

# Inspection report for Marsh Farm Children's Centre

<b>Local authority</b>	Luton
<b>Inspection number</b>	383701
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	N/A
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Butterflies Pre-School (EY314587) Gill Blowers Nursery School (EY304683) Sundon Stars Pre-School at Cheynes Infant School (EY417602)

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with representatives of Luton Borough Council, the centre manager, centre staff, representatives from the centre's partners and commissioned services, the family support team and the senior management team. They met with representatives from the advisory board and centre users, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Marsh Farm Centre has evolved from a Sure Start local programme into a fully operational designated children's centre providing the full core purpose. It is located in a new bespoke building on the site of Lea Manor High School. The building accommodates: the children's centre; the Edwin Lobo Child Development Unit which provides family and health services for children presenting developmental, physical & learning disabilities; Butterflies nursery, a 65 place day Nursery for children 0-5 years. As well as offering childcare provision on site, the centre has links with Gill Blowers Nursery School, a resourced nursery offering 40 early education places plus a 34 place unit for 2-3 year olds, and Sundon Stars Pre-School based at Cheynes Infant School, that provides 34 places sessional care and before and after school provision. Both satellite venues have community rooms for activities with parents and carers. Cheynes Infant School hosts a child health clinic, and a further clinic is held in the Community Centre. The centre is open 52 weeks of the year on weekdays from 8:00 am to 6:00pm. A 'Dads' Group' meets on Saturday mornings and the centre holds occasional fun days or trips at week-ends.

The centre has an advisory board consisting of parents, professionals from partner agencies, stakeholders and the leaders of the nursery settings. The advisory board is accountable to Luton Borough Council. Re-organisation is planned for this April, when will become a 'hub' centre for a much larger reach area and responsible for the work of three other children's centres.

The reach area for the centre consists of 1365 families with children under five. It also has 638 families from out of reach registered. Socio-economic ratings make the area one of the 10% most deprived wards nationally. Housing is often overcrowded and there is a high level of transience due to temporary housing being provided. There are high numbers of lone parents. Incidents of domestic abuse, drug and alcohol abuse and cases of depression are high in the area. Local authority data for the area show the percentages of children living in poverty, of social housing, of lone parents, of children subject to child protection plans and the number of looked after children are all above the local and national averages. The community is ethnically mixed: 28.7% are White British, 8.1% of dual heritage, 14.5% Asian, 10.4% Black African, 4.5% Black Caribbean, and a small percentage of families with a Chinese heritage. The ethnic background of 32.8% is unknown.

Unemployment is high with around a third of children classed as living in poverty. The proportion of children from households with no adult working and claiming out-of-work benefits is much higher than the local authority and national averages. Within the reach area, 15% of children live in single-parent households. The level of children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years' provision is low in comparison to that typical for their age.

## Inspection judgements

**Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

### Overall effectiveness

**The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families**

**1**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

**The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management**

**1**

## Main findings

Marsh Farm Children's Centre provides an outstanding level of service to its community. It is highly effective in meeting the needs of most of the children and families who live in its area as well as a significant number who use the centre but live outside of its area. Its success is built on high-quality relationships, based on trust. One mother commented: 'They really made me feel that I wasn't just a number and that there is someone out there that actually cares. That is what is so special about the people who work here – they care.' This is typical of many other comments made by users.

The exceptionally strong professional relationship between the centre's leaders and a wide range of community support organisations means that the staff have local

knowledge that enables them to be highly pro-active and intervene with early support for a wide range of local issues. An excellent level of information-sharing with the health services means that the centre offers early support to all expectant families. Excellent relations with health services enable centre staff to provide expert support and guidance to vulnerable families. Through local contacts, the centre provides timely support and intervention where domestic violence is a threat to family life. Additionally, working alongside a good range of community services including, schools, early years providers, the job centre, child minders, adult education providers and families within the community, means that the centre has had a great impact on improving the lives of the families. Additionally, it is very effective in improving community cohesion so that there is a growing pride amongst local community members and their aspirations are higher. Parents and carers remarked on how the centre has enabled them to become independent and their experiences with the centre have changed their lives.

The centre has a very good success rate in improving the health of adults and children in its reach area. Children are kept exceptionally safe and the staff, including the outreach workers, show great expertise in this area of their work. Adults engaging with the centre in order to improve their life chances, through learning to speak English or in gaining qualifications, have a high level of success.

Parents and carers feedback to centre staff on how much they have been helped, and give their views on the courses or services accessed. There is a wealth of verbal feedback and opinions from the centre's own community consultation exercises. This is noted and is used effectively in helping to shape future services. Additionally, there is great deal of data available against which the centre management is able to measure its own success. However, leaders have to work hard at sorting the data so that it provides information relevant to their locality to ensure that services are clearly targeted to those most in need and located where the hardship is greatest.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Self-evaluation is thorough and is used very effectively to plan and prioritise challenging targets. Staff development is excellent and there is a wide range of relevant expertise among the staff, the centre's professional partners and commissioned service providers. Leaders have a strong commitment to supporting the community, as do all staff and professionals working with and from the centre. The advisory board members are fully committed to the centre, and the systems to hold staff at all levels accountable are robust and highly effective. The centre leaders and managers maintained a high level of services during an unsettled period prior to relocation. Now in new accommodation, the centre continues to develop its services and meet community need exceptionally well. The capacity to sustain improvement is therefore outstanding.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Ensure that data is organised more effectively so that the centre leaders and managers can more easily use it to:
  - prioritise the areas of greatest need
  - locate services within the locality where the need is greatest.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>1</b>
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The centre is having a considerable impact on community health and well-being. Services that focus on healthy eating and nutrition have had a significant impact on child obesity in the area, which has reduced dramatically over the last year, whilst it is increasing across the borough. Dental health is improving significantly, with the proportion of young children's damaged or repaired teeth being around a half of that in neighbouring areas. The centre reports a high percentage of new mothers continuing to breastfeed beyond eight weeks. At 'Stay and Play' sessions and in the nursery, children have the opportunity to exercise, run around and play in the open spaces outside. They are provided with healthy snacks and parents and carers have a good understanding of healthy diet. Parents and carers keep a careful eye on their baby's health; most attend the one-year development checks with their children and a large majority attend two-year checks.

Parents, carers and their children are kept very safe by the centre through the rigorous attention to health and safety. They benefit from close supervision during activities and a fully secure environment. All families' circumstances are assessed very carefully and sensitively through the weekly allocation meetings where a team of professional partners and centre staff discuss individual cases. This involves the full cooperation of the service users and enables staff to direct families to the most suitable support. This process is particularly effective for vulnerable children and adults. Families are supported very effectively when they most need it. Case studies demonstrate the excellent impact of the centre's intervention and the positive impact it has had upon the lives of parents, carers and children. Home-safety checks contribute to parents' understanding of how to keep the home a safe place for children.

Children enjoy learning and make excellent progress. This includes those with a disability and those with special educational needs, and children who speak English as an additional language. The gap is closing between the lowest-achieving children and the national average attainment. The proportion of children reaching the levels nationally expected for this age is steadily increasing year-on-year and is now close to the national average. Children thoroughly enjoy activities and are fully engaged in outdoor and indoor activities that cross all areas of learning. They are active learners, motivated to learn through being encouraged to follow their own interests. Adults make excellent progress in improving their skills and qualifications. The centre records significant success in improving parenting skills, improving literacy and numeracy, raising nutrition awareness and gaining qualifications. There are cases where these have led directly into employment. Out of work adults receive effective and highly valued support through opportunities to 'drop-in' to consult with a representative from Jobcentre, or to have a more structured meeting. Both adults

and children are exceptionally well prepared for the future.

Children and their parents and carers contribute very well to the work of the centre. Children's 'Learning Journals' clearly record discussion with children relating to their learning experiences, what interests them and which areas they would like to take forward in their next steps. These preferences are clearly used in planning for children's learning. Parents and carers make a significant contribution to the centre's work. There are active members of the community on the advisory board. Parents and carers give their feedback on services accessed and the centre regularly issues questionnaires seeking parents and carers views.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>1</b>

### **How good is the provision?**

<b>1</b>
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Rigorous assessment of users' needs is made by using information provided by health professionals and the centre's own extensive knowledge of families in its area. Staff are highly qualified to deal with areas where there is a significant level of need. Users' needs are identified carefully and reviewed regularly with partner agencies so that staff can adapt support plans accordingly. This results in targeted and very effective support from professional service providers that reaches all of the centre's identified target groups well. Through effective outreach work, centre staff have a strong insight into the needs of the families with who they work. Users have good opportunities to participate in well-organised activities that are tailored to meet their needs. For example, an English conversation group was set up to give non-English speakers the confidence to join more formal classes for those who speak English as an additional language. One parental comment, typical of many others, said, 'I wanted to go on a course, learn more and better myself, which is exactly what I have been able to do.'

The centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment exceptionally

well because staff use their knowledge effectively to help children build on their limited skills on entry. The outreach and family support team and health professionals work together closely to provide a good range of fully integrated services to support the welfare needs of all groups of users and the wider community. For example, the parenting programme is highly effective in improving parenting skills.

Outstanding care, guidance and support are major features of the centre's provision. Excellent support for families in crisis has meant that the centre has made significant contributions to the welfare of parents, carers and children. Allocation meetings, in which staff review targeted support for vulnerable families, make a very strong contribution to the care, guidance and support provided by the centre staff. The Common Assessment Framework process is used very effectively to guide excellent multi-agency working between the outreach workers team, health visitors and the nursery staff. The centre admit that many cases are resolved before the need for the Common Assessment Framework process, due to the early involvement of the centre's professional partners and highly effective outreach work. The centre supports cases involving child protection or where children are experiencing or witnessing domestic violence. Care and support plan options are reviewed, and it is clear that there is a wealth of knowledge and skill contributing to outreach work. Feedback shows that there has been excellent progress in resolving many cases through the excellent support and guidance provided.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

<b>1</b>
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The centre manager and her deputy provide inspirational leadership and determination to provide only the best for the community. Their skills, qualifications and experience complement each other exceptionally well. Day-to-day management and professional supervision are of a high quality. Well-qualified staff are committed to fulfilling the centre's aims and priorities. Their roles are clearly defined and there is an excellent sense of teamwork. This leads to an integrated approach to providing highly effective services for users. The centre provides excellent value for money.

Different levels of governance and professional accountability ensure the centre's operations are highly effective. Luton Borough Council has commissioned services to meet with the centre leaders regularly to review the centre's performance and



monitor progress. The advisory board carefully monitors the centre's performance, is closely involved with the centre and set challenging performance targets. The community is fully involved in the work of the centre and a past close alliance with the Marsh Farm Community Development Trust ensures continued community involvement in setting of priorities in the centre's work through the advisory board and a parents' forum.

The centre is proactive in seeking the views of its service users. Services are evaluated by participants and findings used to constantly refine and improve provision. Users' questionnaires explore ideas such as which services users value most and what else would they find of value. The outcomes are evaluated and used in planning. The centre celebrates diversity and values all children and their families equally. Festivals from a range of cultures are celebrated. Parents from minority ethnic backgrounds are warmly welcomed by all. Equality of opportunity is excellent with services meeting the needs of all vulnerable groups very well, including disabled children and adults and those with special educational needs.

Safeguarding is outstanding. It is given high priority, and the centre's arrangements for keeping users safe are very well managed. Leaders ensure the safe recruitment of staff and full checks are made on any adult working in or through the centre. Staff are well trained in child protection and qualified in administering first aid. They are vigilant about site safety and make very careful daily checks of any potential risks in activities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>1</b>

## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection**

The reports of the most recent early year's inspections of Butterflies Nursery, Gill Blowers Nursery School and Cheynes Infant School were used to inform the outcomes of this inspection. Children's progress was judged to be at least good and often outstanding.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Marsh Farm Children's Centre on 15–16 February 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We really enjoyed our visit and would like to thank those of you who spoke to us about your experiences there. You told us how much you value everything the centre is doing for you. We saw how much you and your children enjoy a range of activities in the centre, such as the craft session we saw. Children are exceptionally well prepared for the next stages of their learning.

The centre is particularly successful in supporting its identified target groups. Staff have helped those of you who do not speak English very well, those experiencing abuse in the home and lone or young parents. We were impressed by some of the evidence provided to show the thriving 'Dad's Group', although we did not get a chance to visit it. Some of you spoke very highly of the support you have received. We read and heard about many success stories. The real strength of the centre's work is the way in which it works with its professional partners, such as health, and with the community itself. It is able to draw on an excellent range of expert knowledge to tailor programmes of support. Your cooperation in this process is an essential part of the centre's success.

The centre has great success in helping you and your families achieve healthy lifestyles. Work in helping you keep your homes safe places for your children and avoid accidents in the home is successful. Healthy cooking and eating sessions are helping bring down child obesity, and you have managed to achieve a very good record of dental health for your children; better than other areas of Luton. Children make excellent progress in the nursery in learning skills for the future. Adults too, make similar progress in gaining skills and qualification that are improving their lives.

The centre manager and her deputy provide excellent leadership and encourage a strong sense of ambition and drive among the staff. The advisory board checks on the centre's work effectively and helps it to improve, but it has to work hard to sort

out a great deal of information to see what the community needs most and where the greatest need are located. We have asked the centre to try to work out ways of using data to prioritise services and to locate support where it is most needed. Everyone at the centre works together as a highly effective team to provide the best that they can for you and to direct you to suitable services. A high proportion of you are using the centre's services and benefiting from them. We were pleased to hear of how much you all trust the centre staff.

Safeguarding is excellent. This aspect is given a very high priority. All workers and volunteers have been checked to confirm their suitability to work with children, and adults and are well qualified in all the important areas connected to your safety and that of your children. The centre is outstanding, and the leaders and staff are determined to make sure it is just as effective under new organisation later this year.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).