

Inspection report for Borehamwood Link Children's Centre (H5)

Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	383946
Inspection dates	28 – 29 March 2012
Reporting inspector	Joan Lindsay

Centre leader	Susie Scutt
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	The Venue Elstree Way Borehamwood WD6 1JY
Telephone number	0208 2367550
Fax number	0208 2367551
Email address	susie.scutt@hertsmereleisure.co.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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.

Report published: April 2012



Corporate member of
Plain English Campaign
Committed to clearer communication

361

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



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 the centre's senior leadership team, representatives from the local authority and the advisory board. They also spoke to partner agencies, such as the health services, and parents and other users of the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's improvement plan.

Information about the centre

This phase two centre was designated in January 2008 and fulfils the full core purpose of services. It is managed by Hertsmere Leisure on behalf of the local authority and is part of the Borehamwood and Shenley cluster which has a shared advisory board. The designated children's centre building is The Venue Leisure Centre but the team work out of The Borehamwood and Elstree Children's Centre (The BECC), the main site of Borehamwood South (H4) Children's Centre. Staff resources are shared across the cluster. Services are available 50 weeks of the year from a number of community venues.

The centre is located in a 30% most disadvantaged area, with four of the 12 super output areas described as Hertfordshire's most deprived areas and three others described as England's most deprived.

There are 1606 children under five in the reach area. The area has become culturally increasingly diverse. Although largely White British, there has been a significant growth in the number of African and Afro-Caribbean families in the last 10 years. Elstree has the highest Jewish population in the country. The percentage of children aged nought to four living in households dependent on workless benefits is slightly higher than the national average and the number of eligible families benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit is similar to that seen nationally.

Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision across the reach area are well below those expected 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The Borehamwood Link Children's Centre (H5) provides a good service to families. There are outstanding levels of care, guidance and support because staff have the welfare and safety of families at the heart of all they do. This is particularly so for the most vulnerable families where the excellent partnerships that have evolved with many other agencies are used very effectively to tailor support. As a result of the warm, enthusiastic welcome and the excellent knowledge the staff have of the families, all those who use the centre feel safe and have very high levels of trust in staff. There is a strong focus on developing children's early learning and enhancing parenting skills. This combined with the excellent work done in safeguarding children, means that outcomes for families using the centre are good or outstanding and continue to improve.

Families feel fully involved in the centre and it is evident that their views are regularly sought and acted upon to shape the services on offer. However, although the centre's target groups are represented on the joint advisory board there is no parents' forum available at present and no formal method to ensure parents' views are passed on to the board.

Leadership and management at all levels are good and the day-to-day organisation is excellent. The advisory board works conscientiously to support the centre but is not yet fully involved in the strategic management as it reviews rather than challenges the centre's self evaluation and improvement plan. The latter document is succinct and includes appropriate key priorities but the targets are not based well enough on available data to ensure they are measurable, or time specific enough. Nevertheless, senior leaders and managers have a clear and accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development and there is a very strong commitment from staff and partners to see it progress even further. The good and outstanding outcomes reflect this, and combined with a clear understanding of the specific needs of the most vulnerable groups, show there is a good capacity to continue to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Involve families in the strategic management and governance of the centre so that their views are fully taken into account by such as:
 - establishing a parents' forum and
 - formalising the way parents' views are recorded, acted upon and passed on to the advisory board.

- Strengthen the role of the advisory board so that it is more involved in the centre's self-evaluation, and enhance the centre's improvement plan so that targets are measurable and specific by:
 - increasing the strategic role of members in evaluating the centre's performance
 - using data to measure the centre's impact in more aspects.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Childhood obesity levels in the area halved in 2011 to 6.8%, which is below the national average, although there had been a significant rise in 2010. Immunisation rates are in line with national averages. Sustained breastfeeding rates, at 50.7% in 2011 are slightly above the national figure and have improved due to increased support and strong partnerships with the health services. Very large numbers attend baby clinics and the centre has been instrumental in setting up clinics in the community. A strong focus on healthy eating including 'Cook 4 Life' classes and physical exercise, with families encouraged to use the excellent garden at The BECC, means that parents have a good understanding of how to lead healthy lives. Outcomes for families with emotional or mental health problems are good due to the availability and use of a counsellor, various drop-in sessions and strong links with the health visitor team.

Emergency hospital admissions are below the national average but these data relate to 2008. Keeping families safe is key to the centre's work. Many families have successfully completed paediatric first aid training. Road Safety Week is highlighted and home visits ensure the most vulnerable families are supported in safeguarding children in the home. Families all report that they are confident to share concerns with the 'non-judgemental' staff who, because of their excellent training, are quick to pick up and act on any possible safeguarding issues such as domestic abuse or child protection matters. As a result, the centre's full involvement in supporting those subject to child protection plans and participation in the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process has led to positive outcomes for many children. In several cases, the support of the centre at CAF level, and the excellent partnership working, described as 'Absolutely invaluable' by many agencies, have prevented the need to escalate the level of care and intervention.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results increased significantly in 2011 and are now in line with national figures. The achievement gap between the lowest 20% and the rest narrowed by over 8% in 2011, to 30.2%, slightly below the national figure. Excellent links with all the early years settings in the area, network meetings and the work of the children's centre qualified teacher have been instrumental in helping children achieve well. The 'Nurture Groups' and 'Tea Club' for the most vulnerable children have enhanced their speech and language skills and their personal development very well. Children are very well prepared for transition to school. Very high levels of enjoyment are seen at all the centre activities such as 'Rhythm and Rhyme' and 'Funky Monkey Movers'. 'It makes me a better parent and my child a better child' and 'It's been brilliant, I come to everything now and my son loves it' reflect the opinions of many families.

Adults are also helped to achieve, learn and develop through signposting to literacy and language classes for example, and through the close links with JobCentre Plus, Worknet and the Citizens Advice Bureau. This has led to notable outcomes in relation to returning to work, training or education with over a third of families attending the centre engaged in training, adult learning or relevant activities. However, the centre does not track these families in the longer term. The number of children living in poverty is decreasing, although the latest figures available are for 2009 (24.4%). Several parents volunteer in the centre and some have gone on to employed roles as a result. Many families spoke about how their lives have changed as a result of contact with the centre especially in the way their confidence and self-esteem have been raised which has enabled them to move forward and improve their economic and social well-being. This was summed up by a parent saying 'It has made a massive difference to how I feel and how the children are'.

Children behave very well in the centre and develop positive relationships, excellently modelled by staff. Families feel very involved in the centre through regular, meaningful evaluations and methods such as 'The Question of the Month' and 'You Said We Did' feedback. Target groups are represented on the joint advisory board, although they are relatively few in number and there is no formal parents' group meeting on a regular basis.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
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	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and	2

parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	
--	--

How good is the provision?

2

Staff have a very good knowledge of the community and they use this to assess the needs of the most vulnerable and put in appropriate services and courses. For example, highly effective outreach work in the community shop, schools and a weekly stall at the local market ensure the fairly wide-spread area is covered and families can access services easily. As a result, all outcomes are good or outstanding. Activities are held in church halls, a synagogue, the Venue leisure centre and Shenwood Court Hostel to ensure that the most vulnerable groups such as young and lone parents, and the Jewish community have their needs met well. Consequently, over 80% of under fives are registered with the centre although at present, precise data relating to specific target groups are not available. Participation rates and attendance levels are high. For example, almost 90% of the young parents who started the '24/7 Tool for Young Parents' course, completed it. Disabled children and those with special educational needs have their needs met very well with regular drop-in sessions with the Think Family Practitioner, an excellent sensory room and 'Singing and Stories' groups.

Achievements are shared and celebrated well through 'The Achievement Tree' and 'The Confidence Mountain' and this encourages families to aspire to more. The focus on children's early learning and development is demonstrated by all the well-planned and conveniently located courses and activities. Children identified as needing some extra support, and the recognised underachievement of boys, is addressed through specific courses for parents such as 'About Boys', 'Nurture Groups' and 'Tea Club' for children and especially through the highly effective links the centre has established with all the early years providers in the area. This is having an increasingly positive impact on outcomes for families, especially those most in need of support such as young parents.

Families who use the centre are unanimous in feeling they receive outstanding levels of care, guidance and support. This is especially so in times of crisis, such as where children have become subject to child protection plans or there are complex emotional issues. In these situations, staff make excellent use of the many strong partnerships to give specialist help and advice such as through Homestart or St. Albans and Hertsmere Women's Refuge. Support for families is described as a 'one-stop shop' by several partners. The way it is planned for and followed up through excellent case studies and regular multi-agency meetings, is highly effective.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
---	----------

The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
--	----------

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1
--	----------

How effective are the leadership and management?	2
---	----------

Day-to-day management is seamless and highly effective despite the fact that staff work across three children's centres. The local authority provides regular and constructive support through robust monitoring and has been instrumental in helping the advisory board develop its role. Partners are very well represented on this body and there is a shared commitment to see the centre improve. However, until recently, the large number of members made it difficult for the board to play a more strategic role in the centre's future development. Additionally, the improvement plan does not make enough use of data to set measurable, time-specific targets.

Nevertheless, everyone involved with the centre has a clear understanding of the strengths and particularly where most improvements are needed. As a result, the services are meeting the needs of families well. This is especially so for the most disadvantaged groups.

Centre resources, especially the staff team, are managed very well and the outreach workers are being very effective in increasing the numbers who use the centre's various venues, especially in the most deprived areas. The toy library, including the activity chests, is a well used and much appreciated resource accessed by families, early years settings and childminders. All of the venues are welcoming and staff ensure they are made safe. A full timetable of events, some targeted at the most vulnerable groups, focusing strongly on developing parenting and children's skills, ensures outcomes are at least good across all aspects. Consequently, the centre gives good value for money.

Equality and diversity is promoted well and those who use the centre accurately reflect the community it serves, and includes the growing number of African and Afro-Caribbean families. The centre is highly inclusive with a common view being 'No one judges me here, but everyone supports me'. Specific groups for young parents, children with special needs and fathers ensure these groups are effectively engaged and their lives are enhanced as a result. The gaps between different groups are closing as families are given more confidence in being able to look after their children, returning to work or training and in supporting their children to learn. The provision of a crèche has had a very positive impact, not only on increased numbers accessing courses but also on children's early development as they learn to become independent and also benefit from the high quality care and resources.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are very strong and staff are highly trained in specific aspects such as in recognising and dealing with domestic violence or in spotting possible child protection issues. All appropriate Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out and risk assessments of all the venues are routine and robust. Staff are highly proficient in their involvement with the CAF and the work done with other agencies ensures that children's interests are safeguarded extremely well.

through close monitoring, home visits and active participation in multi-agency meetings.

The centre has been proactive in developing wide-ranging and highly effective partnerships that make a very valuable contribution to all outcomes for families using the centre. These include health visitors who hold clinics in various locations in the area, midwives, speech and language therapists and agencies that support the homeless and victims of domestic abuse. This means that the needs of all target groups are met but specifically so for the most vulnerable groups and where children are potentially at risk. The excellent partnerships with early year educators are ensuring outcomes for children are continually improving.

The partnership with parents is also strong and the numbers engaging with the centre, especially in the neediest areas are growing rapidly. The use of Learning Journals for different activities is also involving families well in their own and their children's development. Families' and children's views are frequently canvassed and used to shape services, such as young parents having a say in the content of the Top Tips for Young Parents' course. However, the most recent annual survey was undertaken in 2010 and the number of respondents then was low, although there was a 100% level of satisfaction. In addition, there is no formal procedure for involving families in the strategic management and governance of the centre so that their views are fully taken into account.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
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	1
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	2

Any other information used to inform the judgements made

during this inspection

None.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Borehamwood Link Children's Centre (H5) on 28–29 March 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

There are several aspects of the centre's work that are outstanding, such as the care, guidance and support that are provided by the staff, the excellent partnerships that are in place, and the safeguarding arrangements that ensure you all feel extremely secure and trusting of staff. 'No one judges me here but everyone supports me' was a view voiced by many of you.

During our visit, we looked at your centre's improvement plan and numerous other documents. We spoke to a wide range of partner agencies working with the centre as well as staff, members of the advisory board, and representatives from the local authority. We also visited most of the centre activities taking place during the inspection, such as 'Funky Monkey Movers', 'Rhythm and Rhyme' and 'Top Tips for Young Parents' and spoke to a substantial number of families using the centre.

Thank you for your participation in the inspection. It was very helpful to have your input and to hear how positive you all feel about the centre and especially about the commitment of the staff and how well your children have learned and developed. Many of you say your children 'Love the staff and interacting with other children'. You also feel that the centre has helped you to improve many aspects of your own lives by giving you the confidence to change aspects of your life such as to return to education or employment or get support with sensitive issues. Typical comments included 'It has made a massive difference to how I feel and how the children are' and 'It makes me a better parent and my child a better child'. You feel fully involved in the centre through things like 'Question of the Month' and being able to voice your opinion about what courses would be helpful such as 'About Boys'. However, as there is no formal, regular method to put forward your ideas and pass them on to the advisory board, we have asked the centre to put this right by for example forming a parents' forum.

It is clear that the centre is highly inclusive and more and more families are using it because services are being run in various locations in the community, which means it is easier for you to access them. The staff have been particularly successful in ensuring the needs of young parents, those raising children on their own and children with special needs are met well. Also, the work that the centre has done

with all the schools and nurseries in the area is excellent and means that children are supported very well in their early development such as their speech and language skills and their confidence and social skills. Other excellent partnerships mean that when there are specific and sometimes complex needs, the centre can harness the support of many different agencies such as Homestart or the health services. This means that there is a positive impact on outcomes across all areas such as how well you understand how to lead healthy lives and how well safeguarded your children are. The many parenting courses have also done much, not only to help you look after your children but also to enhance your own confidence and self-esteem. This has had a substantial impact on the lives on many of you.

The centre is led and managed very well, especially as staff work across three children's centres. The advisory board members play an effective role in reviewing the work of the centre but we have asked that they now extend this to play a more active part in producing the centre's improvement plan and for that document to include targets that are easier to measure by using data more often.

Everyone, including families and partners who work with the centre, are committed to continue to improve the outcomes and increase the numbers who benefit from the services. There is a very clear understanding of all the strengths and the areas for development and there has already been a positive impact on the lives of many. As a result, the centre is well placed to continue to improve.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.