

Inspection report for Beechfield Children's Centre

| | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 366433 |
| Inspection dates | 10–11 March 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | David Speakman |

| | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Centre governance | Watford and District YMCA |
| Centre leader | Susan Bugden |
| Date of previous inspection | Not applicable |
| Centre address | Beechfield School |
| | Gammons Lane |
| | Watford |
| | WD24 5TY |
| Telephone number | 01923 482862 |
| Fax number | 01923 482862 |
| Email address | ruthellis@watfordymca.com |

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| Linked school if applicable | Beechfield School |
| 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.

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.

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with another YMCA children's centre manager as the Beechfield manager was on annual leave, centre staff and representatives from the lead agency, Watford and District YMCA, including the Director of Operations and members of the partnership group. They met with a number of representatives of services who work through the children's centre, including health visitors, outreach workers, instructors and the Head of Community Learning at West Herts College. Inspectors spoke to groups of parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Beechfield Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre that provides 70% of the core offer. This includes family support, outreach to parents, and child and family health services. No early education integrated with childcare is available on site, but the centre has links with a number of childminders and nursery providers to whom it directs parents. It operates from a centre building within the grounds of Beechfield School.

There has been a recent change in management of the centre. The previous manager left at the end of December and a new one took up post at the end of February this year. A senior executive from the YMCA oversaw the management of the centre on a temporary basis during the interim period between managers. The centre is funded by the county council, which has joint responsibility for running the children's centre with Watford and District YMCA. A board of trustees manages the

centre. A partnership group contributes to the management of the centre and consists of service providers and centre users.

The majority of families who use the centre are White British and a minority come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Twenty nine languages other than English are represented among the centre’s users. Data for the reach area place the user base in the 30% experiencing most deprivation nationally. There are 1207 families with children under five in the children’s centre’s reach area. Around 14% of children and adults who use the centre come from homes which are dependent on benefits and where no-one is in work. The levels of skill shown by children when they start the nursery are below those expected for their age.

The range of activities offered by the centre includes local community baby clinics, child development checks, breastfeeding support and special needs support groups. The centre has links with health visitors and speech therapists. A range of adult education and courses and activities designed to support parents and carers back into employment are provided by the centre’s partner providers.

The centre opens 51 weeks each year on weekdays from 9:00am until 5:00pm. The centre provides services for fathers on the last Saturday of every month.

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

Beechfield Children’s Centre provides a satisfactory level of effectiveness in meeting the needs of the community which it serves. The quality of care, guidance and support shown by the centre is good, as is the value for money achieved.

Parents appreciate the caring ethos of the centre. They feel the centre provides good support and guidance which are making a significant improvement in their lives. Effective support is provided for families in times of crisis and hardship. Helpful advice and guidance help parents to deal with issues, such as isolation, and to find the resources they need to improve their lives. This applies equally to lone parents

and those from different ethnic backgrounds. Centre staff demonstrate understanding of different circumstances, and parents testify that the centre has a positive impact on their emotional health and social life. One parent said: 'It is wonderful here. They bend over backwards for us. There is a genuine wish to help us and there is real warmth in a caring and supportive children's centre.'

The centre's management is aware of its commitment to provide equality of access to services for all of its users. The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the centre's vision, which is, 'To provide children and their families with a supportive and nurturing environment where every child matters and where they will flourish and achieve a confident, happy, secure and healthy future.' A satisfactory range of good-quality courses for adults, children and babies is held at the centre throughout the week and at some weekends for fathers. The centre does not have effective systems for assessing the needs of the whole community and, therefore, does not have sufficient information to know what would benefit residents in the reach area. Centre managers cannot, therefore, guarantee that all who would benefit from the centre's provision are accessing the range of services, particularly those families living at the edge of the reach area. Equality of opportunity is, therefore, satisfactory. Much of the adult education takes place through partner providers, such as Community Learning at West Hertfordshire College. At present, the centre does not provide services at any venues within its reach area other than the centre itself.

Children are making satisfactory progress from their starting points in developing their skills. However, there is not a robust system for recording and monitoring individual children's progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage in sessions held in the centre. Liaison with the school to find out how well children who attended the centre achieve in Reception is at the early stages of development. Parents demonstrate improvement in their knowledge of child development, through programmes such as the very successful 'How children learn through play' in which participants were reported to have outstanding success rates. However, the outcomes for adults signposted to other providers for adult education are not recorded. The centre staff cannot provide evidence to demonstrate that learning and achievement are any better than satisfactory, or that it evaluates services regularly against outcomes to plan and refine activities.

There is a corporate policy folder with a full range of documents that are clear in the guidance provided. Although the YMCA policies are clear and comprehensive in the areas of operation covered, the centre's own written policies are not fully robust in their adaptation and guidance specific to the centre. The centre's own policy on child protection, confidentiality (record keeping) and whistleblowing was reviewed during the inspection to ensure that it meets local guidelines. The centre now has a localised child protection policy which has been adapted in line with Watford & District YMCA's safeguarding policy as well as Hertfordshire County Council's Children's Trust and Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Board. Because of this, safeguarding is satisfactory.

The new centre manager still has to develop her own strategic plan to fit alongside

the YMCA's operational plan. Targets are met adequately. Self-evaluation is realistic and the centre is beginning to involve the community, its partners and parents and carers in decision-making and the writing of its annual review. The board of trustees monitors outcomes and the performance of the centre's staff adequately. The centre, therefore, has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of venues within its reach area through which the centre provides services in order to ensure that provision is easily accessible to all families.
- Monitor carefully the progress and achievements of adults and children using services that are either recommended by or directly provided by the centre in order to:
 - create a database of service use and success rates
 - enable centre managers and staff to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of services
 - use the evaluation to plan and refine services.
- Review and revise all policy documents so that they are relevant to the centre's work and robust in their guidance.

How good are outcomes for users?

| |
|----------|
| 3 |
|----------|

The extent to which the centre's users achieve a healthy lifestyle is satisfactory. Most parents show that they are developing a satisfactory understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy. The percentage of babies that are breastfed is similar to the Hertfordshire average. The number of families engaging with the centre's services is increasing. 'Start4Life' workshops on weaning and breastfeeding, which have just started, are well attended, as is the 'Well Baby Clinic' held every week. Families with young children, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and from vulnerable groups, derive some benefit from well-integrated services including baby massage, 'Up on Downs' and 'Chatterbox Tots'. Baby massage sessions raise parents' awareness of babies' physical development and help them enjoy parenthood. During these sessions, full attention is paid to the physical and emotional health and safety of both mothers and babies. Outcomes for parents and carers who are experiencing change, challenge or difficulties in their parenting are improving.

Adults, children and babies are safe while on site. The outdoor area is fully enclosed and provides additional seating. It offers a safe and welcoming play and recreational area where parents can meet while their children play together. Most children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. Their understanding of dangers and how to keep themselves safe is satisfactory. Staff demonstrate safe

practice, giving valid reasons for actions enabling parents to incorporate this practice into their lives. Parents feel safe, understand their rights and responsibilities, and take responsibility for their own safety and well-being and those of their children.

The centre staff work purposefully to ensure safeguarding and child protection are effective in cases where children are included on the child protection register or looked after by carers. They have been involved in a number of cases where the Common Assessment Framework has been applied. These assessments have improved the life chances of the children involved.

'Stay & Play' and 'First Steps' sessions are planned using the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning, to ensure there is a strong focus on developing early language and social development through play. Observation of sessions shows that children behave well and have positive attitudes towards sharing and taking turns. Children are developing sound relationships, develop respect for each other and are adequately prepared for the school environment. Adult learning has been offered and well received, enabling some participants to move into further education and employment. The centre offers families financial and budgeting advice, thereby increasing their chances to become debt free or manage their benefits. Outcomes for some users, including the most vulnerable, are improving slowly due to information, advice and guidance provided by the centre and its partners.

Some parents feel they have an active voice in the running of the centre through the parents' forum. The parents' forum has served across the two YMCA children's centres. With the two new managers, it is important for the new forums to establish independence. A few service users have become volunteers at the centre and a number of volunteers now assist with delivery of sessions

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 | 3 |
| 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

Reaching approximately half of the families in its reach area, the centre's record is considered good. The needs of children, parents and other users are assessed through home visiting, consultation and partnership working. Initial contact with families is now made after receipt of new-birth information provided by the health authorities. Each family is offered a home visit and this enables centre staff to identify the more vulnerable groups and discuss needs with users. The centre then works in partnership with other agencies to support the family. However, there is no provision in venues other than the centre to reach even more families in the wider community, particularly those living close to the furthest boundaries of the area and in quickly growing areas. Translation is provided by the centre for some European languages and the centre has access to this facility for some Asian languages through the school next door. However, there is little formal provision in the centre for teaching English to adults who speak other languages.

Parents spoken to have very positive views about what the centre does and the impact it has on their lives. 'This is an amazing place and staff have really helped or told me where I can get help.' Services provided by the centre have been adapted to meet the needs of groups; times of services have been changed, for example. Adult education has raised aspirations, enabling individuals to develop and progress educationally and personally. Users are offered a warm and welcoming environment, and good links with partners such as colleges and support services add quality to the services provided. Services are organised with an emphasis on early support and intervention. There is an adequate range of services focused on local need and parental choice.

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 | 2 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Monitoring of the effectiveness of the centre's work is satisfactory. Provision is adequately monitored, although impact is not judged rigorously against outcomes data. Participation in courses and services is beginning to be monitored through analysing where users live. Service gap analysis has identified where services need to be provided outside of the centre and at venues within the community which are

more accessible to families on the edge of the reach area. However, the centre does maintain good relationships with service providers so that it is able to deliver appropriate services. Early indications for the next round of targets are that they are challenging but achievable. They are set in line with the development points in the YMCA's operational plan and in consultation with the board of trustees. Systems for the performance management of staff are in place and support the quality of services.

The centre promotes the inclusion of all children and their families by celebrating a wide range of festivals and celebrations. There are storybooks in different languages and posters recognising cultural and language diversity. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are welcomed into the centre. They are given appropriate support within groups such as 'Up on Downs', 'Chatterbox Tots' to support children with speech and language difficulties and individual support for children with behavioural issues. The whole site is fully accessible to children and adults with limited mobility.

Procurement procedures enable the centre to benefit from the accounts, terms and conditions, discounts, and best value secured by Watford and District YMCA's finance team. Staff deliver services internally, for example 'Stay & Play' and 'Parenting', thus ensuring a good use of the skill set and value for money. This means that on a relatively small budget, the centre is able to provide services for 51 weeks each year and on Saturday mornings each month. It therefore gives good value for money.

The manager recognises the significance and importance of effective safeguarding policy and procedure. Although child protection concerns were not always recorded correctly in the past, policy and procedure have been reviewed to ensure that secure and full details are now kept. All staff and volunteers have appropriate checks in line with government and local requirements. These are kept up to date and evidenced in a single central record held by the human resources team and the centre manager. Safe recruitment is always carried out. All staff receive induction on Watford and District YMCA's safeguarding policy and staff training is up to date. Safeguarding, child protection, information sharing and use of the Common Assessment Framework are part of staff induction and on-going training and development. Protocols and practice for making referrals and sharing information between the relevant agencies working within and outside the centre are in place.

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 | 2 |

| | |
|---|----------|
| 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 | 3 |
| 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 other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The Early Years Inspections at YMCA Charters Nursery (6 January 2011) and the aligned Section 5 Inspection at Beechfield Primary School were used to help inform the outcomes of this inspection. The Early Years inspection found quality of nursery provision to be good. Outcomes of the primary school inspection for achievement in the nursery were used to guide inspection outcomes for Beechfield Children's Centre.

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 Beechfield Children's Centre on 10–11 March 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We are grateful to those parents and carers who spared the time to talk to us about Beechfield Children's Centre and the benefits it brings into your lives. We would also like to thank representatives from the centre's professional partners who gave up time to tell us about the work of the centre. What you had to say was very useful in making our final judgements.

Those of you visiting the centre told us you receive good support and guidance. Centre staff are caring, and their support makes a significant impact on the lives of your children and your families. You told us that the centre's work supports your emotional health and social life. The centre is inclusive in the way it operates. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families are welcomed into the centre and targeted support activities are laid on. Those of you who speak languages other than English are supported through translation services. However, centre staff do not have a deep enough understanding of what the whole community needs, particularly those of you who live in growing areas or have just moved into the region. There is no effective system for recording and monitoring your successes in adult education, or individual children's progress when they move onto school. We have, therefore, asked the centre manager to monitor more carefully your achievements and those of your children, create a database of success rates and use this information to assess the effectiveness of services to help plan and refine provision.

The centre provides a satisfactory range of good-quality courses for adults, children and babies throughout the week, during the holiday periods and at some weekends for fathers. Much adult education takes place through partner providers, such as Community Learning at West Hertfordshire College. At present, the centre does not provide services at any venues within its reach area other than the centre itself. We have asked the centre to consider using different venues from which to provide services so that those of you living further away are able to access the range of services more easily.

Children are making satisfactory progress from their starting points in developing their skills. Those of you taking advantage of the centre's services demonstrate improvement in your knowledge of child development. This is achieved through courses such as the very successful 'How children learn through play' programme in which participants were reported to have outstanding success rates. Other useful knowledge and understanding some of you have gained include information on how to improve the health of your family through nutrition, how to keep children safe and useful skills in family budgeting. When they attend the centre, children behave well and have positive attitudes towards sharing and taking turns. Children develop sound relationships, respect for each other and are prepared for the school environment.

The centre has a range of YMCA policies that are clear in the guidance provided. However, the centre's own written policies are less detailed and do not fully reflect the centre's practice. We have asked the centre manager to review and revise all policy documents so that they are all relevant to the centre's work and robust in their guidance.

The centre has a new manager who is very recently in post and still has to develop her own strategic plan to fit alongside the YMCA's operational plan. The centre will see some changes, but discussions with senior executives from the YMCA confirm high expectations of the new leadership. We are confident that the new manager will lead further development at the centre.

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