

WH5 Creswick Children's Centre

c/o Creswick Primary School and Nursery, Sir John Newsom Way, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 4FL

Inspection dates 24–25 February 2015

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 is a good centre.

- All children living in the area served by the centre are registered. The large majority from most priority groups access services regularly.
- A wide range of good-quality services is helping to reduce inequalities, enhance parents' understanding of how to look after their children's well-being and improve parenting skills.
- The centre helps children to prepare well for school, as reflected in their good level of development and the rapidly reducing achievement gap.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Strong partnership work enables well-integrated service delivery and is effective in meeting local needs. Timely and well-coordinated support helps families who are most in need to overcome personal challenges and helps keep particularly vulnerable children safe.
- Good leadership, management and governance, and successful teamwork, are the driving forces behind the centre's good effectiveness and sound capacity to build for further success.
- Parents hold the centre in high regard. One parent's words reflect the views of others: 'The centre is just like a family – they support you when you need it and challenge you to keep on improving.'

It is not outstanding because:

- The centre has not yet managed to ensure that the large majority of workless families and families living in one of the least advantaged communities in the north east of the area regularly access appropriate services.
- The checks made on the impact of services on meeting the needs of workless families are not thorough enough. This impedes leaders' ability to plan an individual's next steps towards improved economic well-being or to enhance employment opportunities, for example, by offering the chance for volunteering.
- Performance management arrangements are not as effective as those for supervision. This is because the reviews of how well individuals are meeting personal targets are not being given close enough attention.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the sustained engagement of workless families with young children and those living in the least advantaged community in the north east of the reach area, so that at least the large majority benefit from appropriate services until their needs are met.
- Enhance the checks being made on the take-up of services by looking rigorously at what impact they are having on improving the outcomes for workless families. Seek more detailed information from Jobcentre Plus to support this work, and use it to plan the individuals' specific paths towards improved employability and economic well-being.
- Build on the well-established volunteering programme to better support parents who are not in paid employment and are seeking to enhance their work-place skills and job prospects.
- Strengthen performance management arrangements by undertaking regular reviews of how well individuals are meeting personal targets and how effectively these are contributing to meeting the centre's priorities.

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 centre coordinator, staff, the headteacher representing the lead agency, officers from the local authority, partners, parents, volunteers and members of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited 'Crawlers and Toddlers' and 'Rhyme, Play and Learn', both observed jointly with centre leaders, and a childcare adult learning course.

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
Peter Towner	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Creswick Children's Centre is a standalone centre that opened in 2008. It delivers a range of services including early years experiences, family support, child and family health services, careers guidance, adult learning courses and opportunities for volunteering. It works in close partnership with Waterside Children's Centre and Oak Tree Children's Centre, which are located nearby. There are nine children's centres in total situated in the Welwyn and Hatfield locality.

The centre shares a site with Creswick Primary and Nursery School and Creswick Pre-School, both of which are inspected under separate arrangements. Their inspection reports can be found on <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>. Creswick Primary and Nursery School currently manages the children's centre on behalf of the county council. The advisory board, which is a sub-committee of the school's main governing body, provides governance. The centre manager, supported by the coordinator, both work part-time and share the day-to-day management of the centre.

There are 933 children under five years of age living in the area served by the centre. The area is mixed socially and economically with pockets of deprivation. There are two communities located in the north and north east of the reach area that are the most disadvantaged. Some 16% of children live in homes where no one is in paid work. There are two accommodation units located in the community which provide temporary housing for families from London. Families in the reach area are predominantly White British; increasing numbers of Polish and Indian heritage families are moving into the area. When they start school, children have skills and abilities that are typical for their age.

The centre's priority target groups are: lone parents in receipt of benefits; low income and workless families; families living in temporary accommodation; fathers and male carers with identified needs; vulnerable children, including those subject to child protection plans or children in need plans; and two year-olds eligible for free early education.

Hertfordshire has just completed a review of its children's centres, and from April 2015 there will be a new lead agency responsible for the management of Creswick Children's Centre.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families **Good**

- Good partnership working and timely sharing of information with health professionals mean that the centre has early contact with parents-to-be and those with new babies. Most parents use the centre's services at least three times in the first three months of their child being registered. The centre has effective systems for following up those families who are registered but who have not been seen for some time.
- The large majority of lone parents in receipt of benefits, fathers and male carers with identified needs and families living in temporary accommodation access the centre's services regularly. Effective links with Jobcentre Plus enable the centre to know about the needs of lone parents in receipt of benefits, and provide timely support to help lone parents to improve their own and their children's well-being. Contact between the chair of the advisory board and the manager of the temporary housing is enabling the centre to respond to sometimes quite pressing needs of children and families from London who stay in the area for various lengths of time.
- Effective partnership work with social care enables the centre to build comprehensive information about children under five years of age living locally and who are in need or subject to child

protection plans. A member of staff from the children's centre is often the lead professional overseeing the package of support for children and families whose needs are assessed using the Common Assessment Framework procedures and who typically receive one-to-one support at home. The families of these children sustain regular contact with the centre until all assessed needs are met. Records show that staff work effectively to help families to overcome personal challenges and access the activities open to everyone independently when they are ready to do so.

- Although two thirds of workless parents visit the centre, they are not necessarily engaging in services aimed at improving their employment prospects. In addition, the geography of the area served by the centre means that reaching priority groups in neighbourhoods in the north is quite a stretch. Activities are held from time to time in local venues to try to increase engagement. However, the centre recognises that not enough families living in one of the most disadvantaged areas in the north east use services often enough.
- The centre has forged strong links with early years partners, and there is good sharing of information about how well children at risk of falling behind are achieving over time. Virtually all eligible children take up their free early education entitlement in good or better quality settings.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The range, relevance and quality of practice and services are good. They are not yet outstanding because the match between needs and services provided to help the priority group of workless parents improve their chances of employment has not been fully thought out. A wide range of further learning and skills training is available, but there are too few checks on the take-up rates by workless families and on what impact the training has on preparing them for or helping them to find employment. The volunteering programme is not being used well enough to give further experience to these parents to assist their economic well-being.
- The centre provides very well for children through services such as 'Rhyme, Play and Learn' and helps them to prepare for their move to school. In 2014, three quarters of Reception-aged children who had accessed the centre's services achieved a good level of development. This is 16 percentage points higher than the national average and reflects very positively on the centre's successful work to reduce inequalities. The gap between children from the least advantaged backgrounds and the rest is closing more rapidly than seen nationally.
- The care, guidance and support provided for families are good. The parenting courses run by centre staff clearly enhance parents' confidence in raising their children. Staff and the partners they work with, including those from the health services, schools and social care, thoroughly and accurately assess families' wider needs and establish well-integrated packages of support that draw on specialist help as appropriate. As a result, families, some of whom have very complex problems, are empowered to take control and get back on track.
- A wide range of well-planned services is leading to improving health outcomes. At 61.5%, sustained breastfeeding rates are high. Childhood obesity is an area-wide problem which is being tackled effectively over time. Well-attended 'Buggycise' takes place in the park to promote physical exercise, and healthy eating programmes help families to gain a better understanding of nutrition and portion size. Parents told inspectors that, having attended 'Grow, Cook and Eat' sessions, they now cook from scratch rather than use convenience foods and are very aware of the sugar and fat content of the drinks and snacks they buy. The community allotment, whose development the centre is spearheading, is involving a group of fathers and children in planting potatoes ready for spring.
- Links with partners who provide education and employment support are good. As a result, parents who take up services are helped to improve their education and skills, including English and

mathematics. The centre receives useful monthly updates from Jobcentre Plus about the progress of lone parents and their pathway towards employment, but this information about workless parents is not provided. Parents value the learning opportunities they experience, such as the opportunity to gain a level 1 qualification in childcare, and say that further learning is widening their horizons.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The manager and coordinator have complementary skills and styles that work very effectively in giving direction to the centre's work and making sure that local families, including those most in need, benefit from good-quality services. Teamwork is a strength. Staff are well prepared to grasp the opportunities that lie ahead when the centre merges with two other children's centres in a few weeks time. All of the staff are aware of the centre's improvement priorities and show strong determination to help the centre achieve further success.
- Close monitoring of the centre's performance by the local authority and advisory board plays an important part in its development. Challenging targets are tackled well and help set a good pace to improvement, as shown by the rapidly reducing achievement gap. The chair of the advisory board, managers and the headteacher of the co-located school regularly observe activities to keep abreast of the quality and impact of services. They ensure that resources are used efficiently and well to meet local needs and to improve the outcomes for most priority children and families.
- Supervision arrangements are effective. Staff feel well supported by the monthly one-to-one opportunities to explore casework. All staff are set appropriate performance management targets to meet individual needs and contribute to the centre's priorities. However, currently not enough focus is given in meetings to discussing what progress has been made in meeting these targets.
- Safeguarding matters are given high status. Staff vetting is robust and records are stored very securely. Training is up to date and comprehensive. E-safety is promoted particularly well by staff, and parents are kept well informed about issues that might affect their children's well-being. Family support workers have been trained about child sexual exploitation, but this training has not yet been rolled out to all staff. Effective multi-agency collaboration also helps reduce the risk of harm to particularly vulnerable children, including those assessed as in need or subject to child protection plans.
- Parents hold the centre in high regard, with 97% identifying in the most recent survey that they have a positive experience from attending the centre's services. The parents' forum meets with staff from time to time to share views. Parents' ideas are taken on board as appropriate. For example, they suggested that a session with dance and music would be an asset to the programme, and so 'Wiggle and Giggle' came about.

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	23560
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	454038
Managed by	Creswick Primary and Nursery School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	933
Centre manager	Val Garland
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
Telephone number	01707 343512
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