

# Inspection report for CHE3 Chelmsford Children's Centre @ Beeches Close

Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	365764
Inspection dates	30–31 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Godfrey Bancroft

Centre governance	Chelmsford YMCA commissioned by the local authority
Centre leader	Sophie Beckwith
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	The Adult Community College
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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.

## 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 year's inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the advisory board and local authority, the centre manager, senior staff, outreach works, partner providers, members of the community and parents and carers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The centre is a phase two Sure Start children's centre that was designated in 2008. It has an administrative base and activity rooms at the Adult Community Learning College in Chelmsford. The building is owned by Essex County Council. The centre provides the full core offer and various activities at a range of other venues across its reach area, some of which are delivered by partner agencies. There is no directly linked childcare. The centre is governed by the Chelmsford YMCA commissioned by the local authority.

The centre supports a reach area that is partly urban but includes a large rural area extending from the western fringe of Chelmsford. The reach has an above average percentage of unemployment and families living on benefits in workless households. The immediate area, in which the centre is sited, is among the 20% most deprived in England. The proportion of potential users who come from minority ethnic groups is lower than found usually, but rising steadily. The centre supports children and families on a nearby Traveller site. Children begin school in the Early Years Foundation Stage with attainment that is lower than that 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

This is a good children's centre. It is valued by parents and carers and highly regarded by the community it serves. The centre's great strength comes from the warmth of the welcome it provides for everyone and the way in which all users are valued and treated equally. Some aspects of its work are outstanding. For example, there are excellent arrangements to ensure that children and adult users are safe and protected. This applies in particular to those who, at times, because of their circumstances might potentially be at risk. These arrangements underpin the exceptional care, guidance and support that the centre provides for its users. Any welfare concerns are identified at an early stage and resolved by prompt action. Actions taken in this respect are the result of effective teamwork by the centre leader and staff and good liaison with partner providers, such as health service professionals.

The centre benefits from strong and effective leadership at all levels. The advisory board supports the centre's work well. Resources are used wisely and activities matched well to the identified needs of users. Links and liaison with other children's centres and with partner providers are good. Staff are highly motivated to do their best on behalf of users. A key strength is the very effective promotion of the mental and emotional health of users. This helps to raise their confidence and self-esteem. As one parent commented, 'They do not give up on anybody.' In recent times, mainly due to the strain on resources, some partnerships have proved difficult to sustain. This applies to the activities to support breastfeeding and to the help provided through Jobcentre Plus for parents and carers who want to return to work. Centre leaders have recognised these relative shortfalls in provision and have acted effectively to promote alternative arrangements.

Thoughtfully planned developments serve to exemplify the centre's good capacity to sustain improvements in the future. For example, the centre leader, who is a relatively recent appointment, has built on previous good work by carefully targeting those parts of the centre's reach where more activities are needed, particularly in the somewhat isolated, rural communities. This has resulted in a doubling of the

numbers accessing the centre's activities in less than eighteen months. The appointment, by the YMCA, of a senior manager whose role is to evaluate the quality of provision and the extent to which activities meet users' needs also augers well for the future. However, mechanisms for collating and interpreting data about the centre's activities are not sufficiently streamlined to showcase the successes of its work to the fullest extent.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Rekindle the links with health service providers to ensure that the planned programme to encourage and sustain breastfeeding achieves the best possible outcomes.
- Further develop the partnership with Jobcentre Plus to ensure that the centre's activities can be sustained to support parents and carers when entering or returning to the world of work.
- Work in partnership with the advisory board and local authority to develop systems whereby data about the centre's activities can be collated and used to affirm the effectiveness and success of its work.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2
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The promotion of the mental and emotional health of children and their families is a significant strength. One parent reflected the view of many when she said: 'Before I knew about the centre I was afraid to leave my house. The people I have met at the centre are now my best friends.' The centre's work in helping mothers to overcome postnatal depression is proving to be highly effective. Courses encouraging users to take outdoor exercise and to help them grow their own vegetables are popular and have a good impact on attitudes towards taking exercise and eating healthily. This is further enhanced by providing access to an allotment. Sessions, such as the physical and soft play drop-in sessions and 'Active Tots', are helping parents, carers and their children to enjoy opportunities for exercise.

Centre staff and partnership workers make an excellent contribution to identifying the needs and providing support for any child or adult who, because of their circumstances, might be at risk. Children and adults, who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those children who are looked after, receive exceptional support. The centre's contribution to the well-being of children who are subject to Common Assessment Framework processes is also outstanding. Excellent partnerships mean that referral procedures are efficient and effective. Record keeping is meticulous and ensures that the progress of each child is tracked closely and staff are aware of developments.

Children achieve well and make good progress, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. The attainment of many children when they start school is low, particularly in terms of their language and communication skills. Even so,

because they behave well and form good relationships, they are well prepared for school and the foundation is laid for them to make good progress. Children and adults clearly enjoy attending the centre and participating in the activities. Adults are increasingly well placed to contribute to decisions about the development of the centre. The centre is very thorough in encouraging participants to evaluate the various activities and in responding to their views. The parents' forum is a relatively recent introduction and attracting members has proved to be a challenge. It is now up and running and parents and carers are increasingly well placed to contribute to decision making and to having their voice heard.

There are good opportunities for children and adults to develop the skills they will need to secure their future economic well-being. Jobcentre Plus has not been involved in this aspect of provision to the fullest extent, although the centre's partnership with the Adult Community Learning College means that parents and carers have good opportunities to access courses and gain qualifications to help them find employment. The centre is notably successful in helping parents and carers to gain confidence and become increasingly independent. Parents and carers are rightly proud of their achievements.

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

Effective cooperation between the various partnerships means that the identification and ongoing assessment of the needs of children and adults is thorough. Records are updated frequently and regular discussions means that all who need to know are aware of developments and progress. Each individual user is well known to outreach workers and to managers. The quality of outreach work is exceptional and parents and carers are full of praise for the help they receive. The influence of the centre and its profile in the wider community has expanded rapidly as it becomes increasingly popular and well known. The focus on embracing the needs of the more rural parts of the centre's reach has proved to be very effective in raising participation levels

and in ensuring that no one is left out. The mobile toy library is a very popular element of this provision.

Arrangements to ensure that activities are matched well to users' needs and interests are improving all the time. Centre staff are good at listening to what users have to say. The recent appointment of a senior manager to lead the evaluation of activities is already proving to be of significant benefit. Managers and staff are very adept at promoting the personal development of users which helps to lay the foundation for their successful educational progress. For example, good links with the on-site crèche mean that parents and carers can be free to pursue any of the wide range of academic and work-related courses that take place in the Adult Community Learning College. Parents and carers are very appreciative of these opportunities.

High quality care, guidance and support are at the heart of everything the centre does. Parents and carers are full of praise for the centre's work. During the inspection, many provided first-hand accounts of how the centre has helped them to overcome the challenges they face, including the ways in which partners from various agencies have worked together to give support. The high quality of information about activities, courses and services is often the trigger for parents and carers to take action for themselves; for example, in attempting to give up smoking or travelling to an activity at another centre under their own steam.

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>

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

**2**

Governance and accountability at all levels are good and leaders and managers are effective. The centre's advisory board is able to draw on a wide range of skills and knowledge and works very closely with the centre leader and staff. All parties work together well to evaluate the quality of services and provision and to plan for improvements. Establishing the formal involvement of parents and carers in governance has proved to be a challenge but they are now well placed to make an appropriate input. A parents' forum has also been established to supplement the well-developed arrangements for users to contribute to the day to day evaluation of activities and services. Suitable targets for continued improvement are evident, although current systems for gathering and presenting data currently make it

somewhat difficult to measure success accurately.

The centre benefits from the sharing of expertise and knowledge with other centres and with partner providers. This means that, as one parent commented, 'No one slips through the net.' It also means that users are supported in accessing activities at other centres as part of the common programme provided by the YMCA across the range of centres for which it is responsible.

The centre leader and the advisory board have brought together a strong team of practitioners who are all committed to the aim of making certain that everyone can be involved in the full range of the centre's activities. They provide users with access to the full range of services, especially those who might otherwise prove hard to reach and those who have disabilities. In discussion one parent said: 'This centre feels inclusive and looks inclusive. Staff understand the real meaning of welcoming every family.' Excellent day to day communication within the team means that everyone is aware of developments and progress, and can contribute to the team approach for helping individuals.

Safeguarding arrangements are excellent. Policies are all embracing and set out clearly the actions that staff are to take. Training is up to date and everyone is very well informed and knows exactly what to do in the event of any concerns. The impact of these arrangements is the good extent to which children are safe and the confidence that parents and carers have in the ability of staff to recognise and respond to their needs.

The centre provides good value for money. Managers work effectively to ensure that resources are used wisely. Carefully structured plans ensure that in the event of any reduction in funding the impact on activities and services will be kept to a minimum. Underpinning this is the excellent way the children's centres in the area and beyond work together, along with a wide range of strong and effective partnerships.

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>1</b>

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

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

There were no inspections happening concurrently with this one. No parts of the linked provision have been inspected during the last twelve months.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the CHE3 Chelmsford Children's Centre @ Beeches Close on 30–31 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

I would like to thank those of you who gave your time to talk with us and share your views about the centre. Your help in this respect is greatly appreciated. In turn, we were delighted to hear how you appreciate the work of the centre and the guidance and help that the staff provide. Like you, we feel that one of the centre's great strengths is the warmth of the welcome it provides for everyone.

We think that some aspects of the centre's work are outstanding. This includes the arrangements to ensure that you and your children are safe and, as far as possible, protected from danger. We feel that the centre provides you with an exceptional quality of care, guidance and support. All the staff, but particularly the outreach workers, are excellent at responding and helping you to solve any problems you might face. As one of you pointed out, 'They do not give up on anyone.' The centre's leaders and managers are good at making sure that everything works well. In fact, they are so good that you may not be aware that over the last eighteen months the number of parents and carers taking part in centre activities as more than doubled.



The staff have certainly excelled in getting out and about and bringing activities and services to those of you who live in rural areas and have found it difficult to get to the centre in the past.

The centre benefits greatly from good leadership and from the help it receives from the advisory board and from the local authority. Everyone is working constantly to meet your needs and to find ways of making the centre even better. Recently, it has been difficult to keep some the activities going. With this in mind, we have asked the centre to make sure that the courses designed to help mothers with breastfeeding are able to meet everyone's needs. Similarly, some of the partners whose task it is to help you back into employment have not been able to do as much as in the past. We are asking the centre to make sure that everything is place to help those of you who are seeking employment. Even so, we are very impressed by the ways in which staff give you the confidence to attend courses and help you to become increasingly independent. You have every right to be proud of your achievements.

The centre is careful to use all the available resources wisely. It is possible that in the future this may prove even harder to achieve. With this in mind, we have also asked the centre to make sure that it has all the evidence it needs to showcase the success of its work. For example, the fact that many more people than previously make use of the centre is a useful starting point. What the centre lacks is all the facts and figures readily available to show what a good job it is doing. We hope that your centre continues to flourish in the future and that you enjoy and benefit from the activities it provides.

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