

# ROC5 The Oak Tree Children's Centre

Grove Wood Primary School, Grove Road, Rayleigh, SS6 8UA

<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 March 2015
<b>Previous inspection date</b>	Not Previously Inspected

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>	<b>4</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Inadequate	4
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Inadequate	4

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a centre that is inadequate.

- Safeguarding policy and procedures are weak. Family case files do not consistently show clearly that families who need early help or intervention are well supported or protected from harm. Senior managers have not undertaken effective quality assurance of case files or recorded the outcomes of supervision.
- Leaders do not routinely monitor the access levels of priority children and so find it difficult to demonstrate how well they are engaged and what impact the centre's services are having.
- Information on new births and children who are known to social care is not routinely shared by health services or social workers, and this limits the centre's improvement work.
- A third of eligible two-year-olds are not taking up their free entitlement to early education. The centre does not know whether the most vulnerable are receiving the best start to their education.
- The centre is not able to demonstrate clearly the impact of its services on narrowing inequalities because progress tracking systems are not in place and information on children's achievement is not analysed effectively.
- Leaders and those responsible for governance do not hold an accurate view of the centre's performance because they have not monitored the quality or impact of services well enough.
- Plans for improvement lack specific targets, particularly with regard to improving the outcomes for children and families from priority groups. As things stand, there is limited capacity to improve the centre's effectiveness.

### This centre has the following strengths:

- The centre's effective volunteering programme helps to build confidence and work-readiness for the few parents who take up the good opportunities provided.
- The number of local children registered and accessing services is improving due to the centre's well-targeted actions. There has been rapid improvement over the last year.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Immediately strengthen safeguarding arrangements by:
  - ensuring all policies and procedures, including risk assessments, are reviewed, updated as appropriate, and fully implemented by all staff
  - ensuring all case files and records held on families who receive targeted intervention or support are fit for purpose. As a minimum these files should record details of the family, professionals involved, referral, assessment, action plan, chronology and record of all interventions and their impact
  - ensuring that family case supervision decisions and monitoring outcomes are recorded on case files
  - undertaking a review of the use of Shared Family Assessments to ensure that families who may need multi-agency support receive this and that information is shared appropriately between agencies
  - working with the local authority to secure basic information on all families who are known to social care.
  
- Ensure that access to services is good for children and families from all priority groups by:
  - routinely monitoring the sustained engagement of priority groups
  - working with health partners to secure information on new births and families moving into the area, so that almost all are registered and have access to information, advice and guidance
  - ensuring that most two-year-olds who are eligible for free education take up their entitlement in good or better quality early years settings.
  
- Ensure that services have a positive impact on improving the outcomes for all priority groups by:
  - monitoring and evaluating the quality of services delivered by staff and partners and identifying areas for further improvement
  - routinely tracking families who receive targeted support to identify which families are not engaging, particularly those who are subject to domestic violence
  - enhancing the opportunities for adults' further learning and employability skills and tracking the progress they make when they take up services
  - tracking the progress made by children from priority groups and use the findings to help reduce inequalities, particularly for boys and girls who live in the most deprived areas and who do not achieve as well as their peers
  - focusing services on improving children's healthy weights and breastfeeding rates at six-to-eight weeks so that they are at least in line with levels seen nationally.
  
- Strengthen the effectiveness of leadership, governance and management by:
  - ensuring that the data sharing agreement between the local authority and Barnardo's is extended to fully include the Pre-school Learning Alliance
  - ensuring leaders and managers at all levels quality assure family case work, activities and services
  - creating an improvement plan that focuses on specific, measureable, achievable, realistic and time-bound tasks to improve both access and the quality of services
  - ensuring those responsible for governance provide effective support and challenge to promote rapid and sustained improvement.

## 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 inspectors held meetings with the children's centre manager, staff and a wide range of partners including representatives from early years settings, schools, health and children's social care. They also met with the chair of the advisory board, several local authority staff and parents. Representatives from the lead body, Barnardo's, and delivery partner, Pre-school Learning Alliance, were also involved.

The inspectors visited all three children's centre sites and observed a range of sessions including: 'Baby Clinic' at Willows; 'Stay and Play' at Oak Tree; and 'Stay, Weigh and Play' at Ladybirds. They also jointly observed 'Messy Play' at Willows with the children's centre manager.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including over twenty family files. Some family files were jointly reviewed with leaders and managers.

## Inspection team

Lead inspector, Michael Blakey	Additional inspector
Peter Towner	Additional inspector
Karen Cooper	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Oak Tree Children's Centre consists of the main site and two other sites: Ladybirds and Willows. Oak Tree Children's Centre shares a site with Grove Wood Primary School. The school is subject to separate inspection arrangements and its report can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>. The centre is managed by the Pre-school Learning Alliance under contract to Barnardo's which is the lead agency for this centre. An advisory board is in place to support governance, and this is chaired by the headteacher of Grove Wood Primary School.

Approximately 2,505 children aged under five years live in the area served by the centre. The area includes 32 distinct areas, most of which are relatively affluent but with three that are ranked amongst the least advantaged. One of them is amongst the 30% most deprived in England, and is close to the Ladybird's building. Unemployment rates are well below national levels. Approximately 8% of children are assessed as living in poverty.

The most prominent group of families are of White British origin with small numbers of a wide range of other ethnicities, including Thai and Chinese. Children's skills and knowledge when they start school are broadly in line with those typical for their age.

The children's centre has identified the following priority groups: children and families living in the most deprived areas; children from minority ethnic backgrounds; and two year olds who are eligible for free early education. In addition, the centre gives priority to supporting families in greatest need including those subject to domestic violence, those known to children's social care and those suffering from post-natal depression.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

### Requires improvement

- Health clinics held at the centre and activities such as 'Stay and Play' are generally very well attended. However, leaders and managers do not routinely monitor the sustained engagement of children and families from priority groups or check how well their needs are being met by the centre's services. These aspects of the centre's work require improvement.
- Most children aged under five are now registered with the children's centre. Over the last twelve months there has been an increase of 15 percentage points in the level of children's participation in children's centre services due to the centre's effective actions.
- As a result of focused outreach work and strong partnership working with midwives and health visitors, access to services for families and parents expecting children is improving. Most families with children under the age of one, including those from minority backgrounds and those living in the most deprived communities, accessed services at least once in the last year.
- Information shows that 64% of eligible two year-olds took up their entitlement to free early education in the autumn of 2014. This is an improvement from the previous summer when 49% accessed their places. The centre has recently received information about the children who are eligible for free places and this offers the scope for actions to be taken to help the most vulnerable make a good start in their education. The take up of funded places by three-year-olds is good and

almost all four-year-olds are in nurseries.

### **The quality of practice and services**

### **Inadequate**

- Case files and record keeping on children and families who receive targeted intervention or support are not fit for purpose. As a result of poor record keeping, leaders and managers are not confident that all priority families, including those subject to domestic violence, are safe. This is because important information is often missing from records, which are held on pieces of paper stored loosely in plastic wallets. Details of the referral, initial assessment, action plan, chronology and record of all interventions are often incomplete.
- Shared Family Assessments are not used effectively to coordinate multi-agency support for families in most need. At the time of the inspection, there were no Shared Family Assessments, although records indicated that a multi-agency response was appropriate in some cases.
- The large majority of sessions and activities observed during the inspection required improvement. The centre manager's evaluation of a 'Messy Play' session, which was jointly observed with inspectors, rightly pinpointed that opportunities were missed to promote children's language development. The lack of focus on meeting priority children's needs lessens the value of such sessions in reducing inequalities.
- Although the large majority of Reception-aged children living in the area achieved a good level of development last year, the centre is not able to demonstrate the value it adds to children's learning and development because systems to track the progress made are not in place. Children living in the most deprived areas achieved well below their peers. Activities and services are not sufficiently focused on helping them to make good progress, particularly boys.
- The proportion of mothers who sustain breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks is well below the level seen nationally. The centre has rightly identified that this is an area for further joint working and improvement. The absence of reliable data on childhood obesity restricts this core aspect of the centre's work to help families live healthy lives.
- Programmes for adults are underdeveloped. Leaders are not always clear about further learning or employability needs and which families need support. In contrast, the volunteering programme is highly regarded, makes a discernible difference to parents' confidence, and has successfully helped a few to return to work.
- Parents who have accessed one-to-one support speak very highly of the difference this has made to their lives. A typical comment is: 'I can't praise them enough for everything - reliable and consistent support.'

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

### **Inadequate**

- Safeguarding procedures are not robust. The centre's policies and procedures, including risk assessments, are not rigorously followed by staff, and the safeguarding policy requires updating to take into account the most recent guidance.
- Available resources are not being used sufficiently well to assess and meet the needs of priority families living in the area. Self-evaluation processes provide an unrealistic view of the centre's performance and plans for improvement lack focus and specific, measurable targets. These

inadequacies impede the centre's capacity to build for better effectiveness.

- The current governance arrangements are inadequate because those who are responsible do not know what is happening in the centre and inadequate provision has gone unchallenged.
- Monitoring arrangements lack rigour. Barnardo's, the Pre-school Learning Alliance and the local authority have visited the centre to discuss practice but have not focused on the important aspect of family support work and case file recording.
- Those responsible for the governance do not know how effective the centre is in closing the gap and reducing inequalities for children because they do not make effective use of data to compare the relative performance of the centre against other centres.
- The information sharing agreement in place between Barnardo's and the local authority is not yet established with the Pre-school Learning Alliance, who are contracted to manage the centre. The centre does not receive information about vulnerable children who are known to social care. Details about new births in the area are not made available to the centre and this is a barrier to further improving engagement levels. The advisory board has recently provided effective challenge to improve data sharing.
- The centre manager and her team of staff are dedicated and hardworking. The effort that they have put into gathering information about families in the area has been significant, but has distracted them from other important aspects of their work. There has been positive impact from the staff's work to drive up registrations. Staff are supervised regularly. However, the outcomes of supervision meetings are not consistently stored on case files.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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>	22539
<b>Local authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	454033
<b>Managed by</b>	Barnardo's / Pre-school Learning Alliance on behalf of the local authority.

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	2,505
<b>Centre leader</b>	Emma Maynard
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01268 775 910
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