

# Inspection report for Wycombe East Children's Centre

---

<b>Local authority</b>	Buckinghamshire County Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	383575
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 September 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Michael Blakey

<b>Centre leader</b>	Paul Lovell
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Centre address</b>	Wycombe East Children's Centre Ash Hill Primary School Herbert Road High Wycombe Buckinghamshire HP13 7HT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01494 446785
<b>Fax number</b>	
<b>Email address</b>	pwlovell@buckscc.gov.uk

<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	None
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	None

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

---

**Report published:** October 2011



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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

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

This publication is available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080).

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

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

An inspection of the co-located primary school 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, representatives of the local authority, parents, family support workers, members of the advisory board and staff from partner agencies including a headteacher, health visitor and educational psychologist.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Wycombe East is a Phase 2 children's centre. It was purpose built in 2007 and delivers the full core offer of services, including early education, child and family health services and family support. The centre is situated on the same site as Ash Hill Pre-School in the grounds of Ash Hill Primary School. Governance lies with Buckinghamshire County Council. The centre has an advisory board in place, with a newly appointed independent chairperson. A coordinator manages the centre.

The centre serves one of the top 40% most deprived wards in England. There are 860 children under five years of age living in its reach area. Twenty-eight per cent of these children live in workless households. Twenty-five per cent of families are in receipt of benefits.

Eighty-seven per cent of children in the wider area are White British and 6% are of Pakistani origin. The remaining 7% are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, including Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Indian.

Children's levels on entry to early years education are well below national expectations for their age.

## Inspection judgements

**Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

### Overall effectiveness

**The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families**

**4**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**4**

## Main findings

Since Wycombe East Children's Centre opened in 2007, it has successfully registered over half of the children living in its reach area. However, it has had little positive impact so far and its current services are not targeted closely enough at those children and families who need them the most. The centre has not sufficiently improved children's health or early learning and it has not done enough to support parents into training or finding employment.

Outreach work has been too slow at encouraging new children and families to engage with the centre's services and participation rates at too many activities are low. Only a very small minority of children who live in workless households and a small number of children in minority ethnic groups regularly access services. However, more recently, family support workers have had some success at targeting teenage mothers by working in partnership with a neighbouring children's centre. The promotion of equal opportunities is poor overall.

Some of the provided activities are well attended. The 'Happy House' drop-in session, for example, satisfactorily promotes learning and is enjoyed by children and parents alike. As one parent said, 'Singing and performing helps my child to feel more confident and happy and we enjoy it.' However, the range of services provided does not adequately meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups in the reach area.

Partnerships with a range of services, including health, are developing but are not effective enough in improving outcomes for families across the reach area. Links with the family learning service are strong and provide families with opportunities to learn together and for adults to access further education. However, Jobcentre Plus is not engaged with the work of the centre. Furthermore, arrangements to support children's speech and language development are insufficient to meet local need.

The centre's governance is inadequate. The local authority, through its annual performance review process, has correctly judged leadership and management to be ineffective. However, it has failed to take prompt and rigorous action to remedy the weaknesses. The centre has not identified any performance measures or targets to monitor the impact of its work. Self-evaluation is weak and based on too little evidence or feedback from children and families. The centre coordinator has identified a number of priorities for improvement but these have not been shared with parents, partners, or the advisory board.

Although safeguarding policies and procedures exist, they are not implemented systematically. Criminal Record Bureau checks of adults who may have unsupervised access to children are not carried out in a timely manner and accurate records of staff induction are not routinely kept.

Staff do not effectively evaluate services or analyse available data. The centre's management lacks ambition and has not driven improvements in outcomes for children and families with sufficient rigour and determination. As a result of these shortcomings, the centre does not have the capacity to make the necessary improvements.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that statutory safeguarding requirements are fully met by leaders, managers and governors:
  - checking that all policies and procedures are adhered to by all staff
  - ensuring that all adults who have unsupervised access to children and young people are subject to an Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check.
- Improve the governance and leadership of the centre by the local authority:
  - providing enhanced support and challenge for centre staff and the advisory board
  - ensuring robust planning processes based on an accurate needs analysis of the local community
  - working with staff to design services that specifically target the needs of the reach area
  - evaluating rigorously the impact of the centre's services to continuously improve their quality and effectiveness.
- Increase the number of children and parents from target groups who access services, especially families from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and those who are unemployed.

## How good are outcomes for families?

4
---

Children behave well and parents say that they feel safe at the centre. Parents who

have successfully undertaken first aid courses say that they are now more able to care for their children in the event of an accident. The centre has adequately supported a small number of families who are subject to child protection plans or Common Assessment Framework processes. Despite these positive features, the centre is not able to report how safe children and families feel, other than a small sample of ten parents' responses to the 2010 survey. There is no evidence to show how well the centre has raised families' awareness of how to keep their children safe. The centre is unable to provide adequate case studies about the impact it has had on children who are on the child protection register or those who may be vulnerable.

Eleven per cent of Reception Year children living in the reach area are obese and the centre has therefore recently commissioned a new service, 'Action Kids', to promote physical exercise. The centre delivers occasional cooking courses and provides healthy snacks during some activities to help children and parents learn about healthy eating. However, the most recent parental satisfaction survey shows that the majority of parents who responded do not believe they have a healthier lifestyle. The centre has made too little impact on improving children's health overall.

The percentage of children in the local area reaching a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage improved slightly between 2010 and 2011. However, the gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers increased further. Children's communication, language and literacy development is poor and insufficiently prioritised by the children's centre. Despite sharing a site with the pre-school and primary school, the centre does not liaise effectively with these professionals to track children's progress. As a consequence, the centre is unable to measure the impact of its provision.

Adults who take part in activities delivered by the family learning service are encouraged to celebrate their achievements, and proudly do so. The majority of parents who responded to the centre's satisfaction survey said that they were not looking for work or training. The centre's coordinator correctly identifies that the centre has made limited progress in supporting people into training or employment. Services are not making enough impact on target groups and too few parents are improving their economic stability and independence.

The Parents' Forum is becoming established and some members are preparing to voluntarily take over the running of a 'drop in' session at the local community centre. However, there is too little support to enable the parents' forum to effectively influence services. The local population is not fully represented in terms of ethnicity or disability. Too few families are involved in decision-making at the centre and target groups are not able to make their views known easily.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for families*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy</b>	<b>4</b>
---	----------

<b>lifestyles</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>4</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>4</b>

## How good is the provision?

**4**

The centre does not have an accurate insight into the needs of different groups of users across the reach area. Consequently, the services offered by the children's centre do not adequately meet the wide range of needs of the local community. Recent data shows that only 9% of children of minority ethnic origins and 1% of children from workless households accessed services in the first quarter of this year. Approximately 25% of children in the local area speak English as an additional language. However, the centre does not routinely make use of interpreters or provide any information in languages other than English.

Parents speak positively about the learning opportunities they attend. Sessions delivered by the Family Learning service are well attended and promote learning and enjoyment for children and adults alike. For example, 'Wycombe Wanderers' was well attended by fathers and they were encouraged to create scrapbooks with the children. However, the centre does not tailor learning opportunities sufficiently well to engage the wide range of families who speak English as an additional language. Provision does not focus adequately on improving children's language and communication skills to prepare them for school.

The centre's outreach work is extremely limited. While there are examples of the centre's positive impact on individual families, poor supervision arrangements and inappropriate resource allocation have led to significantly reduced outreach activity. As a result, families are now expected to attend the centre or other venues such as a local community hall, which few parents can access.

Appropriate procedures are in place for assessing individuals' specific needs, but these are not fully used by staff. Family support workers are trained to undertake the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) but they have not done so to date.

Health visitors provide a weekly, hour long, 'drop in' session and parents speak positively about the 'Cuddles Club' which includes advice for families' oral health. However, too few expectant mothers and those with young children attend.

Overall, provision for improving families' health and wellbeing is inadequate. Health and social needs assessments conducted by the centre are inadequate. Although the centre has identified reducing obesity levels as a priority, it has not set any targets or amended its provision to achieve this goal.

Parents' advice and guidance, on accessing benefits or smoking cessation is mainly in the form of displays and leaflets. However, parents do receive some effective advice from the family support workers. For example, a parent reported they had, 'made all the difference', in getting her child into a sleep pattern. Nevertheless, there are too few opportunities for parents to undertake further training to improve their chances of returning to employment.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>4</b>

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

**4**

The centre's leadership has failed to drive improvements in outcomes for children and families, and in particular for the most vulnerable in the local area. The management of resources has no consistent impact on improving outcomes for families. The centre does not therefore provide satisfactory value for money.

The local authority's performance evaluations correctly identified poor areas of the centre's work in 2010. However, to date, the local authority has been ineffective in addressing these issues. Governance and accountability arrangements are unclear. The advisory board, which is well attended and includes a range of partners, has not been given sufficient information to provide appropriate advice, challenge or support.

The centre's leadership does not effectively evaluate its effectiveness or set challenging targets for improvement. They do not analysis available data to inform future services or measure their impact. New service proposals do not clearly set out how services will meet local need or how they will be evaluated. In addition, the supervision of staff and opportunities for their professional development are inadequate. These weaknesses hinder the centre's development and reduce its effectiveness. In addition, the centre's partners are insufficiently involved in joint planning and evaluating the impact of services.

The promotion of equality and diversity is limited. For example, the centre does not effectively engage children with disabilities or families of minority ethnic



backgrounds. The centre's governance is not proactive at reaching out to the local community and, as a result, too few families from the target groups benefit from its services. The views of families are not used routinely to shape services.

Leaders do not proactively promote early intervention to support vulnerable children. Some centre staff feel reluctant to use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) as they feel it stigmatises families. However, partners, including the co-located primary school, do undertake such assessments and family support workers attend 'Team Around the Child' meetings, despite the lack of leadership from the centre. Child protection policies and procedures are not followed robustly. The centre's coordinator does not give a sufficiently high priority to the appropriate implementation of safeguarding procedures.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>4</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>4</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>4</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>4</b>

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Wycombe East Children's Centre on 14–15 September 2011. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

We observed a range of activities, including 'Happy House', which many of you told us you enjoyed. One of you proudly said, 'Singing and performing helps my child to feel more confident and happy and we enjoy it.' Another told us, 'I didn't know anyone, nor did my children, and this group helped us feel part of the community.'

However, many of the other activities on offer at the centre do not fully meet the needs of the families living in your area. The centre fails to reach out to your local community's most vulnerable children, parents who do not work and those families from minority ethnic origins.

The centre has made very little impact on helping you and your children to be safer or healthier. For example, too many children in your area are overweight and some of you told us that the centre was not helping you to live healthier lifestyles.

Children's communication, language and literacy development are poor and the centre has failed to address these weaknesses by the time the children start school. As a result, too many of them fail to reach a good level of development by the end of their first year and the more vulnerable children in particular, fail to catch up with their peers. In addition, the centre does not do enough to help you undertake training or support you with trying to find employment.

Leaders do not clearly understand what the centre does well or where it needs to improve. They do not fully evaluate the services that the centre provides and they take too little account of your views and opinions about the services you use. The Parents' Forum is bringing about some positive changes and some of you are now supporting the centre by running the 'drop in' sessions, for example.

The advisory board, whose job is to provide advice, support and challenge for the centre, now includes a range of partner organisations. This board has not been provided with all the information it needs to carry out its role. For example, the local authority correctly recognised that the centre needed help to improve its leadership and management but the board were unaware of this finding. In addition, the centre's leaders had identified a number of priorities that it wanted to work on but had failed to share these with its partners and with you.

All of you we spoke to told us that you feel safe at the centre. However, we identified that some of the policies and procedures that are meant to keep your children safe were not fully implemented by the centre coordinator. For example, a number of members of the Parents' Forum had not completed Criminal Records Bureau checks and the centre's records were incomplete. Without these checks, the centre is not being vigilant in seeking to minimise the risk to your children.

We have therefore asked the centre to ensure that all safeguarding policies are fully implemented and that all adults who have unsupervised access to children and young people are rigorously vetted. We have also asked the local authority to ensure that the centre leader and staff are given additional support to enable them to

improve the services offered by the centre and to find out exactly what all the different groups in the community need. We have also recommended that the centre increase the number of children and parents who access its services, and to ensure that those using the centre are more representative of your local community. In particular, we have asked the centre to work specifically with more minority ethnic children and children whose parents are out of work.

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