

The Red Oak Children's Centre

Radstock Way, Merstham, Surrey RH1 3NH

Inspection dates		24–25 March 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.

- Most children aged under five living in the centre's area are registered. The large majority of children and families living in one of the centre's priority areas, the Merstham estate, continue to attend regularly.
- The centre has been effective in helping children to be ready to go on to school. As a result, those who have used the centre regularly make good progress. Parents feel well supported in understanding and encouraging their children's early development. Most eligible children take up their funded early years place.
- Safeguarding children and families is at the heart of the centre's work. Staff have established good links with a wide range of partners such as health services and the local housing association. Consequently families, who often have very complex needs, are provided with good care, guidance and support until they have the confidence to get their lives back on track.
- Parents have very positive views of the centre. They feel that their concerns and ideas, put forward through the regular 'tell us your views' sessions, are listened to and services adapted accordingly.
- Good leadership, governance and management are driving positive change. There are effective systems to monitor and evaluate services to check that families who would benefit most are registering and using the centre. Everyone involved in governance and management has a clear and accurate understanding of its strengths and where improvements are needed. This gives the centre a good capacity to continue to move forward.

It is not outstanding because:

- Although access rates have improved significantly, not enough children and families living around the Portland Drive area sustain regular contact after they register. The centre has not fully established the reasons for this; for example, the implications of the regeneration project in this area.
- Just over half of all mothers start to breastfeed their babies; this is considerably lower than the national average.
- There are few opportunities for parents to extend their education and be supported back into employment. Systems to track the longer-term impact of the centre's work to support these parents are underdeveloped. This reduces the effectiveness in the planning of future services.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the large majority of children and families from the Portland Drive area use services regularly after they have registered by:
 - analysing more fully the impact the regeneration programme is having on the number of young children and families in the area
 - identifying more precisely the priority needs of local children and families
 - working with partners to provide the services that meet those needs and to encourage good take up.
- Work with health partners to address the relatively low percentage of mothers who initiate breastfeeding.
- Provide more opportunities for parents in priority groups to access training and employment services by:
 - assessing the specific needs of parents more precisely, especially of those living in the two least advantaged areas
 - working more closely with partners to provide services to meet those identified needs
 - developing a robust system to get feedback from partners and parents about the progress they have made as a result of signposting or support from the centre.

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 and the deputy, the headteacher and Chair of Governors of Furzefield Primary School, and the Chair of the advisory board. They met representatives from the local authority and spoke to several partners, including those from health, the housing association, family learning and an early years setting. The inspectors spoke to several parents and volunteers and took their views into account.

The inspectors visited sessions taking place in the centre such as an 'Every Child a Talker group' and the Baby Baby activity. They also visited the Baby Cafe and a Bookstart session that took place off site. A joint observation was undertaken with the centre manager. The headteacher, centre manager and deputy and a representative from the local authority observed all the inspection team meetings.

Inspection team

Joan Lindsay, Lead Inspector

Additional inspector

Barbara Saltmarsh

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The Red Oak Children's Centre is a standalone centre that was designated in 2009. It is located in the grounds of Furze Field Primary School. There is a day care facility, Shining Stars, in the children's centre, overseen by the centre manager. Some services are delivered in the community at the Age Concern building in Merstham and St Catherine's Primary School in Bletchingley. The centre provides early years experiences, family support, adult learning and health services through partnership work. Some services, such as Baby Cafe, are delivered jointly with three other local children's centres, Stepping Stones, Welcare and Dover's Green.

The governing body of Furze Field Primary School manages the centre on behalf of the local authority; the headteacher provides line management of the centre manager. There is an advisory board in place to assist governance. The school and the day care nursery are subject to separate inspections. Their reports can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

There are 909 children aged under five in the area served by the centre, which covers Merstham, Bletchingley and Nutfield. The area is economically diverse, with two of the eight localities in the centre's area ranked amongst the least advantaged in the country. These areas are located around Portland Drive and on the Merstham Estate. The vicinity around Portland Drive is undergoing a major regeneration project, which has led to a large number of families with young children being rehoused away from the area served by the centre.

Information shows that, overall, one in seven children live in households where no adult is working, which is below the national average, but this rises to almost one in three in the Portland Drive area. Approximately a quarter of families are claiming Working Tax Credit in the least advantaged areas, which is above national figures. Most children come from a White British background. Children generally enter early years settings at levels below those typical for their age, although this varies across the area served by the centre.

The centre has identified priority groups needing most support as young children and families living in the two least advantaged areas around Portland Drive and on the Merstham estate.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The centre has registered most of the young children living locally. The large majority of children and families living on the Merstham estate make regular use of the easily accessible centre services. The use of venues in the local community such as the Playtime sessions at the Age Concern building in Merstham also encourages their attendance.
- A lower proportion of children living in the Portland Drive region attend the centre's activities regularly. A major regeneration programme is underway here, with young families being rehoused out of area. The centre has not fully established the impact of this on the number of children who have moved out or on whether services need to be adapted to meet the specific requirements of families who are left.
- The centre covers a very extensive area. It overcomes transport and other access problems effectively by taking services out into the community, such as the SPLAT! session held at St Catherine's School in Bletchingley.
- A weekly well-baby clinic is held at the centre and antenatal services are run in conjunction with neighbouring children's centres. This ensures that expectant and new parents are encouraged to register and have good access to early health services.
- The centre works well with local partners to identify children and families most in need of support. Health visitors are proactive in encouraging families to use the centre and in referring families for

targeted support. This has a positive impact on parents' well-being, especially in the early days of parenthood or if there are specific problems such as postnatal depression.

- There are effective links with local early years settings. Families who are eligible have been encouraged effectively to take up the entitlement for two-year-olds to have free early education; 93% now do so, all in good or better provision. Most three- and four-year-olds also take up their free education places.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The quality, range and relevance of services are good overall. They are particularly strong in relation to children's early development. The centre has a detailed and comprehensive system to evaluate services each term. These link planning and assessment effectively to ensure what is offered meets priority families' needs. This has highlighted that fewer families from Portland Drive use services regularly. The centre is now trying to establish the reasons for this.
- There are very close links with Furzefield Primary School and the on-site nursery. This is enhanced by the early years teacher who works in the centre and the school. Consequently, children are given good-quality learning experiences that are frequently targeted to meet specific aspects such as speech and language development. Sessions designed to develop children's speaking and listening skills and one-to-one Bookstart sessions are not only much enjoyed by children and parents but are also having a positive impact on children's early development.
- Tracking priority children when they are at the centre through detailed learning journeys and when they move on to the adjacent nursery shows that they make good progress as a result of using the centre regularly. Two thirds of children living in the centre's area achieve a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year, which is above national and county levels. The gap between those less likely to achieve and their peers is substantially narrower than seen nationally.
- Health outcomes for young children are generally positive. At 83%, a higher percentage are at a healthy weight at the end of the early years than seen nationally. The proportion of babies who are being fully or partially breastfed at around two months, 61%, is substantially higher than average. There is good support for mothers available at postnatal groups and the popular Baby Cafe. However, the percentage of mothers who choose to start breastfeeding is much lower than the national figure. The centre is aware that more collaborative work needs to be undertaken antenatally with health partners to address this.
- Care, guidance and support provided to individual families by staff working in the community are effective. This is highly valued by recipients, who typically state, 'They are lovely at the children's centre. I don't know what I would have done without my outreach worker.' Case files are maintained to a very high standard. They reflect families' views and contain assessments of the progress they have made to resolve often complex issues.
- Although there are currently few volunteers, this is partly because of the centre's success with previous parents who have gone on to employment or training. A small number of other parents have been supported back to work or have accessed courses to improve their confidence, such as Cooking on a Budget. However, the centre is aware that opportunities to access employment services, further education or training are limited and that this is an area for development. In addition, the system to track families is not sufficiently well established to show the impact of the centre's or partners' input in the longer term.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre manager and her deputy are an effective team; they have been the driving force behind recent improvements in the number of children and families registering and regularly accessing services. They are ably supported by the local authority through regular monitoring and reviews and the setting of challenging targets. There is a recognition at all levels, however, that targets now need to be more specific in relation to the sustained engagement of children and families in the

Portland Drive area.

- Members of the advisory board and the governing body are knowledgeable about the centre, its strengths and areas for development. Members regularly visit sessions to get first-hand experience of what the centre offers to local families. Advisory board meetings are well attended by a core group of partners who have an in-depth knowledge of the community. As such, they are able to challenge as well as support the centre. However, parent representation is not as high as it was because previous members have returned to work.
- Regular staff appraisals are conducted thoroughly. Staff have challenging targets linked to the centre's main priorities. They are well trained, especially in all aspects of safeguarding children and families. Staff ensure that children who are looked after, subject to child protection plans and those deemed to be children in need are well supported. At present, staff are provided with names of such families on a 'need-to-know' basis only. The recent appointment of a link social worker has strengthened the exchange of communication with social care, however.
- Centre users have high levels of satisfaction with the quality of services and the support and information they receive from staff. Typical comments include, 'My confidence in dealing with children and adults is the biggest difference they have made.' Parents' views are gathered regularly at the end of courses such as the postnatal group and the impact is measured. More generally, in the absence of a formal parents' forum, comments are collected at the 'tell-us-your-views' sessions and acted on where possible. For example, following on from a cooking course, the suggestion to start growing vegetables at the centre is being acted on.
- The centre is attractive and welcoming indoors and outside. Resources, including staff, are of a high quality and are used efficiently to support families and to reduce inequalities, especially for young children in the local area.

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	23247
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	455076
Managed by	The governing body of Furzefield Primary School, on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	909
Centre manager	Nikki Bird
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01737 645908
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