

Ickniel Children's Centre

Ickniel Infant and Nursery School, Archers Way, Letchworth, SG6 4UN

Inspection dates

Previous inspection date

11–12 December 2014

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.

- Staff are exceptionally good at maintaining contact with families living within the area served by the centre and keeping them informed about its services. Almost every child under the age of five is registered with the centre and almost all families from the centre's priority groups use the centre.
- Extremely cooperative partnerships with health visitors, doctors, schools, pre-schools and other organisations keep the centre very well informed about families' needs.
- The centre helps families to access its services by arranging activities in different venues and by providing one-to-one support in the home for those who need it.
- The centre provides an excellent range of high-quality services which have an extremely positive impact on the lives of families, particularly those from priority groups. It caters particularly well for families with children under the age of one.
- Parents greatly value the services provided by the centre and particularly appreciate the support and advice of staff who are always willing to help meet their needs.
- The quality of care, guidance and support provided is outstanding, and many parents say that the centre has been a lifeline for them.
- The centre is highly successful in improving health outcomes and levels of children's development, and in encouraging eligible families to take up funded nursery places for their two-year-old children.
- Very effective work by centre staff engages the interest of adults who are not in paid employment. Appropriate courses help them prepare for a return to work. The range of available courses, however, is not yet sufficient to meet all of their needs.
- The centre manager provides outstanding leadership and has developed an extremely experienced team of staff who are intent on meeting ambitious targets to engage families and meet their needs.
- The centre manages its resources extremely efficiently and effectively.
- Governance arrangements are excellent. The governing body of the partner school, the local authority and the centre's advisory board keep a very close check on the centre's performance and set challenging targets which have helped it to improve markedly over the last two years.
- All policies, procedures and practices for safeguarding and ensuring the welfare of children and families are exemplary.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- In conjunction with partners, identify and provide a broader range of courses to fully meet the needs of adults preparing for a return to work.

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: representatives from the local authority; members of the advisory board; the headteacher and members of the governing body of Icknield Infant and Nursery School; the centre manager and staff of the children's centre; various groups of parents and users of the centre; and representatives of organisations who work in partnership with the centre.

The inspectors visited activities and held discussions at the centre and at The Pod at Northfield School. , A session of 'Tiddlers', for parents and children under the age of 18 months, was observed jointly with the centre manager at Mrs Howard Hall in Letchworth.

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

Inspection team

Graham Sims, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Pippa Wainwright

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Icknield Children's Centre is one of three children's centres in Letchworth Garden City. It opened in 2007. The local authority has delegated responsibility for governance of the centre to the governing body of Icknield Infant and Nursery School. An advisory board, which comprises partners and parents, also contributes to governance arrangements. The local authority is due to reorganise its 82 children's centres into 29 clusters by March 2015.

The centre's staff team comprises the centre manager, two family support workers, an administrator, a promotions assistant and a part-time family support assistant. The centre is situated on the site of Icknield Infant and Nursery School. The school is subject to a separate inspection. Its inspection report can be found on Ofsted's website at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>. The centre provides a range of services to support local needs, some in partnership with other local providers.

An estimated 826 children under the age of five live in the area. The large majority of families are White British, and around 20% are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A quarter of the centre's reach area lies within the 30% most deprived areas of the country. Almost a quarter of the children are assessed as living in poverty with parents who are on benefits or out of work. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are slightly lower than those which are typical for their age.

The centre has identified its key priority groups as: the families of vulnerable children (those subject to a child protection plan, children in need, looked after children, and those assessed under the Common Assessment Framework); children living in families where there is domestic abuse; children under the age of one; two-year-old children who are eligible for free nursery education; children living with adults who require support or who wish to develop skills to return to employment; families living in the centre's most deprived areas.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Outstanding

- The strategies used for ensuring all families living in the area know about the centre and for encouraging them to attend its activities are excellent. As a result, almost every child under the age of five is registered with the centre, and the very large majority participate regularly in the high-quality activities on offer. The centre maintains contact with every family from its priority groups, including those living in the most deprived areas, and almost all of them use its services regularly.
- The number of families registering with and using the centre has increased markedly over the last two years. This has been because of the relentless drive of the staff to establish contact with families and to keep them fully informed of what is happening at the centre. Highly effective work is undertaken to find out about specific needs such as those of families living in the most deprived areas and to encourage them to attend activities that not only meet their needs but enhance their safety and well-being considerably.
- Some of the staff have specific responsibility for particular priority groups. One member of staff, for example, with responsibility for engaging all families with children under the age of one, keeps detailed records of when each family has been contacted and which activities they have attended. The records are reviewed frequently to identify any families who have not participated in a recent activity, to renew contact and to suggest activities that are relevant to their needs or their child's stage of development. This results in high levels of engagement with the centre.

- Extremely fruitful, harmonious and cooperative partnerships with a wide range of professionals and organisations contribute strongly to the centre's knowledge of families in the area. The health authorities provide live birth data; doctors inform the centre of families who have moved into the area and registered with them; and health visitors' regular meetings with the centre staff keep everyone informed about families' needs. Excellent working relationships with schools and pre-schools lead to regular reviews of two-, three- and four-year-old children to ensure that none are missing out on their successful preparation for school.
- The centre runs various activities in different venues to enable families who live at some distance from the centre to benefit from its services. Collaboration with the other two centres in Letchworth enables a number of activities to take place in the town centre, which many families find convenient. Staff from the centre attend health visitors' clinics to make contact with expectant and new parents and to inform them about the activities available. Family support workers provide timely and effective one-to-one support in the home for those who need it.

The quality of practice and services

Outstanding

- The centre provides an excellent range of well-planned, high-quality services for expectant mothers, parents and young children which are having a significant impact on improving the lives of families, particularly those from the centre's priority groups. Partnership working is exemplary. Staff are highly reflective, always willing to try out new ideas, and contribute strongly to the centre's continuous improvement. The centre makes good use of volunteers and takes careful note of parents' views to plan and modify its services.
- The centre caters particularly well for families with children under the age of one, offering a graduated programme of activities to help with each stage of a child's development in their first year. Parents are full of praise for the quality and variety of these activities, which help to ensure that young children get off to the best possible start in life.
- The centre has become a vital hub for the local community. Parents particularly value the fact that they can drop in at any time, that there is always a friendly welcome, and that staff are always willing to help. Children love coming to the centre, where there is always something interesting for them to play with or to engage their attention. Activities provided for families during the holidays draw many participants and continue to enrich children's learning when school nurseries are closed.
- The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the staff is outstanding and has a major impact on reducing inequalities. Case files demonstrate that the one-to-one support provided by the centre's staff helps families to deal effectively with a whole range of issues, such as postnatal depression, home safety and difficult behaviour. Staff maintain contact with families until needs have been met. They seek out those who are new to the area and, through their activities, help them to integrate and make new friends. Many parents said that the centre has been a lifeline for them.
- The positive impact of the centre is seen in improving health outcomes, improving levels of children's development and increasing numbers of adults seeking support to help them return to work. The proportion of mothers breastfeeding their children at six to eight weeks has increased by 10 percentage points for each of the last two years. The proportion of children who are obese at age five is reducing. The very large majority of families from priority groups attend sessions where there is a focus on healthy lifestyles.
- Staff are tenacious in identifying families with two-year-old children who are eligible for free nursery education and, over the last year, has successfully encouraged almost all to access their places. For

those awaiting a place, the centre provides additional activities to help prepare children for their entry to early years education. An annual meeting with schools to analyse Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data, regular meetings with early years providers, and the centre's own tracking of children's achievement help ensure that the centre is constantly focusing in its activities on aspects of children's development highlighted by these meetings.

- Through a productive and fruitful partnership with Jobcentre Plus and its innovative 'Build a Dream' programme, the centre has far exceeded its initial targets for attracting adults interested in developing skills for returning to work. The centre has facilitated courses to help them identify skills, boost their confidence and write a CV, and has signposted them to courses run by partners. It keeps a careful track of adults' progress and identifies next steps for them to take. However, the range of available courses, particularly those to enable adults to gain higher level qualifications, is not yet sufficient to meet the varying needs of all those with whom it is working.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Outstanding

- The centre manager provides outstanding leadership and very clear direction for the centre. She has built a very strong team of experienced and highly committed staff who know families within the centre's reach area exceptionally well. The team works together extremely effectively, supporting each other whenever necessary and ensuring that there is always someone who can respond to users' needs. Most members of the team have responsibility for a specific priority group and are strongly focused on meeting highly ambitious targets to engage children and families within their group.
- The centre manages its resources extremely efficiently, effectively and creatively. The small centre building receives a constant stream of visitors, and excellent cooperation with local schools and other organisations provides suitable and conveniently placed venues for activities in other parts of the area served by the centre. The centre's distinctive van provides families with a constant reminder of the centre as it is used for the many home visits made to keep in touch with families and remind them of the activities available. Excellent collaboration with the other children's centres in Letchworth enables the pooling of resources, sharing of expertise and reduction of costs while at the same time broadening the scope of activities on offer to families.
- Governance arrangements are excellent. The headteacher of Icknield Infant and Nursery School, who line manages the centre manager, and the school's governing body keep a very close check on the work of the centre and the way it is managed. Collaboration between the school and the centre is outstanding. Centre staff provide invaluable support for the school during term time and, in the holidays, the centre uses the school's facilities to provide worthwhile, educational activities for families.
- The local authority monitors closely how well the centre is performing and sets highly challenging targets, which have been influential in improving the centre's performance. Professional partners and parents on the advisory board also make an extremely positive contribution to the running of the centre, providing a further level of challenge and source of guidance. All those involved in governance have a very clear understanding of how effective the centre is in reducing inequalities for children and families.
- The centre's evaluation of its own performance is extremely robust and focused strongly on the extent to which it is meeting the needs of families within its reach area, and especially those from priority groups. A challenging development plan, rigorous arrangements for the supervision of staff, and the collective experience of the staff team, forged by working together since the centre opened,

have led to significant improvements in its effectiveness over the last few years.

- The centre's exemplary policies, procedures and practices for safeguarding ensure the welfare of children and families. Messages with regard to safeguarding are clearly displayed within the centre and on its website. Collaboration with other agencies to support families with children who are at risk is excellent. The centre cooperates fully with Common Assessment Framework procedures. Staff know and keep in constant contact with families where children are in need, subject to child protection plans, or looked after, and ensure that these families have frequent support.

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	22143
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	447491
Managed by	The governing body of Icknield Infant and Nursery School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	826
Centre leader	Angela Hall
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01462 663100
Email address	manager.icknield@hertschildrenscentres.org.uk

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