

WH3 Waterside Children's Centre

c/o Rowans Primary School, Rowans, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 1NZ

Inspection dates	25–26 February 2015
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

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.

- The centre works extremely hard to increase the number of children and families who are known and registered. As a result the vast majority are registered and the large majority of those most in need of support access the centre regularly and make good use of what is on offer.
- Friendly and supportive staff have built trusting relationships with families. Staff are extremely knowledgeable about the issues facing families in the community. A good range of services are located in the centre and the excellent working relationships with other centres in the locality ensure that families can access enhanced services.
- Strong partnerships including the sharing of information results in the good level of individual care, guidance and support provided. One parent identified that the support received has turned her life around.
- There is a high take up of funded early education places by eligible children aged two, three and four years of age.
- Good leadership, strong management and challenging governance enable the centre to focus on improving services. They know what is working well and have identified areas that need improvement. The advisory board keeps close checks on performance.
- Effective processes of ongoing review and monitoring by the local authority means that the centre has a good capacity to sustain further improvement.

It is not outstanding because:

- Despite some good collaborative work with partner agencies the service level agreement with Jobcentre Plus is not being fully implemented. This means information about the successes of parents referred for employment support is incomplete.
- The proportion of boys reaching a good level of development is below levels seen nationally and the gap in achievement between boys and girls is not closing quickly enough.
- The data provided by the local authority is not being used to identify all families on low incomes living in the most deprived areas and this impedes leader's ability to plan appropriate services that fully meet their needs

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority to ensure that the service level agreement with Jobcentre Plus is fully implemented. Seek regular and detailed feedback about the outcomes of all referrals and the success rates of any parents signposted for training or employment support.
- Use the expertise of the link education improvement advisor, to help leaders build stronger links with schools in the area where gaps in Reception-age children's achievement are evident from the 2014 profile data. Work with early years partners to help accelerate the learning and development of boys, and raise their achievement to match or exceed girls' achievement.
- Strengthen the use of relevant data provided by the local authority's management information system to extend and enhance its work with low income, workless and those families living in its most deprived area which are now being identified as requiring additional support.

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 head of children and families for the lead agency. They also held meetings with centre staff, parents, volunteers, members of the advisory board and a number of partners, including health, education, childminders and social care professionals.

The inspectors visited sessions held at the centre and in local community buildings including 'Story Sacks', 'Arts and Crafts', 'and Tums and Tinies'. An inspector jointly observed a 'Stay and Play' session with the head of children's and families services. The head of children and families services for the lead agency, the centre manager who is on maternity leave and a manager from one of the other centres were involved in team meetings.

The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. Throughout the inspection the inspectors took full opportunity to talk with parents and children.

Inspection team

Debbie Sanders, Lead Inspector	Additional inspector
Michael Miller	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Waterside Children's Centre opened in 2009 and is one of six centres in Hertfordshire currently run by the YMCA on behalf of the local authority. The centre is based on the site of Rowans Primary School (URN 117257) which is subject to a separate inspection. There is an advisory board comprising of key partners and parents in place to assist governance.

This centre is one of three children's centres in the locality and parents will often use more than one centre to access services. The centre works collaboratively with partners to provide a wide range of family support activities, with access to health, early education, parenting programmes and adult training.

There are 854 children under five years of age living in the area served by the centre, The area includes the North East of Welwyn Garden City and is made up of two areas called Haldens and Panshanger. The very large majority of families are of White British heritage, with a small mixed minority ethnic community including Eastern European and Asian families. The centre covers a small area that is highly populated and where 15% of children live in low income families, predominantly in the Harding's area. However, the number of children under five years-old who live in families where no adult is in work is low.

Leaders have identified priority groups of children and families in most need of support as; children subject to a child protection plan or identified as being in need, and families being supported by the Common Assessment Framework (CAF); families living in the most disadvantaged area with identified needs; families with English as an addition language or identified need.

The centre is currently undergoing a re-organisation following re-commissioning by Hertfordshire County Council. In April 2015 Waterside Children's Centre will become part of a group lead by a new lead agency.

Inspection judgements

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

- The vast majority of families with young children living in the area, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, are registered with the centre. The centre staff know the families very well and are able to ensure they meet the needs of the large majority of children and families from priority groups who regularly visit the centre. However, the data provided on low income families and those living in Harding's, is not yet being used effectively and this restricts leader's ability to extend their reach, and fully meet the needs of this small but significant group.
- Parents are signposted to good quality early years provision and staff work hard to assist families with issues which sometimes make attendance difficult. The centre prioritises those families most in need and provides additional support with transport and discount cards so they can attend a full range of services. All eligible two-three and four year-olds take up their entitlement to free early education.
- All staff are well trained and vigilant in supporting families who are suffering from domestic violence and encouraging their close contact. This is reinforced by messages promoted during parenting courses and by the good quality displays in the centre. Parents comment sum up many; 'The centre is the hub of the community' and 'The staff are brilliant, they have turned around my life.'
- 'Family Matters' meetings and the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) ensure there is timely contact with the most vulnerable children and families. Joined up services ensure support is matched carefully to meet assessed needs well.
- Through good health partnerships the centre knows about parents to be and provides well focused support to families because they receive regular information about all new births. Carefully targeted baby and parenting courses and the work of the children centre practitioner and outreach worker have helped these families build good relationships and develop confident parenting skills.

The quality of practice and services **Good**

- Partnerships with most schools and early year's providers in the area are strong. Together, they share effective practice, access training and have high aspirations for improving the lives of children and their families. Parents are receiving expert advice on e-safety and behaviour management that

helps keep their children safe.

- Outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage show that an above average proportion of children overall are reaching a good level of development. However, the proportion of boys achieving a good level of development is lower than the national average. The gap between girls' and boys' achievement is not closing quickly enough. The group is working well with partners to analyse this data and plan future work to help reverse this trend.
- A good range of well-located services are offered to children and families. A sensible balance is achieved between those available to everyone and those designed to support children and families identified as most in need of support.
- The skills of the outreach team who work with families in their own home are exceptional. Their knowledge of the area and the families means they are able to react quickly in times of crisis. Parents who use the services in such times express high praise about the impact the support has on their lives.
- Case files are maintained to a good standard and the centre staff keep detailed records of their work with families. A strength of the centre staff team is their wide range of professional backgrounds and expertise. The commitment and enthusiasm of staff is clear.
- Families who use the centre have access to an appropriate range of family and adult learning opportunities, including advice about parenting and domestic violence programmes which builds their confidence and raises aspirations. Jobcentre Plus links are helping meet the needs of the small but significant priority group of workless families but there is too little sharing of information about referrals or how well parents get on when they are signposted for specific help.
- The volunteering programme is well structured. Volunteers are supported positively in developing their work place experience and skills. A number of past volunteers have successfully moved into paid work.
- The centres' good work to promote healthy lifestyles is supported by the strong working relationships with health partners. The level of childhood obesity is below the national average and reducing. Staff are trained to provide good advice and support to those mothers who are breastfeeding, and this helps parents to better understand and promote healthy lifestyles

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Governance arrangements are effective and the advisory board is very well attended by a wide range of partners and parents who keep a close eye on the work of the centre. Good levels of support and challenge are provided by both the early years advisor and Herts for Learning Children's Centre' improvement partner on behalf of the local authority. They work effectively with leaders to monitor and review the centre's performance. This culminates in a robust annual conversation that challenges the centre's self-evaluation and identifies key strengths and areas for further development.
- Parents regularly share their views about centre services by using the parent suggestion box, completing session evaluations, attending parent forum meetings and using spotlight forms. In addition there is a 'Thought Wall' which parents are being encouraged to use to voice their opinions. A social media site is also used to gather information. As a result parents are instrumental in shaping services and involved pro-actively in centre decision-making.

- Safeguarding matters are taken very seriously. There are robust checks to ensure that staff, partners and volunteers are suitable to work with young children. Ongoing training on aspects of child protection ensures that staff skills are up-to-date.
- Robust early help procedures result in vulnerable families, including children subject to a child protection plan and looked after children, being effectively protected. In addition, close supervision alongside regular and detailed case file management helps to identify any potential weaknesses in practice. This ensures family files are kept up to date and progress for families is routinely reviewed.
- Well thought out performance management systems, including supervision and appraisals, are helping to drive up the quality of services and provision. Leaders are successful in tackling any underperformance.
- The centre effectively focuses efforts on reducing inequalities, tackling discrimination and improving the well-being of the whole community, but especially those families identified as most in need of support. The increased level of access by families from ethnic minority backgrounds who speak English as an additional language has enabled staff to provide even more focused support.
- Resources are used efficiently and enhanced by the successful collaboration of most partners and other children's centres. However, the service level agreement with Jobcentre Plus is not being fully implemented. This means that there is too little feedback and sharing of information in relation to impact on families looking for employment.

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	23558
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	454037
Managed by	YMCA West & Central Hertfordshire on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	854
Centre leader	Amy Matthews
Date of previous inspection	Not Previously Inspected
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Email address	waterside@ymcacentralherts.org.uk

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