

# Elstead & Villages Children's Centre

Thursley Road, Elstead, Surrey, GU8 6DH

**Inspection dates** 20–21 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Despite improving registration figures, not enough children under five are registered and using children's centre services regularly. This is especially so for families living in Wrecclesham, one of the centre's priority areas.
- There has not been a strong enough emphasis on recording priority families' regular use of the centre. As a result, leaders and managers have not fully analysed which services would best meet families' needs, especially for those from Wrecclesham. This hinders the centre's capacity to improve.
- Tracking of children's progress and assessing the longer term impact of adults' contact with the centre are at an early stage. Where adults are referred to other partners' services, the outcomes are not consistently followed up by the centre to ensure that needs are being met.
- Parents have very positive views of the centre but their formal involvement in developing services is limited. There are no clear pathways for their views to be fed into the advisory board, no formal parent group and only one parent member of the advisory board. Although there have been volunteers in the past, there are none at present.
- Advisory board members are supportive but not sufficiently challenging, especially in relation to the irregular use of the services by priority families. In addition, targets set by the local authority and those in the service delivery plan are not specific or measurable. There is not a strong enough emphasis on how to improve some priority groups' engagement with the centre.

### This centre has the following strengths:

- Centre staff are enthusiastic and positive despite the difficulties of working for only a few hours each week across one of the largest geographic areas of any Surrey children's centre. They have developed strong partnerships with schools, early years settings and health services in order to gauge local needs.
- Work with the Islamabad community and two-year-olds eligible for free early education has led to both priority groups engaging regularly and positive outcomes for families achieved.
- Local health outcomes, such as breastfeeding rates, are well above national figures.
- Families are given very good care, guidance and support, leading to the improved well-being of those given one-to-one support.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of children living in the area served by the centre who are registered.
- Ensure that the large majority of children and families from all of the centre's priority groups, especially those living in the Wrecclesham area, engage with services regularly by:
  - identifying the specific needs of children and families and establishing why more are not using the services after they register
  - adapting services to meet the needs of priority children and families more effectively
  - monitoring and recording all contacts consistently.
- Measure the impact of the centre's work effectively by:
  - establishing a robust system to track the progress of priority group children during their time at the centre and when they move on to early years settings
  - working with partners and other children's centres to develop a system to check the progress adults make as a result of signposting or referral and ensure their feedback about the services they receive.
- Involve a greater number of families in shaping services by:
  - encouraging more volunteers from the local area
  - establishing a more formal parents' forum
  - clarifying the way parents' views are relayed to the advisory board and increasing parent representation on the board, especially from priority families.
- Ensure that the local authority, leaders, governors and managers gather reliable information about priority children and families' access and regular engagement with services. Use this to better effect to measure the centre's impact and set specific and measurable targets that are used more robustly to challenge the centre's performance.

## 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, the head of centre who is also the headteacher of St James Church of England Primary School, and two representatives from the local authority. They also met members of the advisory board, including the link governor. They spoke with several partners including those from health, early years settings and family learning. They met staff members and held discussions with several parents.

The inspectors visited a Play and Learn session at Wrecclesham Community Centre which is run jointly with Potter's Gate Children's Centre.

They looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation and service delivery plan, safeguarding practice, policies and procedures and a sample of case studies. The centre manager, head of centre and local authority representative attended all inspection team meetings.

## Inspection team

Joan Lindsay, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Anthony Mundy

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Elstead and Villages Children's Centre opened in 2010 but was not fully operational until December 2012. It is a standalone part-time centre, open from Monday to Wednesday. It works closely with the other six Waverley Borough children's centres. Some services are delivered in the community at Wrecclesham Community Centre and in outlying villages by the Sure Start Mobile Children's Centre. The centre provides family support, adult learning and health services through partnership working.

The governors of St James Church of England Church of England Primary School, where the centre is located, manage the centre on behalf of the local authority; the headteacher line-manages the centre manager. The centre employs three members of staff, all of whom work part-time, making a full-time equivalent of 1.75 days per week. Over the past 12 months, there have been lengthy periods of staff absence. There is an advisory board in place. St James Church of England Primary School is subject to a separate inspection. Its report can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

There are 684 children aged under five years living in the area served by the centre. This geographic area is one of the largest and most affluent of Surrey's children's centres. However, there are some pockets of disadvantage amongst the 13 mainly rural villages in the area covered by the centre, as well as in Elstead and Wrecclesham. The percentage of young children living in workless households is 7% overall, which is well below national averages, as is the 10% of families claiming Working Tax Credit. Most children are from a White British background. The area includes the Ahmadiyya Muslim gated community in Tilford where families who mainly originate from Islamabad in Pakistan now live. Children generally enter the Early Years Foundation Stage at levels in line with those typical for their age.

The centre has identified priority groups needing most support as: young children living in the least advantaged areas of Wrecclesham and Elstead; two-year-olds eligible for free early education; and families living in the Islamabad community in Tilford.

### Inspection judgements

#### Access to services by young children and families

#### Requires improvement

- Despite a substantial increase over the last year, currently at 62%, the centre has not yet registered the large majority of young children in its area and this requires improvement. Although 60% of children in Wrecclesham are registered, the numbers who then access the centre regularly are too low.
- Services are delivered weekly in Wrecclesham jointly with Potter's Gate Children's Centre but on occasion only a few children and families attend. Information about how frequently services are used and by whom has not been looked at well enough by managers to identify where the gaps are in effective engagement. The centre has not done enough in-depth analysis of why this is and what services would best meet the needs of families from priority groups.
- The large majority of families living in Elstead, another priority area, are registered and have used the centre, although only approximately half do so regularly.
- The centre has, however, been very successful in registering and engaging with families from the Islamabad community at Tilford, where a weekly visit from the mobile children's centre ensures regular and effective contact. Similarly, the centre is aware of all the families where two-year-olds are eligible for free early education, has assisted in placing them in good or better provision and has regular contact with them.
- There are no baby or antenatal clinics held in the centre. However, access to early childhood services by families, including those expecting babies, is effective due to close links with the health visitor and good levels of information exchange. A more effective system to inform the centre of new births has recently been implemented, as has an antenatal group at a neighbouring children's centre.

- The take-up of free early education by three-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds, as well as the two-year-old health check, is high, further increasing families' access to early childhood services.

**The quality of practice and services****Requires improvement**

- The quality, range and relevance of services require improvement because there has not been enough analysis of which services would most effectively meet the needs of some priority groups, especially in Wrecclesham. The regular attendance of families who need support the most has not been checked closely enough to ensure services meet their needs.
- The centre provides some courses for adults to improve their skills, such as paediatric first aid and baby massage, but only a small number attend structured parenting courses or adult education. There is some tracking of outcomes of those who do but this is not done consistently enough to show the centre's long-term impact on reducing inequalities and improving the outcomes for those who attend.
- There are currently no volunteers at the centre. Sessions are regularly evaluated by participants and parents feel their views are listened to, for example about the timing of sessions. However, there is no formal parents' forum or a clear route to ensure parents' views are fed through to the advisory board. The one parent representative on the board attends regularly and has a good understanding of the local community.
- Tracking children's progress has started and good links with local schools and early years settings mean that there is some sharing of information when children move on. Priority children are not yet monitored in depth, however, partly due to staff absence, nor are their 'next steps' linked to session planning.
- Some of the sessions developed by the centre to support children's school readiness have not been well attended. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence from parents and the link school is that children settle well and are confident as a result of their contact with the centre. The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results for the centre's area improved in 2014 and, at 64%, are 4% above the national level.
- Health outcomes are very good in the local area. Over 80% of babies aged six to eight weeks are breastfed, well above the figure for England; 87% of young children are deemed to be a healthy weight, compared to 77% nationally. The centre has a strong focus on healthy eating, with good displays showing the sugar levels in popular drinks, for example, providing a very visual reminder for parents.
- Parents who have been supported individually by the centre are fulsome and sincere in their praise for how staff have helped them overcome difficulties and improve their well-being. One parent summed up the views of others, stating 'I couldn't have survived that period without centre input.' Staff work well with other agencies to support families and the case files are comprehensive and maintained to a high standard. However, staff are not automatically informed when a child is subject to social care supervision.

**The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management****Requires improvement**

- Leaders and managers at all levels have not made enough use of information related to priority families' regular engagement with centre services. Performance targets set by the local authority and the advisory board have been largely focused on increasing registrations, with not enough emphasis on how to engage priority families in appropriate services until their needs are met.
- Self-evaluation is over optimistic, as is the advisory board's view of the centre's effectiveness because there has not been enough in-depth recording and analysis of information about families' regular engagement. Furthermore, the targets in the service delivery plan are not specific or measurable enough to check whether the centre's work is having a positive impact on families who need most support. This is inhibiting the centre's capacity to move forward.
- The centre manager provides inspirational leadership and all staff have a very positive outlook and

commitment to helping families. They ensure that everyone feels welcome. However, staff resources are very limited and the geographic area covered by the centre is very extensive. These factors, coupled with long-term staff absence, have adversely affected the speed of the centre's improvement, for example in how well embedded the tracking systems are.

- Safeguarding policies and procedures are all well implemented. Staff have a good knowledge of the whole of the centre's extensive area and know the families who use the centre and their specific needs. They act on any concerns swiftly and effectively. There are very low numbers of young children who are subject to social care supervision or who have Early Help Assessments. Where the centre is involved with these children and families, staff play a full role in multi-agency meetings.
- Parents spoken to during the inspection, and the results of surveys, show there are high levels of satisfaction and that the staff are much appreciated. One parent summed up the views of others about the centre by stating 'It was fantastic for just dealing with everything.' However, not enough parents are formally involved with the running and development of the centre.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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.

**Children's centre details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	21092
<b>Local authority</b>	Surrey County Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	447520
<b>Managed by</b>	The advisory board on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	684
<b>Centre manager</b>	Jill Beaumont
<b>Telephone number</b>	01252 706915
<b>Email address</b>	childrencentre@st-james-elstead.surrey.sch.uk

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