

# EH6 Duckling Green Children's Centre

2B The Square, Sawbridgeworth, CM21 9AE

<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 January 2015
<b>Previous inspection date</b>	Not previously inspected

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b> Previous inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
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 the high level of registrations, too few children and families from priority groups sustain engagement with the centre. Managers have not investigated closely enough the reasons for this.
- There are not enough opportunities for parents, particularly those who are out of work, to enhance their education, skills and employability. There are no volunteers currently active at the centre.
- The systems to track how well children or adults learn at sessions run by the centre or when parents access partners' services do not provide enough detail about their progress.
- Development planning lacks precise targets, clear success criteria and appropriate timelines. This impedes the pace at which priority improvements, for example to the take-up of free education by eligible two-year-olds, are made.
- Although the advisory board members know the area well and support the centre with their different skills, the board has limited parental involvement and is not holding the centre fully to account for its performance.
- Risk assessments are not recorded consistently as part of the daily safeguarding checks before activities commence, for example prior to 'Messy Play' sessions.

### This centre has the following strengths:

- Through its strong partnerships, the centre is effective in improving the well-being of families who move in and out of the area and of all children assessed as in need or subject to a child protection plan. Case files are maintained to a high standard.
- Effective collaboration with early years settings and good-quality, centre-led activities are helping children get ready for school with confidence. Well-conceived partnership agreements assist the timely sharing of information about children's achievements once they transfer to pre-school.
- The centre's proactive work to promote healthy lifestyles is reflected positively in the reducing level of childhood obesity and increasing sustained breastfeeding rates.
- The centre canvasses and listens to the views of centre users and uses them to inform service planning, such as when making changes to content and times of sessions.
- Parents who use the centre have a high level of satisfaction with the quality of what is on offer.

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

- Ensure that the large majority of children and families from priority groups access appropriate services. Make sure their needs are met by monitoring all recorded contacts with the centre so that managers have a clear insight into their level of access and target their sustained engagement.
- Ensure that most eligible two-year-olds take up a good-quality free early education place.
- Build on the links with colleges and Jobcentre Plus and widen the opportunities for adults, especially those who are out of work. Extend their qualifications and skills or access to volunteering opportunities that support their economic health and chances of employment.
- Measure the impact of the centre's work on improving the outcomes for children and families by:
  - extending the checks made on target children's learning and development during centre activities, so that staff know who is making good progress and can plan the next steps forward for those in danger of falling behind
  - tracking the take-up, retention and success rates of parents when they access further learning, accredited courses or skills training at the centre, or when signposted to partners' services.
- Sharpen development planning by drawing on reliable data to set challenging targets, precise actions, clear success criteria and appropriate timelines that assist a rapid pace of improvement.
- Ensure that there is wider parental involvement in governance and that the advisory board keeps a closer check on the centre's performance and follows up issues rigorously.
- Ensure that detailed risk assessments are consistently carried out and findings recorded prior to all sessions such as 'Messy Play' where there are heightened risks to children's safety due to the nature of the activities provided.

## 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, a senior manager from the Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust, staff, local authority officers, partners, parents and members of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited activities, including 'Baby Rhyme Time', 'Family Toolkit', 'Messy Play' and a crèche provided for a group of childminders. Two sessions were observed jointly with the centre manager, and a scrutiny of case files was undertaken with an outreach worker.

Inspectors took into account parents' views as expressed directly to them during the inspection, as well as through their recorded evaluations about the centre's work.

Inspectors also looked at a wide range of documentation.

## Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead Inspector

Additional inspector

Anthony Mundy

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

EH6 Duckling Green Children's Centre opened its doors to local families in February 2010 as a stand-alone centre based in the centre of Sawbridgeworth. There are ten children's centres in the east of the county that collaborate on an informal basis. The staff team, led by the centre manager, comprises one full-time and two part-time outreach workers, and a recently appointed administrator. There have been significant staffing issues over recent years. The team has been up to full strength and stable since September 2014.

The centre is managed by Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council. The advisory board oversees governance. The health visiting team has an office base at the children's centre, from which they run their well-baby clinic, postnatal and breastfeeding support. Centre staff also support another clinic run by the health visiting team in the large village of Much Hadham as well as delivering a range of services including family support, parenting programmes and adult learning.

Approximately 724 children under the age of five live in the area served by the centre, which is mainly affluent with small pockets of disadvantage mainly in North Sawbridgeworth. Most homes are privately owned. Recent housing developments have included social housing at Bullfields. Rural isolation is a feature of some areas due to limited public transport. The hostel at Spellbrook provides temporary accommodation for young homeless people, some of whom have young children. Most families are White British. When they start early years education, children have skills and abilities that are typical for their age.

Target priority groups identified by the centre are: lone parents and workless families with young children; two-year-old children eligible for free early education; families with young children who move in and out of the area residing temporarily at the hostel; children under five years old assessed as in need.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

### Requires improvement

- At 92%, registrations are high, but only a minority of children and families from priority target groups regularly use the centre. For example, only a quarter of lone parents and a third of workless parents accessed the centre's services more than six times during the last 12 months. 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, and this requires improvement.
- The strong partnership with health professionals is helping the centre to have early contact with expectant parents and those with new-born babies. Information shows that most babies were seen one or more times at the centre in 2014. Weekly clinics held at the centre provide a golden opportunity for centre staff to follow up any concerns that parents have. Effective work takes place to help parents access specialist early childhood services as required.
- A drop-in session takes place at the scout hut in Bullfields, which is one of the least advantaged areas served by the centre. Numbers accessing the group are increasing. Ongoing useful work takes place with early years settings located in this area to explore the best ways of meeting vulnerable children's needs.

- All children assessed as in need or subject to a child protection plan are known to the centre, and there is effective collaboration between partners to ensure that they receive timely access to effective services until their needs are met. Through its effective partnership with the hostel, centre staff are in early contact with families who move in and out of the area.
- At 94%, the take-up of free education places by three- and four-year-olds is good. However, the information available about the access to places by eligible two-year-olds is unclear. The centre recognises that more work is required to ensure that more two-year-olds take up their entitlement, and has set a target of 80% in going forward. Staff are meeting with early years settings and childminders with a view to increasing the number of good-quality places available locally.

### The quality of practice and services

### Requires improvement

- The quality and range of services are good, but not enough children and parents from priority groups use them regularly, and this requires improvement. The effective checks on the impact of targeted centre-led support for families most in need enable managers to monitor outcomes effectively. However, systems for tracking children's or parents' progress when they access centre activities which are open to all or adults take-up of partners' specific services are incomplete.
- The centre provides courses for adults, such as cake decorating and baby massage, to improve their skills, but very few attend adult education or skills training. There is some tracking of the progress of those who do attend, but this is not systematic enough to show the centre's long-term impact on reducing inequalities and improving outcomes. The links with colleges and Jobcentre Plus to support the work with adults are at a very early stage of development.
- There is good practice in helping children and families most in need to get back on track. Case files clearly demonstrate the positive impact of the centre's well-targeted early help. Programmes such as 'Family Toolkit' meet specific parenting needs well. Evaluations show clearly that they have enduring benefits, for example, in managing children's behaviour positively.
- Good work takes place to help children prepare confidently for their move to school. Comprehensive partnership agreements underpin the centre's positive work with early years settings and schools. Centre staff regularly visit settings to share information about children, to check on achievements and to follow up any concerns. There has been a recent focus on boys' learning needs, with an 'About Boys' course put on for parents to help them better support their children's development. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of their Reception Year is above the level seen nationally.
- Through its strong partnerships with health, social care, housing and hostel staff, the centre is effective in improving the welfare of children and families, including those who move in and out of the area. The large majority of families who have engaged in events such as first-aid training identify that they now know so much more about keeping their children safe. All parents attending postnatal sessions said that, since attending sessions, they understand more about childhood illnesses and minor ailments and are much better equipped to respond quickly to any concerns.
- The level of childhood obesity is reducing and sustained breastfeeding rates are increasing locally. The centre has a strong focus on healthy lifestyles. It promotes the importance of a nutritious diet at the baby-feeding cafes. High-quality displays, for example, showing the sugar levels in popular drinks, provide a visual reminder for parents.
- Parents appreciate how well staff help them to overcome personal challenges in their lives. One parent attending the young parents' group summed up the views of others by saying, 'I have

learned loads since coming to the centre, at times it is life-saving.'

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

### **Requires improvement**

- Staffing problems inhibited the centre's development until September 2014. Since then, the centre manager has placed the centre on an improving course. Strengths are emerging as shown by the local authority's detailed reviews and as commented upon in this report. However, further improvements are required, particularly to the development plan which needs strengthening, as does the use of data to help set challenging targets and review the centre's performance.
- Staff are reflective practitioners and show good commitment to helping families. However, human resources are small in number and the geographic area covered by the centre is far reaching with small pockets of disadvantage that are hard to reach. These factors, coupled with long-term staff absence, have adversely affected the pace of the centre's improvement, for example, in increasing the engagement of priority groups in appropriate services.
- The advisory board members include a wide range of partners who attend regularly, although parents are currently under-represented. Members use their many skills well to support the centre's work and to help plan services. The board questions some of the information presented, but does not follow through closely enough on improvement priorities to see what impact the centre's actions have on making a positive difference.
- Safeguarding matters are attended to appropriately by the centre, and there are sensible procedures to ensure the protection of children and families. Recruitment checks are carried out effectively to ensure that staff meet the required standards. Staff act on any concerns swiftly and effectively. 'Family Matters' meetings provide a useful forum for the different agencies to share information and plan appropriate support for children in need, including those subject to child protection plans.
- Good safeguarding practices were seen in all sessions observed by the inspection team, with one exception: detailed risk assessments are not consistently carried out or recorded prior to potentially high-risk drop-in sessions such as 'Messy Play'.
- Parents who spoke to inspectors during the inspection, and the results of surveys, show that there are high levels of satisfaction with the services provided and that the staff are much appreciated. The parents' forum meets to discuss ideas and a 'You said – we did' board shows how the centre has taken forward parents' views, such as in opening up the Saturday fathers-only group to families.

**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.

**Children's centre details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	21074
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	452804
<b>Managed by</b>	The Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust on behalf of the local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	724
<b>Centre manager</b>	Carol King
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	<b>Not Previously Inspected</b>
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279 601900
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