

Hertfordshire - Hertsmere: Radlett and Park Street Group

c/o Mount Pleasant Lane, Bricket Wood, St Albans, AL2 3XA

Inspection date	11–12 March 2014	
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 children's centre group is good.

- The very large majority (86%) of children and families are registered with the group. Well over two thirds of families, including those living in the most deprived neighbourhoods, regularly access services.
- All children in need are known to the centres and receive timely early help from the experienced staff, who work in close partnership with health and social care professionals to provide good care, guidance and support.
- Children benefit from good quality activities such as 'Stay and Play' held at a variety of community venues and 'Learning Journeys' are used well to show parents the wide range of activities children experience. The proportion of Reception-age children who achieve a good level of development is above the county and national average.
- Parents build their confidence and self-esteem, and widen their skills, by attending a range of well-planned parenting courses. Good health outcomes, as reflected in the low-level childhood obesity and high rates of breastfeeding, are championed by the group in many practical ways such as by promoting a healthy diet and the benefits of physical exercise.
- Strong leadership, management and governance ensure that the group works efficiently and effectively in delivering good quality services that make a positive difference to families' lives. Accurate self-evaluation, well-focused action planning and clear management procedures mean that the group has good capacity to build for still greater effectiveness.

It is not outstanding because:

- The group has not yet engaged a high enough proportion of workless families in appropriate services that enhance their skills development and education.
- Session planning and assessments lack sufficiently sharp focus on the learning needs of target children and there is inconsistent follow up of how well they achieve relative to others when they transfer to school.
- The experienced but newly formed advisory board has yet to fully develop its role.

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. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are SA9 Park Street and St Stephens and H6 Radlett Link Children's Centres.

This inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the team leader, senior leaders, managers and staff of Hertsmere Leisure, local authority officers, partners, parents, childminders, grandparents, centre users and members of the group's advisory board.

The inspectors visited two activities jointly with staff. A 'Stay and Play' at Greenwood Park Community Centre and 'Creative Play' at Radlett Village Institute.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a wide range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
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Georgina Beasley	Additional inspector
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Jean Samuel	Additional inspector
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Full report

Information about the centre group

The group consists of two children's centres: H6 Radlett Link, which is located as part of the library in Radlett; and SA9 Park Street and St Stephens, which shares a site with Mount Pleasant Lane Junior Mixed, Infant and Nursery School (URN:117347) which is inspected under separate arrangements. The report is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centres are managed under contract by Hertsmere Leisure, a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee, which manages leisure facilities in Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire as well as being the lead agency for eleven children's centres. Hertsmere Leisure was commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council to be the Lead Agency for both children's centres in 2009.

The group's governance is overseen by a board of trustees. A senior management team, led by a chief executive, is responsible for overall operation, management and strategic direction, and reports direct to the board of trustees. Supporting this governance structure is an advisory board made up of local partners and parent representatives. The team leader oversees the management of both centres and their staff teams, and 3R1 Abbots Langley children's centre (URN:20009) which was inspected separately.

There are 1,198 children under five years of age living in the group's reach area, which is socially and economically diverse. The majority of families are of White British heritage with a growing number from different ethnic minority backgrounds. Some 11% of families are eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Children's skills and knowledge on entry to early years provision is broadly at the level expected for their age.

Services to meet the group's core purpose are run from SA9 Park Street and St Stephens children's centre and a range of other venues including Radlett library, village institutes, health centres, churches, community centres, schools and nurseries.

Target groups have been identified as: families living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods (How Wood and Phillimore), workless families, lone parent families, children receiving the two- year-old early education funding, minority ethnic families, and particularly vulnerable children.

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

- Increase the number of workless families who take up appropriate opportunities that enhance their skills, employability and economic well-being, and track the progress they make in achieving personal goals.
- Sharpen planning to ensure that practitioners have a clear focus on promoting the learning and development of target children, and make sure that assessments chart the progress they make over the longer term.
- Press ahead with reviewing the role of the advisory board and injecting more challenge into decision making about the group's performance.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Registrations are rising due to the group's well-targeted work, and the large majority of children and families living in the reach area regularly use services.
- The centre engages expectant and new mothers well. 'Baby Massage' sessions are very well attended and evaluations show the very positive impact they have on helping new and young mothers build confidence and also helping parents who are experiencing problems with attachment and bonding.
- Good use is made of community venues to deliver local services, especially in the Radlett area where there is no actual children's centre building. The group's approach of taking services to where they are needed most encourages those who may be less likely to attend, such as families without the use of personal transport. Additionally, the group's strong focus on reducing inequalities, for example by providing crèche facilities, means that parents do not need to worry about child care while they attend courses.
- The engagement of families living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods is particularly successful. Effective partnership working with a local housing association and a nearby stand-alone children's centre ensures that increasing numbers of priority families have access to a wide range of appropriate services such as 'Stay and Play' on their doorstep. However, more work is needed to encourage the take up of services by workless families.
- Good support for children most in need of protection, including strong multi-agency partnerships that ensure joined up early help is available, results in 100% of these children benefitting from the group's services.
- At over 80% there is good take up of funded early education by vulnerable two, three and four year-olds. There is timely information sharing with health partners about children's on-going development, but the tracking of their learning and achievement when they transfer to school has only just begun.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The staff work closely with a wide range of partners to provide appropriate good quality services that are open to all families with young children living locally alongside specific help for priority families who most need support.
- Parents are active participants in shaping the services through good attendance at parents' forum meetings and representation on the advisory board. The centres have been very effective in establishing themselves as the hub of their communities and families are highly satisfied with the services they receive.
- Child health clinics run by health visitors provide regular opportunities for parents to receive support and advice on a range of family health issues. Health outcomes are good as a result of the strong focus placed on family well-being, diet and exercise and are nurtured effectively in group sessions such as 'Healthy Tots' and 'Funky Monkey Movers'.
- The proportion of children who reach a good level of development at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage is greater than seen nationally. However, girls tend to outperform boys and children eligible for free school meals do not do as well as their peers. Staff have made a positive start with early year's partners to use this information to shape services such as the 'About Boys'

course and focus on language development during the 'Fun with Stories' sessions. However, opportunities are being missed to accelerate achievement of target children during drop-in sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and record their progress in the well-developed 'Learning Journeys'.

- Adults have extremely positive views about the courses they attend, such as 'Parenting Puzzle' and 'Family Toolkit'. The very large majority of adults who start a group or course usually finish it. A group of mothers told inspectors that they 'pick up lots of useful tips to manage their child's behaviour positively' and to support their learning at home, for example when making glitter play dough together to create models. The positive partnership with 'Catapult Services' results in tailor-made First Aid courses being delivered that respond well to the welfare needs of families.
- A range of adult education courses are available, but the centre is not yet proactive enough in ensuring the large majority of workless families participate in order to enhance their skills and education, or when they do, in finding out about how well they have got on. The volunteering programme chalks up a number of successes including examples of how parents have used it as a stepping stone to get back into work. Currently some of the group's volunteers are instrumental in supporting the life and development of the library at Radlett, but there are no volunteers active at Park Street and St Stephen Children's Centre.
- Families are very well supported during times of personal crisis, and are helped to overcome particular challenges for example during post natal depression and acute illnesses. One mother who has experienced extremely poor health identified that without the support of the centre she would not have made it through the first six months of her child's life. Another summed up her views by saying: 'the staff are an amazing bunch of people who deserve recognition and top marks'.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Strong and self-critical leadership ensures that the group's performance is improving over time as reflected in increasing registration figures and improving health outcomes. Regular meetings led by the local authority keep a close check on how well the group is doing and provide plenty of challenge to help move things forward. Well-focused action planning and clear management procedures mean that the group has good capacity to build for still greater effectiveness.
- Leaders use a wide range of useful information to help shape services that respond to local needs and ensure the effective deployment of resources. The tight budget is managed very efficiently. Collaborative partnership work delivers good quality practice and services that result in children and families, particularly those most in need, improving life chances and choices, health and well-being.
- Staff view supervision and appraisal arrangements as highly beneficial in enabling the exchange of information and sharing of good practice. Staff take full ownership of the role they play as being central to the group's overall effectiveness. Training is well-targeted and a programme of learning walks and peer monitoring is being developed to further enhance the robust and accurate self-evaluation processes.
- Governance is effective with some useful benchmarking taking place across the children's centres that Hertsme Leisure manage, to assist best practice exchanges and support improvement. The group's well-established but newly re-vitalised advisory board has already set out a clear agenda for reviewing the effectiveness of its role and in particular the level of challenge it injects into decision-making.
- Safeguarding families is inherent in the group's policies, procedures and practice, which are applied consistently across the wide range of community venues used to deliver services. When particularly

vulnerable children and families are identified or referred to the centres, staff become fully involved in working with partners to ensure the right package of support is quickly established, including the use of the Common Assessment Framework procedures. Consequently there are very low and reducing numbers of families where children are subject to child protection plans or intensive levels of social care involvement. All children identified as being 'in need' or 'looked-after' are in regular contact with the group.

- The group offers a warm welcome to everyone. Chinese and Turkish families told inspectors how friendly staff are and how well they were helped to overcome feelings of isolation when they first accessed services. A father said how much his daughters had already learned from the very positive staff role models. Harmonious relationships were a key feature of the inclusive ethos observed in the groups inspected.
- The parents have good opportunities to express their views through the parents' forum and the 'You said, we did' process. While their views are discussed at meetings by the centres' leadership and parent representatives, their knowledge of what the advisory board does is sketchy.

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 Group details

Unique reference number	80291
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	430117
Managed by	Hertsmere Leisure on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,198
Group manager	Jeanette White
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01923 673698
Email address	Jeanette.white@hertsmereleisure.co.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 22612 SA9 Park Street and St Stephens
- 21333 H6 Radlett Link

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