

Wokingham - The Red Kite Children's Centre Group

c/o The Red Kite Children's Centre, Chestnut Crescent, Shinfield, Berkshire, RG2 9EJ

Inspection date	3–4 February 2015		
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
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 group that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Significant changes in staffing and staff illness during 2014 have slowed down the pace of improvement, for example in increasing the engagement of families from some priority groups.
- The local authority has not set performance targets for the centre group since summer 2014, and the review of the group manager's performance has slipped. The advisory board has not met for some time and is not fulfilling its terms of reference in holding the group to account.
- The appraisal system does not link closely enough to the group's priorities. Not all staff have been set performance targets.
- Not enough attention is given to checking what impact services have on improving the outcomes for children and families most in need of support.
- Although there are promising 'green shoots' beginning to show, current opportunities for enhancing parents' education and economic well-being, particularly for those who are workless, are too narrow.

It has the following strengths:

- The manager has steered the group positively through a very challenging year. The two partnership boards, composed of partners and parents, provide effective governance.
- More and more services are being taken into the community, for example by using the mobile bus; this is widening access for families, and driving up registrations and participation levels.
- Good quality services and practice enhance the confidence and skills of parents to help their children learn well, eat healthily and behave positively.
- Volunteering opportunities increase parents' workplace skills, and help some to get back into work when ready. The comments of one volunteer sum up the value of the programme: 'It has opened up another world to me and encouraged changes for the better.'
- Well-targeted support is benefitting children and families who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. Close links with social care and effective use of the triage process help reduce the risk of harm to very vulnerable children.
- Strong partnerships are helping the centre deliver a wide range of services, provide additional capacity in resources, and build for better effectiveness.

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 three Additional Inspectors.

The centres that form part of this children's centre group are The Red Kite, The Starlings and Winnersh.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre group manager, staff, local authority officers, partners, volunteers, parents, members of the partnership boards and members of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited activities at all three children's centres. An observation of a parent-led drop-in session was undertaken jointly by the lead inspector and centre group manager

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
Susan Metcalfe	Additional Inspector
Catherine Kirkham	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Red Kite, The Starlings and Winnersh children's centres were established in 2008 and have operated as a group since October 2013. The main base is at The Red Kite Children's Centre, which is located on St Mary's Junior School Site in Shinfield. The school is subject to separate inspection arrangements and its report can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>. The centre group is managed directly by Wokingham local authority. There are two other children's centre groups within the locality: The Brambles and Ambleside.

Services provided by the group include health, education and parenting support. The manager oversees the work of all centres in the group and the staff team of six full-time family workers, four part-time family workers, and administrators. There is a borough-wide advisory board to provide strategic governance. Each children's centre has its own partnership board to assist centre group governance. The three centres share a parents' forum.

There are 3,905 children under the age of five years living in the area served by the group. The area is mainly affluent, with pockets of lesser advantage in Shinfield, Risley and Rainbow Park. At 6%, the proportion of children living in homes where no-one is in paid employment is lower than that seen nationally. The area is ethnically and culturally diverse, with some 40% of families of White British heritage and others from different minority ethnic groups. A Traveller site - Twyford Orchards - is located in The Starlings Children's Centre area. When they start school, children's skills and knowledge are typical for their age.

Priority groups are identified as: workless/low income families, two year-olds eligible for free early education, young parents, isolated lone parents, parents with English as additional language needs and children known to social care.

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

- Increase the sustained contact of all priority target groups, so that the large majority access appropriate services until their needs are met. Ensure that staff make note of who attends services and that there is timely follow-up of those who have registered but not been seen for some time.
- With the local authority, move swiftly to establish challenging performance targets, and set up regular meetings to review the managers' and centre group's performance.
- Ensure that the advisory board is effective in meeting its agreed terms of reference, and holds the centre fully to account for improving the outcomes for children and families identified as needing most support and particularly those from priority groups.
- Strengthen the appraisal arrangements by making sure that all staff have clear, specific and measurable performance targets that link closely to centre priorities as well as individuals' needs.
- Ensure that sessions such as 'Messy Play' have clear objectives that focus on children's learning needs, and that staff evaluations record precisely how well these are met. Implement the newly completed 'My Learning Journeys' to track the progress of target children from their starting points.
- Build on the developing adult community learning partnership to extend the range of further learning and skills training for parents, particularly those who are workless. Ensure participation levels are carefully tracked, and that information about retention and success rates inform provision for individual needs and centre group services planning.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Only a minority of workless families and lone parents sustain engagement with centre services, and this requires improvement.
- Strong partnerships with health services are used effectively to know about all new births and help increase registrations, which, at 87%, are high. However, these partnerships are not being used well enough to help assess the needs of priority parents, such as those with limited spoken English. The centre does not know how many parents have English language needs and so information captured about the proportion of this priority group that access services is unreliable.
- The large majority of eligible two-year-olds take up their free early education place, as do most three- and four year-olds. Centre group staff are building firm links with early years partners; these links are starting to keep track of the achievement of those vulnerable children who have accessed group services once they transfer to school.
- The centre group uses a range of community venues to help overcome the barriers faced by some families to accessing services due to rural isolation or poor transport links. The use of the mobile bus has been curtailed by mechanical and driver issues, but these are now resolved. The bus travels to areas such as Risley where families who most need support are known to live, and offers a range of services that encourage their increasing active involvement.
- Services run by the group at Twyford engage young parents well, and attract the large majority of families with young children from Gypsy Roma backgrounds to take up services.
- Support for both children and parents, including those known to social care, is effective in helping them to overcome personal crises or on-going challenges in their lives. Good work takes place to encourage attendance at drop-in sessions when they are ready for less targeted help.
- The centres in the group are each described by parents as welcoming, inclusive and good places to spend time. Staff are noted for their friendly and non-judgemental approach, which attracts those who might otherwise be reluctant to access services.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The range, quality and relevance of services are good. However, the systems in place to track the progress that children and parents make over the short term and in the longer term are incomplete and this requires improvement.
- The impact of the well-targeted family support work is closely checked, as is the 'distance travelled' by parents participating in programmes such as the very skilfully facilitated 'Incredible Years' parenting programme. The impact of other activities that are open to everyone is not as rigorously followed up.
- Employability skills taster sessions, including customer service and business administration, took place last Autumn; the feedback by participants was positive. However, the take-up by low income and workless families was not kept under close enough review. The developing partnership with Adult Community Learning, set up to widen what is on offer and improve participation from targeted groups, is well underway but it is too soon to evaluate its impact.
- The volunteering programme which was started in 2014 clearly provides beneficial opportunities, and is a stepping stone to further education and employment. Currently, there are ten volunteers who contribute to the running of centre and support sessions such as the 'International Parents/Child' group and Saturday activities for fathers.
- Last year, children living in the Starlings Children Centre reach area benefitted from a well-planned programme to help them make a smooth transfer to school. This pilot, closely targeted at reducing inequalities, is planned to roll out across the wider area. The effective 'Literacy Champions' course helps parents to know how to help their child learn successfully and is a positive feature.
- The group provides a variety of play and learn sessions as well as crèches for children whose parents are accessing parenting sessions. The planning of these sessions usefully ties into promoting the prime areas of children's learning, but the objectives set are too general and this makes it hard for staff to make precise assessments of how well children progress. 'My Learning Journeys' have very recently been devised as a tool to help gauge progress, but have yet to be

implemented.

- Effective work takes place with health providers, Homestart and youth services staff to help young parents, some of whom have high-level needs, to prepare and cook healthy meals from scratch. Childhood obesity levels are 3.5% below the level seen nationally, and reducing.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- 2014 proved to be challenging in terms of staff turnover across the group and in the local authority. New staff have more recently come into post and the staffing complement is now complete. The centre manager, who at times has been required to take on operational roles to ensure children and families receive planned services, has kept things on an even keel. The good qualities recognised by this inspection are testament to her commitment to doing the best for the community. Development planning rightly identifies that improvement is still needed to achieve some priority targets, such as increasing the group's reach.
- Changes in lead officer in the borough have resulted in limited checks taking place on the centre group and manager's performance. For example, the system for grading the group's performance against its targets has not been in use for some months. The review of the centre group manager's performance has not been as regular as that for other staff. Not all staff have been set targets that link to the group's improvement priorities as well as taking account of personal or professional development needs.
- Governance responsibilities are undertaken effectively by the three partnerships boards, which are chaired independently and composed of partners and parents. However, the advisory board established to provide strategic leadership and critical challenge to all children's centres in Wokingham has not met since May 2014. Members of the board underwent training four months ago to help them focus on implementing a best practice model of governance in going forward.
- Staff are well qualified and keen to develop their respective roles, some of which include new areas of responsibility. They say that training is very well planned to meet their needs and enables them to build new skills sets. For example, some staff have recently undertaken 'Incredible Years' training so that they can facilitate high quality programmes for parents who need help with managing their children's behaviour.
- Strong partnership working and timely sharing of information support the group's safeguarding procedures and practices, which meet current requirements. Effective use of the triage process and close links with social help reduce the risk of harm to very vulnerable children, including those subject to a child protection plan.
- Effective service level agreements with a range of organisations enhance the resources available to the centre group. The budget is efficiently managed and on track to meet the expected forecast by the end of the financial year. Parents also add value to what is provided by sharing good ideas and offering suggestions.

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

Unique reference number	80675
Local authority	Wokingham
Inspection number	453923
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3,905
Centre leader	Rupa Joshi
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0118 9882332
Email address	rupa.joshi@wokingham.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:**23246: The Red Kite****23260: The Starlings****23624: Winnersh**

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