

Inspection report for Chesham Newtown Children's Centre

Local authority	Buckinghamshire
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Linked school if applicable	Newtown Early Years and Infant School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Newtown Early Years and Infant School

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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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, the senior coordinator, senior leaders, members of the advisory committee, governors, headteachers, health care representatives, educational psychologist, early years intervention team, family support workers, a range of providers, parents, teachers and other staff and users. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's operational plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures. Inspectors observed the centre's work and visited outreach centres.

Information about the centre

Chesham Newtown Children's Centre shares a site with Newtown Early Years and Infant School. The centre is run directly by the local authority, is a phase two centre and offers full core provision. The centre opens from 9am to 5.30pm each weekday for 52 weeks a year. The average number of users per week is 70 adults and 80 children. Various services are run on the site and there is also outreach provision and links with other schools and children's centres in Chesham. The centre has partnerships with a range of social care and health agencies. Levels of deprivation in the area range from the bottom 30% nationally to families who are fairly well off. Many of the users come from homes with some level of social disadvantage. Most families in the area are of White British heritage and a few are from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. Most of these are of Pakistani heritage. The majority of parents in the area are in work but many of those who use the centre come from households where no one is currently in work and the family is in receipt of benefits. Children's skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is 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 users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of the centre is good. It is a calm, well-organised environment that benefits all users. It builds on its successes and strives to improve the number of services on offer. Caring and trusting relationships are nurtured effectively in an extremely safe environment and the quality of the provision is good. The centre is warm and welcoming and the staff create a harmonious atmosphere. Adult users grow in confidence as a result of attending the good range of activities at the centre. They are very positive about the benefits. As one confirmed, 'The staff are great, they are always there to listen to your problems and to help. They have made such a difference to my life helping me cope with many problems. Nothing is too much trouble; they always go out of their way to help in any way they can.'

A strength of the centre is the good leadership provided by the management team in strong partnership with the local authority. The centre runs effectively on a day-to-day basis. Leadership of the centre is effective and leaders make good use of clear data provided by the local authority to help to measure the centre's impact. Leaders have good awareness of the hard-to-reach groups in the community but the level of engagement with these groups is still modest. Staff monitor and evaluate the centre's impact well and this ensures that decisions are made which are effective in improving provision. The centre's good capacity to improve is evident in the way leadership and governance continually expand the centre's influence across its reach area in tackling disadvantage and effectively narrowing the achievement gap.

Involvement of parents in the decision-making is in its early stages. The centre has identified the need to increase ways for parents to participate in decision making and to develop the 'Parents' Forum'. Another focus for improvement is to devise effective strategies that consistently reach and engage more vulnerable families, including some members of the Asian community and teenage mums. The centre has already tried various strategies but these have not always been effective enough to establish regular contact.

Information to users is managed effectively, pointing parents and carers to where they can get help and advice from those who work in the centre and also from other

agencies. Staff signpost parents effectively to other providers so that they can gain further qualifications, for example one user enrolled on a vocational course to become a florist. The centre also has good links with the local Jobcentre Plus. The centre has worked successfully with its partners in health, education and housing to offer dedicated care and support tailored to individual needs. The impact of this is that families are now engaging more frequently with the centre in higher numbers and evidence of greater community cohesion is emerging. The centre evaluates the impact of support programmes on children, parents and carers well. However, assessment of children's progress and their individual stages of learning is less well developed.

The outcomes for children and adults using the centre are good. The work the centre undertakes towards promoting healthy lifestyles is effective, resulting in good outcomes for users and their families. The efforts to ensure that children from all groups achieve well and enjoy their learning are effective. Children enjoy the activities provided by the centre. Courses for parents new to English are well organised and run weekly. Long-term users are extremely positive about the quality of the support they receive from family support workers and the quality of learning for themselves and their children from the courses on offer.

Service providers work efficiently as a team to make a real difference to parents and families, particularly those from vulnerable groups who use the centre and those with a protection plan. Home visits are very effective. The centre works well to ensure equality of access to all. Families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported.

The care the centre provides with regard to ensuring safety and child protection is outstanding. There are excellent procedures in place to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of everyone who uses the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Build parental input into decision making further by developing the 'Parents' Forum' so that parents are fully involved in the governance of the centre. Ensure long-term users become more actively involved in the running of the centre, both to support their own personal development and to engage the wider community and other users
- Devise strategies to engage further with hard-to-reach families in the locality including those who are vulnerable, teenage mums and families from minority ethnic groups, and provide courses and activities that consistently engage and meet their needs
- Record initial assessments more effectively so that all children's progress is tracked rigorously in key areas of learning.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre successfully promotes healthy lifestyles and improves the lives of families in the locality. The range of activities, support and guidance offered makes a positive impact to the physical, mental and emotional health of those who use the centre. Parents and carers develop a good understanding of how to provide a healthy lifestyle for their children, for example in relation to a healthy diet and enjoyment of the fun, action-packed activity sessions on offer. New mums commented on the good support they receive for help with breast-feeding. Dads and parents of twins are grateful for help with their role.

There are high levels of security on the site and children feel safe and well protected. Relationships are good and users of the centre feel safe enough to openly share their concerns with staff. Children who have a child protection plan are effectively supported and the support for children subject to Common Assessment Framework process is good with evidence of children and families being helped to keep safe. The joint working with partners often provides a seamless support network, for example in arranging home visits. Families are also given a good understanding of how to keep their children safe at home. First aid courses and fire prevention courses run at the centre are well attended and support parents' understanding well.

The many activities for children are having a positive impact on their enjoyment and learning. Children make good gains in their skills and understanding, developing an interest in exploring, investigating and learning through play in the indoor and outdoor play areas. Excellent learning was observed in activities such as 'Baby Beeps', 'Happy House' and 'Wider Family Learning'. Parents and their children thoroughly enjoyed the sessions. Courses provided for adults are also greatly appreciated and enjoyed. One mum said, 'That was terrific; I have learnt how to make story sacks for my child. I thoroughly enjoyed it and have lots of ideas for more ways to help my child learn.'

Parents report great improvement in their children's behaviour and attitudes as a result of attendance at courses focusing on improving parenting skills and involvement with family support workers. The support parents receive to develop awareness and strategies to help their children learn is good. Parents learn to evaluate the learning potential of nursery rhymes and safety aspects are rigorously reinforced when parents and children make and decorate musical shakers. Adults are also accessing opportunities for learning and gaining some qualifications which support them to prepare for future employment. The confidence of users is further enhanced by one-to-one sessions such as 'Helping Hands', where staff respond very well to individual needs. Vulnerable groups that have accessed the centre's services speak very positively about the support and guidance they received from staff and from activities such as 'Jump Start' and 'Wider Family Learning'.

Although engaging parents in decision making about the centre is still underdeveloped, there are many strategies for seeking parents' and carers' views about the courses and activities they have attended. Users express satisfaction with the centre through a variety of formats. Evaluations, discussion, questionnaires and

informal discussion with centre staff are used to help plan further activities, for example 'Dadstastic', a course for dads, was a direct response from parents' views and feedback.

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	2
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	2
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre knows its users well and has established good assessment procedures. The local authority provides the centre with clear data which it supplements with its own. Overall, this is being used effectively to plan activities that are focused on need. However, the recording of initial assessments of children's skills is less well developed and does not fully ensure children's progress can be rigorously tracked. Health visitors and others work effectively to review the welfare needs of users. A baby clinic has recently been established at the centre and is proving popular with parents and carers. There are good links with other agencies to effectively inform assessments to meet learners' individual needs well.

The provision to help children learn and achieve is good with some outstanding features. Provision for teenage parents and pregnant teenagers is adequate. The centre has established courses for these users but acknowledges that it needs to provide more courses that encourage teenage mums to use the centre on a regular basis. Sessions for dads, however, are proving successful in helping them to cope with looking after their children. High numbers of families with twins also comment on the quality of support they receive in managing two babies. There is a wide range of literature and guidance available for parents to help them make choices about issues such as immunisation and clarify their understanding of how they can keep their children safe and support their learning. The centre also signposts parents to good-quality support for specialist support groups such as smoking cessation.

The quality of care and support for vulnerable families is good, as is the care and guidance of children who attend the activities. Users see the centre as a very safe place where they can share their problems and can feel confident that swift and effective solutions or support will be provided. Outreach and home visits are well organised. Parents are helped effectively to cope with crisis and domestic problems in their own home. All workers at the centre, including administrative staff, have good knowledge of families attending the centre. They were all very thrilled when one child who had been told that she may never walk took her first steps in the centre. The grateful parent was convinced this happened because the child really loves attending. The centre knows there are hard-to-reach groups in the local community who do not feel confident enough to access the centre’s provision and have tried a variety of strategies to engage with them with only moderate success as yet.

Parents with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good levels of support to help them cope on a practical basis with the stresses of managing the extra work and emotional impact of their situation. One parent said that the support that she received from the centre was invaluable and she would not have been able to cope without it. Many parents expressed the positive impact of the attending play sessions and activities. This enabled them to receive good-quality support guidance and support for their child at the earliest stage to alleviate concerns.

Good parenting support enhances the knowledge, confidence and abilities of parents in raising their children. The quality and range of services are adequate in meeting the needs of targeted groups within the wider community but participation rates are variable. The quality of information, advice and guidance for parents seeking work is good. The Citizens Advice Bureau is accessed from the centre and both users and members of the wider community find this most helpful.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
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?

2

The good quality of the provision and the positive impact upon children and adult users alike is due to the good-quality leadership and management at all levels. The

recently appointed coordinator and senior coordinator of the centre have good knowledge of its strengths and the aspects which can be improved still further. The activities are thoughtfully planned and carefully evaluated. Partnerships with all outside agencies are good and services are well organised.

Leadership at all levels is good. The advisory board provides good levels of challenge to the centre and is influential in driving improvements to ensure consistently good quality provision. Safeguarding procedures are excellent. All legally required policies and procedures are in place, up-to-date and regularly reviewed. Staff have an excellent understanding of child protection procedures and training is regular and up-to-date. The staff ensure the building is a safe and secure environment for all users. There are rigorous recruitment checks and arrangements for professional supervision. The centre ensures all partners are fully trained in safeguarding and that procedures are known to all. Risk assessments are rigorous and monitored to a high standard.

Early intervention to support those who are vulnerable is a priority. This is supported very well by good and regular partnership working with the other children's centre in Chesham and local schools. Outreach work in local schools is having a positive impact on vulnerable families. More parents and carers are using the centre, although the centre acknowledges it still has to reach a few hard-to-reach groups. Links with parents, local schools and other children's centres in the Chesham area are good.

The centre provides effectively for equality and diversity. Staff are committed to promoting inclusion of all families within the reach area. The centre gathers valuable information about the different groups of users and evaluates their engagement. Celebration of cultural diversity is good. The centre has made some progress in extending its provision to different ethnic and socio-economic groups but acknowledges that this is also an aspect for development.

Skills of the staff and resources are used well and the centre is successful in providing value for money through its activities and services so outcomes for families and their children are improving.

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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
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	2

statutory duties	
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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Chesham Newtown Children's Centre on 23 and 24 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you we met and who spoke to us about the centre and its work. It was a great help to us. We agree with you that the centre is a good place for you and your children to attend and that all the staff involved in the centre's work do a good job to help you and your children. You told us how friendly and approachable everyone is and how happy your children are when they are in the centre. We could see that those of you who use the centre regularly enjoy and benefit from all it has to offer, such as the 'Baby Beeps', 'Happy House', 'Stories and Craft' and 'Wider Family Learning'. The 'Coffee Drop-in' is also popular and enables you to meet your friends and make new friends.

We think the wide range of courses and activities that the centre plans for you are good but there are some families in your local community who are unsure about using the centre. Staff are working to engage these hard-to-reach groups but need to find more effective strategies to encourage them to access what the centre has to offer.

The centre helps you in so many ways, for example the support it provides for new parents and those of you who have twins. It also provides support and practical help for your homes, road and fire safety, and guidelines to make your homes safer for your children. It is particularly good at helping you learn ways to promote and guide your own children's learning. We know the centre is eager for more of you to contribute to decision making at the centre through the 'Parents' Forum'.

There are many good things in the centre to admire. Your children make good progress in their learning and behave very well because they enjoy all the activities offered. We enjoyed talking to some of them. The 'drop-in' coffee mornings are popular and well attended. All children are fully involved and enjoy themselves learning to play with and alongside others. It was great to see parents and young children involved in fun movement actions and learning new songs to help develop language and physical development. Very young children learn to cooperate well with each other and develop confidence to explore their world. They were eager to help 'Tatty Cat' and suggest ways to make him happy. We would like the centre staff to record initial assessments on children's learning more rigorously so that they can show the impact of their work more clearly.

All of the people who work at the centre do a good job. This is especially the case with regard to the leaders and family support workers. The centre staff effectively evaluate what is needed and put plans in place to make things even better. The centre is outstanding in the way it ensures you and your families are safeguarded.

It was a pleasure to meet you during the inspection and to hear your views. We hope that you and your children and many more families who live in and around the Chesham area will continue to enjoy and benefit from the many activities and services the centre offers. Thank you again for contributing to the inspection by sharing your comments and thoughts so openly.

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