

Inspection report for Wycombe West Children's Centre

Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	365754
Inspection dates	16–17 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Alison Cartlidge

Centre governance	Buckinghamshire County Council
Centre leader	Tahir Aziz
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Mill End Road High Wycombe Buckinghamshire HP12 4BA
Telephone number	01494 447110
Fax number	N/A
Email address	fkauser@buckscc.gov.uk

Linked school, if applicable	Millbrook Combined School Lane End Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if 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.

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 copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

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



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 staff, a representative from the local authority, members of the advisory board and representatives from some of the centre's partners. They had informal discussions with parents and users of the services. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including case studies, a range of policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents and its service plan.

Information about the centre

This phase two children's centre is situated on the western side of High Wycombe and serves the ward of Sands, with satellite provision at Lane End, a village five miles from High Wycombe. There are 720 children under five in the reach area. The centre provides the core offer and a range of services including health, family support, adult learning, and advice and guidance about the early years of a child's life. The centre is in an area that is socially and ethnically diverse and serves a community living in the 40% most deprived areas in the country in Sands, and in the 20% least deprived in Lane End. The largest ethnic groups are White British and Pakistani. The proportion of workless families is 31% and the proportion in receipt of benefits is 17%. Children's levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage in the link schools are below average, especially in communication, language and literacy and in personal, social and emotional development. The centre is managed by the local authority and has an advisory board and parents' forum that represent service providers and the centre's users.

The centre has been open for three years. There have been staffing and recruitment difficulties over the last 13 months and temporary arrangements to cover for the

absence of a full-time centre coordinator. A new centre coordinator took up post in December 2010.

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 users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The centre provides a satisfactory range of services that are greatly appreciated by the children, parents and carers who make use of them. Parents and carers make positive comments such as, 'I'm generally very happy' and 'It provides what I need.' There is a good welcome for all families who come to the centre and parents and carers told the inspection team that 'members of staff are really friendly and helpful' and that talking to staff makes them feel 'a whole lot lighter'. Equality and diversity are satisfactory, but the centre is not reaching out to all the families it could. The centre mainly uses English in its signs and captions and this does not always encourage families with English as an additional language to attend sessions. A group of parents explained by saying that the centre was 'not hitting all the right people' and that 'some Asian families have a language barrier'. The centre is taking positive steps to provide equal opportunities for all groups in the community and celebrates various festivals such as Eid and Divali. There are advanced plans to provide specific training for members of staff on working with Muslim families. Pakistani families do attend the centre, but sometimes in lower numbers than White British families. This is particularly true of certain activities, such as swimming, where cultural needs are not always being fully met to enable them to participate.

The outcomes for the reach area are satisfactory overall, with children's welfare and the way they stay safe being a strong feature. Rigorous safeguarding arrangements ensure that risks are identified and swift action is taken to support families in keeping safe. As one parent put it, 'There is a well-thought-out layout for safety at the centre' and another parent praised the outdoor area with its safe play surface for toddlers. Enjoyment is a strong feature of the work at the centre and users appreciate the fun they gain from taking part in activities. Parents and carers do not always understand the educational benefits of some activities and attendance at some valuable sessions is occasionally low. Leaders are aware of this and have recently started to explain to parents and carers how sessions will help to promote

learning and how they can help their children to play purposefully.

The centre's self-evaluation procedures are satisfactory. A wealth of information has been collected by members of staff, including evaluations of individual courses and sessions. This information is not being used rigorously enough to help demonstrate the impact of activities on the lives of children and their families or for leaders, including the advisory board, to form specific local targets to improve provision. Nevertheless, the positive impact of the centre on the families it has worked with shows that it has a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement. There is good evidence of some particularly valuable work with families in times of crisis.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve self-evaluation and make better use of data by:
 - using information collected to evaluate the impact of provision on the outcomes for children and their parents and carers
 - working with the advisory board to set specific local targets for improvement.
- Increase participation in the less well-attended activities and help users to appreciate the academic value of activities provided and to support their children with purposeful play.
- Enhance the celebration of cultural diversity in the area by:
 - implementing plans for further staff training in working with Muslim families
 - reflecting the community that the centre serves in displays, signs and activities
 - monitoring the progress of various groups more closely, in order to narrow any gaps in learning.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The emotional health of babies is enhanced through baby massage sessions and parents and carers make positive comments about the benefits of music and movement sessions, such as 'He sleeps better afterwards and so do I.' Parents, carers and children take full advantage of the toothbrush swap scheme to improve dental health and have found that 'cook and eat' classes have helped them to use more raw ingredients and to cut down on the use of salt. One parent noted, 'I didn't know that healthy cooking could be so easy.' A safe outdoor area is available to families, but some parents and carers would appreciate more organised activities for outdoor exercise. The area served by the centre has an above-average proportion of parents and carers who are smokers, and some of these do not always ensure that they follow good practice to protect the health of their children.

Welfare needs are identified quickly and specific support ensures that children are kept safe and are protected well. Staff recently noticed that a few children ran out onto the busy road when waiting with their parents and carers outside the centre, and immediately provided a successful road safety training session to raise awareness and to help prevent accidents. Several parents and carers have attended first aid courses and report that they feel more confident about dealing with minor injuries as a result. Case studies show that vulnerable children, including those with child protection plans, are kept safe and have their needs met well. Various external agencies, including Common Assessment Framework workers, liaise closely with the centre to provide the right level of support for children and their families.

Enjoyment is clearly evident in the smiling faces of the babies as they explore the taste and texture of various foods, such as baked beans and jelly. The centre's evaluations of activities and comments made by parents and carers reflect this positive aspect of the centre's work. As one parent said, 'My daughter enjoyed discovering what the jelly felt like.' Achievements are less well monitored because the centre does not analyse information well enough to see if any groups of children or parents and carers make more or less progress than others, so that they can help to close any gaps in learning. Children benefit from some worthwhile activities to develop literacy skills. For example, the 'Rhyme and Sign' sessions are popular and parents and carers note an improvement in their children's ability to remember what they have learnt.

Children generally behave well at the centre and any unkind behaviour and lack of willingness to share is handled sensitively with the help of members of staff. Parents and carers take part in making decisions by belonging to the parents' forum or the advisory board. They feel that 'suggestions are taken on board at any time', but would appreciate more opportunity for informal discussion times at the end of activities.

Adult users are given sound support in accessing training opportunities, including from other providers. For example, training is planned to support them in using information and communication technology to help with making job applications. The centre helps parents to access training from other providers, but is aware that it does not have enough information about the extent to which training is subsequently taken up. There are some positive individual case studies that demonstrate noteworthy successes. For example, one mother recently started a certified childcare course, her first training since leaving school. Children's preparation for starting school is satisfactory. Children develop an understanding of how to behave, and there are good plans to further ease transition into nursery by working more closely with staff in the schools.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
--	----------

The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre is responsive towards requests made by other agencies to meet specific needs. As a result, members of staff deliver a number of valuable activities that are supportive. For example, the centre works closely with health professionals to provide one-to-one support for breastfeeding in order to increase the low uptake in the area. There is a focus on adults with low qualification levels and on providing activities to help children to enjoy and make progress in learning. Activities are not always fully evaluated to check that services are meeting the needs of all the families within the reach area. The centre is aware that there is a need to fine-tune the time and way some activities are delivered so that they attract families from a wider variety of cultural and social backgrounds.

A crèche is provided for certain activities for adults and this improves participation rates. Parents and carers say that most come because the centre was recommended by a friend, and one mother suggested that 'it may be helpful to have information in Urdu', to attract more Pakistani families. The centre frequently seeks parents' and carers' views on activities attended and this information is used to assess and adapt the services it provides. There is less information to evaluate the views and needs of families that do not access services.

The centre provides a vast selection of free advice and guidance in information leaflets about health, although most of these are in English. There are good relationships between centre staff, parents and carers and external agencies. Members of staff are consistently welcoming and supportive in their approach towards children and adults. Parents and carers made several positive comments such as, 'The relaxed atmosphere helps with learning' and 'You're not embarrassed about joining in'. The centre is flexible in the way it works, and many families appreciate the way members of staff respond to their particular needs. For example, the centre is good at working with vulnerable families to ensure that children are kept safe.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Clear lines of responsibility and roles that are fully understood by members of staff have ensured that the centre has been managed successfully on a day-to-day basis during the absence of a full-time centre manager. As one parent said, 'Changes in leadership and management made no difference in the way it is run.' Leaders and managers at all levels are motivated and understand what needs to be done to make the centre better. Self-evaluation is slightly over-generous because not enough account has been taken of the need to evaluate and demonstrate the impact of the centre's work on the outcomes of users. Nevertheless, there is a strong commitment to improvement under the leadership of the recently appointed centre manager.

Safeguarding has a high priority at the centre and provision is good in this aspect of work. Vigilant, well-trained members of staff ensure that concerns are identified and dealt with as soon as they arise and there is strong cooperation between various agencies to ensure that vulnerable families, including those subject to domestic violence, are supported and protected. The emotional health and well-being of all the centre's users are well considered and supported. Care is taken to ensure that adults working within the centre, in whatever capacity, have been suitably checked and vetted. Risk assessment is rigorous and parents and carers are made aware of health and safety issues on-site and in their homes.

The advisory board is passionate about supporting the work of the centre and leaders want to harness the wealth of expertise it represents to help set local targets for future development and to find solutions for areas of weakness. As stated in the advisory board minutes, there is a desire to 'make services more targeted' and the 'need for numerical data' was raised. The impact of the parents' forum is an area identified for development, although comments raised by parents and carers are considered carefully and acted upon by leaders.

Various sources of information are used to prioritise provision, but monitoring of activities and outcomes lacks sufficient rigour to check that maximum use is being

made of facilities and funding in order to ensure good value for money. The centre shares its provision with other agencies and this helps to reduce costs for all concerned.

Cultural diversity is celebrated through specific events and activities such as craft work linked to the Chinese New Year. The centre strives to be socially inclusive, although not all users benefit from activities supplied, because of cultural barriers. The centre is equipped to support the needs of children with disabilities, although currently there are none registered at the centre.

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	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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 West Wycombe Children's Centre on 16–17 February 2011. We judged the centre as being satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank those of you who were able to speak to us. Your views were greatly appreciated and were very helpful to the inspection team. We agree with you that members of staff are friendly and welcoming and want to do the best for you and your children. We found that the centre runs smoothly and offers many valuable activities that are greatly enjoyed by those who attend them. It is not yet reaching as many families in the area as it could or meeting the needs of all users in full. For example, not enough is being done to support families who do not speak English as their home language. Part of the reason for this is because leaders have not used information about the centre's activities rigorously enough to check how well they are helping you and your children to learn and develop new skills.

We found that those of you who are experiencing difficulties in your lives feel that you can approach the centre for help and that you are pleased with the support you have been given.

We were pleased to hear that you and your children feel safe at the centre. This is because there are rigorous safeguarding arrangements to identify and rectify risks. It is good that you and your children have a good time when you attend the sessions and we were pleased to observe you enjoying taking part in the activities such as baby massage, 'Bounce and Rhyme' and swimming. We found that not all parents and carers are aware of how some activities will help their children to learn and prepare them for school when they are older and so unfortunately, in some sessions, only a few families attend. Leaders are aware of this and have recently started to explain the educational benefits of each session to help you appreciate activities fully and learn how to help your children through purposeful play. The positive impact of the work of the centre on those of you who use it shows that the centre is capable of improving what it offers to the wider community.

We have asked the centre to make some improvements by:

- working with the advisory board to make better use of the information collected about how useful you find the different sessions in order to identify and fill any gaps in provision
- working with you to help you all appreciate how the activities provided will help your children to learn, encouraging more of you to take part in the less well-attended activities and helping you to support your children with purposeful play
- improving the ways the centre celebrates and reflects the cultural diversity in the local area.

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