of the area. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are slightly below those typical for their age.

The children's centre offers a wide range of services including family support, health services, adult learning, and work with childminders to meet its core purpose. The centre's key target groups are families living in the most disadvantaged communities, lone parents, those living on low incomes, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, families accessing two-year-old funding, children subject to child protection plans and vulnerable children living in households with domestic violence.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Registrations have rapidly increased and currently stand at 100% of new births in the area served by the centre. The large majority of children and families use the centre's services regularly. Increasing numbers of children and families from target groups including lone parents, families from minority ethnic groups and those who are workless or on low incomes, access the centre's services. The centre is working effectively to encourage the take up of services by families who might be reluctant to do so.
- Leaders and managers have used information about levels of deprivation and local knowledge of the area well to deliver a range of good quality services that meet local needs. The centre is well aware of the needs of children and families in the community, including expectant parents and those from minority ethnic backgrounds who move in and out of the area. This includes families from Grove Road Temporary Accommodation accessing services, and those families who speak English as an additional language supported by the centre in partnership with Hertfordshire Ethnic Minority Forum.
- Managers and staff effectively plan and review the centre services on offer to meet the changing needs of children and families in the area. For example, the centre offers two consecutive, popular 'Baby Signing' sessions on the same afternoon in order to meet parents' demand. Similarly, the excellent attendance levels at the popular, 'Dad's Behaving Dadly' Saturday sessions in the large outside garden area, demonstrate well the centre's commitment to inclusivity and its concerted involvement with fathers and grandfathers. One happy father told inspectors; 'As a stay at home dad I am always included in the sessions and made to feel welcome.'

- The excellent partnerships and well-established information sharing process, with the onsite York Nursery School, health, social care, local Bluebell & Oughton children's centres are successfully helping to identify specific families who would benefit from services. This has resulted in a seamless delivery of well-integrated services for children and families and improving outcomes.
- The very large majority of children eligible for free early education take up their entitlement. Almost all three and four-year-olds are accessing their entitlement to early education and have places in good quality settings.
- Outreach work is used effectively to identify and establish contact with targeted families and thereby ensure a wider range of services for families in their homes. Family support workers have good knowledge of the extremely difficult challenges facing some families. They are highly sensitive to their needs, including those affected by domestic abuse and isolation. 'The centre staff really got me through my difficult days,' are the words of one grateful parent.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The centre provides a warm and welcoming environment with lots of displays of useful information. Families feel confident to 'drop in' with queries and are always sure of a very helpful response from highly committed staff.
- Health outcomes are good. Improving childhood obesity levels, which are significantly below the national rates, and sustained breastfeeding, reflect the centre's effective targeted work and support. Messages about healthy lifestyles and the importance of physical exercise are promoted well through 'Active Tots' sessions and 'Healthy Lunch Box,' cooking sessions.
- Staff plan a range of enjoyable learning experiences to improve parenting skills and help parents to give their children the best start in life. For instance, parents benefit from the health visitor drop-in sessions where they receive valuable advice and guidance on weaning and sleeping routines in 'Baby and You' sessions.
- High quality sessions such as 'Tots, Toddlers, Toys and Talk' led by experienced staff have a positive impact on children's progress and their readiness for school. The Early Years Foundation Stage profile results for the area served by the centre show an improving picture to levels above those seen nationally and a significant narrowing of the achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest.
- The advisor from Jobcentre Plus makes regular visits to the centre to provide guidance on benefits and gaining employment for lone parents. Some parents make good use of volunteering opportunities to increase their chances of successful employment. However, there are too few opportunities for adults to gain information, advice and have access to courses relating to employment. This reduces their ability to improve their families' economic well-being.
- The centre has worked well in partnership with North Hertfordshire Ethnic Minority Forum to extend parents' opportunities for those new to the country, to improve their spoken English and to enhance their chances of gaining employment through the new course, 'Introduction to Childcare'. However, the centre recognises that there is limited adult provision for English language, literacy, mathematics, information and communication technology and opportunities to gain formal qualifications.
- Families highly value the individual support and guidance they receive from staff, especially when they are faced with significant personal challenges. Case files are maintained to a high standard. They provide a clear record of the centre's involvement with families and how the support provided has improved their personal, emotional and economic well-being.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**Good**

- Governance arrangements are good. The local authority and governing body are ambitious for the centre. They play a significant role in holding centre leaders to rigorous account for the impact that their work has on families. Well-presented data is regularly analysed and supports the centre's priorities for further improving its effectiveness.
- Self-evaluation is used well to inform priorities across the area and identify where the centre needs to focus its efforts and resources. Parents' views are gathered informally and used to help when planning services. Through representation on the advisory board parents are actively involved in the centre's decision making.
- The advisory group is newly set up, has good representation from a wide range of partners and has already developed a clear understanding of priorities for the area the centre serves. Advisory members and the local authority work well together to both challenge and support staff to drive improvements. Advisory board members undertake observations of the centre's activities which help them to understand the quality of practice and services.
- The quality assurance arrangements are robust and demonstrate well the centre's clear focus on maintaining high quality services. The centre's evaluation and monitoring includes session observations, supervision, and the local authority's quality improvement visits which inform its development planning and the efficient allocation of resources. However, systems to track children's progress and that of families supported and signposted to other services are not thorough enough. Consequently, the centre is unable to evaluate accurately the difference it is making to children and families.
- The centre places great emphasis on inclusion. It actively seeks to reduce inequalities through specialist sessions, such as 'Baby Signing', for young babies with additional needs, helping parents to learn sign language, such as the sign for 'twirly pasta'. Staff celebrate diversity well through the use of language skills of a bilingual staff member, books and multi-cultural toys for young children.
- The work of the centre makes a strong contribution to keeping families safe through its home visits and first-aid courses for both staff and parents. Seamless working between different agencies leads to reduced risk of harm for those children who are looked after, have a child protection plan or are subject to Common Assessment Framework (CAF) procedures.
- Families, advisory board members and partners speak highly of the hard working, enthusiastic and skilled centre manager and her staff. In particular, they acknowledge that the strength of this centre is the excellent teamwork and dedication of the staff who are willing to go that extra mile and to develop new ways of working to support families. In the words of one enthusiastic partner; 'Staff are so open to new ideas. Nothing is ever a problem for them.'

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	22147
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	447492
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	962
Centre manager	Jane Toll
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
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