

Inspection report for Aylesbury (Oakfield and Bedgrove) Children's Centre

Local authority	Buckinghamshire
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Linked school if applicable	Broughton Infant School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY380796 – Millside Pre-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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre coordinator, members of staff, representatives from the local authority, partner agencies, including representatives from health, members of the advisory board and families using the centre's services. They held informal discussions with parents, carers and children.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its action plan and data about families using the centre.

Information about the centre

Aylesbury (Oakfield and Bedgrove) Children's Centre is a phase two centre. The centre was designated in January 2008 and is run directly by the local authority. The local authority is part of the payment by results trial. The centre coordinator also manages the Aylesbury (Elmhurst) Children's Centre. There are two full time family support workers. Family support workers work across both of the centres. The advisory board contributes to the management of the centre and includes representatives from a number of community and statutory partners. It has seen several changes to its structure overtime and was re-formed in September 2011 to focus on the two centres. Parent forum meetings are held each term. The centre is open from 9.00am to 5.30pm, Monday to Thursday, and from 9.00am to 5.00pm on a Friday, for 52 weeks of the year.

Overall, the centre serves one of the 70% most deprived areas nationally. The centre's reach area covers the wards of Oakfield, Bedgrove and Bierton. There are pockets of higher need and deprivation within the area the centre serves. There are a total of 892 children aged under five in the reach area. Around 90% of families are White British. There are small percentages of other minority ethnic groups, including

Asian families and a growing Eastern European community. Around 8% of children aged under four are living in households dependent on workless benefits. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision across the reach area are broadly at the level expected for their age with their communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development being the weaker areas.

The children's centre is based in the grounds of Broughton Infant School and shares its building with Millside Pre-school. The centre offers a range of services for families and children under five years. These include child health services, family support, including outreach and signposting for Jobcentre Plus. The majority of services are delivered from the children's centre, with some sessions held in community venues including Bedgrove Infant School, Bierton Jubilee Hall and Oakfield Road Scout Hall.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The centre provides satisfactory provision for the children and their families accessing its services and, as a result, outcomes are satisfactory but beginning to improve. The quality of care, guidance and support is a strength as staff have a good understanding of the needs of those accessing the centre's services. Friendly and approachable staff have built high levels of trust with families, who feel nurtured and well supported, particularly when they are experiencing difficulties or a change of circumstance in their lives. Parents and carers express how much they value the services and support the centre provides and the way it is helping them to improve their lives. Statements made to inspectors such as, 'The centre has been a life saver,' and, 'I would have gone crazy without this place,' demonstrate the positive impact the centre has had.

Safeguarding is seen as a high priority and the arrangements are good. All staff demonstrate a good understanding of safeguarding procedures. Effective partnerships exist with other agencies to ensure the needs of families are appropriately met. Staff complete a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) referral when families are considered to need specific help and support.

Families benefit from positive relationships as they and the centre staff treat each other with respect and consideration. One parent commented, 'We do not feel judged.' Families respond well to the range of activities, such as Playtime and More than One. Good quality planning for sessions derives from the Early Years Foundation Stage framework and covers a range of activities to stimulate and develop children's knowledge and skills. These sessions are helping parents and carers to understand how their children learn and develop. Parents and carers feel these sessions are helping to prepare their children for pre-school confidently as they learn how to share, make friends and show respect for each other.

The range of services is designed to meet the needs of families and, as a result, is accessed by a growing number of families. The centre is working soundly to meet the needs of these families, who include teenage parents and families who are identified as in greatest need. This is because the centre accesses data made available by the local authority about the reach area and staff know the community well. However, the centre recognises there is still work to do in order to target services to increase the numbers accessing the centre from their identified vulnerable groups and the more deprived areas of the community. The centre evaluates its performance thoroughly and has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Staff are highly motivated and committed to help families improve their life chances. The centre has an accurate understanding of its strengths and shortcomings and has set accurate priorities for development. However, actions are not always precise enough with measureable targets in order for the centre to demonstrate when these have been successful and what impact they have on improving the outcomes for families. From September 2011, the advisory board was re-formed. It is developing its effectiveness in holding the centre to account and providing a sufficient level of challenge.

Parents feel their views are heard as staff involve them in evaluating sessions. They offer suggestions when services require some amendment to meet their changing needs, for example the timings of sessions and requesting healthy snacks to some sessions to encourage their children to eat fruit. The centre recognises that families need to be more systematically engaged in shaping services and the governance of the centre and is in the process of re-establishing the parent forum.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Together with the local authority and partners, improve the quality of data available in order to:
 - more precisely assess the needs of the community to target services for specific groups, particularly those identified as in greatest need
 - identify more precisely what outcomes the centre aims to achieve in improving the life chances of children and families when setting targets

- and how these will be measured
- track the impact that services have on improving the outcomes for families.
- Improve the effectiveness of the advisory board in holding the centre to account for its services and providing more challenge.
- Develop the parent forum to systematically engage families in shaping services and governance of the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre is at an early stage of evaluating the impact of its work. The evidence available demonstrates the positive contribution the centre is making to improve the outcomes for children and families.

The centre has good working relationships with health visitors so they can support the emotional well-being of individual families. Family support workers introduce identified families to centre activities in order for them not to become isolated. One parent commented on how important the centre had been when suffering from postnatal depression and said, 'I couldn't image life without the centre now.' The child health clinic is well attended and is providing parents and carers with a range of information from advice and support for breastfeeding to guidance on weaning. Data provided by health visitors in the community show an increase in breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks rising from 26% in 2010 to 38% in 2011. Sessions, such as Tots FC, are helping children and families to understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and keeping physically active.

High regard is given to promoting safety at the centre and at community settings and, as a result, children and families feel safe when accessing services. Some parents are gaining confidence and develop their parenting skills as they attend the SPARKS parenting course. They receive good support to help promote positive behaviour of children. Family support work is tailored to support the most vulnerable families including a few whose children have been identified as in need or who are subject to a child protection plan. Families respond well to this support and show improvements in their understanding of how to keep their families safe.

Case studies and family files show how some families have improved their economic stability through specific tailored support. The centre promotes a job vacancies board, which is updated every week and provides families with a range of information about returning to work, including childcare in the area and information on benefits. Some families attend family learning courses held at the Elmhurst centre, which are helping parents and carers to support their child's learning. The centre is not yet tracking the longer-term impact of such courses on the achievement or economic well-being of participants.

Families show high levels of respect for each other. Children and their parents and carers actively engage in a range of well-planned activities, which help prepare for

the transition to pre-school. There has been improvements in the number of children who reach a good level of overall achievement at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, with the percentage rising from 56% in 2010 to 62% in 2011. The achievement gap is also narrowing over time. The centre has begun working with local early years providers and schools to identify where to focus activities, and has placed appropriate emphasis on developing children's language and communication skills as these are typically weaker areas in their development.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target 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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
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	3

How good is the provision?

3

Staff work with the data they have available and with partners to ensure the range of services are matched appropriately and targeted in the right areas of the community. The centre is reaching approximately 41% of families in the area, including increasing numbers from minority ethnic groups and teenage parents. The number of families accessing services is steadily increasing, including those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable, but the centre is not yet reaching enough families in the area. A recent parent satisfaction survey confirms that 91% of families are satisfied with the services offered by the centre. The centre has effective relationships on a local level with health partners so they can offer support to vulnerable families. However, the centre is not yet receiving the full range of health data, including information about new births in the area in order to make initial contact with all families in order to target its services more precisely.

Good quality care and guidance, together with the strong sense of care and mutual support between centre staff and families, ensure an atmosphere of trust exists. Family support work is specifically tailored to meet individual needs and on occasions leads to identification of further need. Family support workers then take appropriate action in order to ensure the safety and well-being of children and families, for example by making timely referrals to other agencies so families receive the correct

support, such as Relate, Shelter and social care. One health professional commented, 'The secret of this centre is the calm and approachable staff, they are delightful, willing and helpful towards their clients.'

The centre is committed to promoting learning and development for families and ensuring their enjoyment. They effectively display children's artwork and provide opportunities for them to share their new skills. For example, during a Playtime session families watched and appreciated the efforts of children as they shared their Brazilian dance. Parents who are coming to the end of the SPARKS course are, with staff, planning their 'graduation' to recognise and celebrate their achievements.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Day-to-day management arrangements are clear and activity sessions run smoothly. Professional supervision takes place regularly and staff value the opportunities for ongoing professional development and feel supported in their work with families. Effective partnerships with health professionals and other key agencies, such as the early intervention and assessment team, ensure centre staff target services to supporting families identified as at risk of greatest need. However, the information the centre receives from the local authority on the demographics of the area does not help it to extend its reach to the wider community.

The local authority is supporting the centre with the implementation of new systems to demonstrate the impact of its work as part of the 'payments by results trial'. It is working at a strategic level with health partners to improve the data available at the centre level. Self-evaluation is accurate and leaders are clear about the centre's strengths and areas to improve, although targets are not always specific enough and do not include success criteria by which to check the impact of the centre's actions on improving the outcomes for all target groups. The advisory board, although undertaking its role satisfactorily, is not yet providing a sufficient level of challenge for the centre. However, one member of the board is part of the local authority's steering group looking at the role of advisory boards, and this is providing useful direction to help the board further develop its effectiveness.

There are systems in place for monitoring and quality assuring the centre's services. However, the centre is not yet fully evaluating the impact services are having for

families over time. For example, staff recognise the need to measure the impact activities have had for children as they start pre-school and are visiting other centres where this is happening to help them bring improvement. This is already paying dividends as they are usefully drawing on good practice to plan the Preparing for Pre-school course they are running during the school holidays.

Centre staff promote an inclusive environment for families. They help vulnerable families to access services by initially accompanying them to sessions in order to build their confidence. The crèche facility for parents attending family learning courses plays a key part in enabling adults to develop their knowledge, skills and experience. Children with disabilities receive specific support when they attend the educational needs group at the Elmhurst centre.

The centre makes effective use of community venues to provide services across the area. Family support workers have a wide range of skills in order to cover the various aspects of children's centre's work providing satisfactory value for money. Staff are well trained in child protection matters and have a secure understanding of safeguarding children issues. Targeted work with families subject to child protection plans or children identified as in need is successful and has a positive impact on keeping children well protected and safe. Effective systems, such as staff recruitment checks, are in place to ensure those who work with children are suitable to do so.

The views of parents are satisfactorily taken into account and used to help shape services, for example through termly meetings organised by the centre. However, despite staff's efforts, families are not yet routinely involved in the work of the advisory board or the parents' forum.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Aylesbury (Oakfield and Bedgrove) Children's Centre on 27 and 28 June 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We enjoyed talking to you during activities and meeting groups of you during some sessions. You were clear on your views about the centre. We agree with you that staff at the centre are caring and welcoming and provide you with good care, guidance and support, especially when you need it the most. You told us how much you value the services and support the centre provides and the way it is helping to improve your lives. Statements made, such as, 'The centre has been a life saver,' and, 'I would have gone crazy without this place,' demonstrate the positive impact the centre has had.

Staff are well trained in how to safeguard children and it is seen as a high priority. The centre has very effective systems in place to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable to do so. Staff work well with other agencies to ensure you and your children access the right kind of support, including health visitors, Relate, social care, and early years providers when you need them.

You told us how you benefit from positive relationships with each other and with the centre staff. You clearly all treat each other with respect and consideration. One parent told us, 'We do not feel judged.' It is noticeable how much you and your children enjoy the activities, such as Playtime and More than One. Good quality planning for sessions derives from the Early Years Foundation Stage framework and covers a range of activities to stimulate and develop children's knowledge and skills. These sessions are helping you understand how children learn and develop. You told us that you feel these sessions are helping to prepare your children confidently for pre-school as they learn how to share, make friends and show respect for each other.

The range of services is suitably designed to meet the needs of families and is accessed by a growing number of families. The centre is meeting the needs of families, who include teenage parents and families who require additional support. This is because the centre accesses data made available by the local authority about the community and staff know the area well. However, the centre knows it still has work to do in order to target services so even more families can benefit from its services, particularly those in the community who are most vulnerable.

Staff are highly motivated and committed to help you improve your life chances. They know what they do well and the areas they need to improve. The centre has set accurate priorities for development. However, actions are not always precise enough with measureable targets in order for them to demonstrate when these have been successful and the impact they have had on improving the life chances for families. The advisory board has seen several changes in its structure overtime. From September 2011, the advisory board was re-formed and is developing its role in monitoring the effectiveness of the centre's work.

We noticed that you have some opportunities to share your views. You offer suggestions when services require some amendment to meet your changing needs, for example the timings of sessions and requests for healthy snacks at sessions to encourage your children to eat fruit. The centre recognises that it needs to encourage more of you to be involved in making direct contributions to the management of the centre and helping to shape services further.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us during the inspection and we are grateful for your views and comments.

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