

Inspection report for The Eatons Children's Centre

Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	383836
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Centre leader	Nicky Munro
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Bushmead Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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

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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.

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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with parents, managers, staff, partner professionals and senior leaders. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The Eatons Children's Centre is situated in St Neots, a large market town to the west of Cambridge. It is a phase two centre and first opened in January 2009. It is managed by the local authority and is based on the same site as Bushmead Primary School. It provides services from the main site and through other centres within the region to a population made up from a broad range of economic and social circumstances. The majority of children live in areas where there is relatively little deprivation. Around a quarter of children attending schools in the area are known to be eligible for free school meals and a small minority are living in households where no-one is working. The vast majority of families within the area served by the centre are of White British heritage.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by providing a wide range of supporting services, incorporating a crèche, outreach and home visiting, parenting courses, volunteering opportunities and workshops. The centre has an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and a parent. Most children enter early years provision with a range of skills higher than 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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Families who use The Eatons Children's Centre receive effective and well-organised care and support from highly motivated and experienced staff. The centre has established effective partnerships with other organisations to provide well-integrated services. An increasing number of families use the centre because it has a strong reputation for meeting needs and providing very effective support. Year on year, the outcomes for families in the area improve as the centre becomes increasingly well established. For this reason, the centre's capacity for further improvement is good.

The centre is making a significant contribution to preparing children well for school, which has resulted in significantly higher than average and improving Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores. Activities to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles are highly effective and have contributed to the particularly low and decreasing obesity rates. Safeguarding arrangements are very effective, and users and staff feel safe at the centre. Staff and volunteers are well trained in keeping children safe and have a good understanding of how to respond to concerns about safety and welfare. Staff promote inclusion well and barriers to participation are quickly identified and removed.

Staff have a good understanding of the needs of the local communities and make sure the centre offers a range of services which is matched well to those needs, such as support for postnatal depression. Outreach work and support for most targeted groups is good. An increasing number of fathers get involved with the centre's activities, and good work is undertaken to identify and support families with disabled children. However, the centre does not routinely receive details of disabled children from health partners. Support for new and young parents is particularly effective because partnership working with the midwife and health visiting staff to support these groups is given high priority.

Breastfeeding rates are low. Accordingly, the centre has introduced a variety of initiatives to promote and support breastfeeding and these are popular with users. However, it is too soon to identify any measurable impact. Arrangements to receive and analyse other health-related data and plan with partners to identify areas for

better integration of services, such as support for families with disabled children and to help people stop smoking, are not fully developed. Listening to users is given very high priority, and the centre has a thorough approach to collecting and acting upon evaluation evidence from users.

Staff have high ambition for all families and precisely identify users' needs at the earliest opportunity. The centre is a very attractive place where families can use and borrow high-quality toys, equipment and learning resources to improve outcomes. One parent told inspectors, 'I do not have a garden at home so we come to the centre to use the outdoor area, which is fabulous.' Parents receive active encouragement to attend education and training courses, but staff do not always monitor attendance and progress well enough.

The centre's leadership team receives good support from the local authority. Staff work very effectively to ensure all users receive consistent, high-quality services. The centre is situated close to the town centre and is easily accessible to local families, especially those with the greatest needs. Support for childminders and childcare settings is very effective.

Staff and partner organisations identify speech and language difficulties at a very early stage. This is a high priority for the centre and many of the activities and resources, such as 'Story Sacks', help to improve children's speech and language development. One parent commented, 'Learning English at the centre is very important for my son and me. It helps us to get to know people and make friends.'

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The centre and health partners should improve outcomes for families by working more effectively together to identify and plan to meet the needs of the local community by:
 - making more thorough use of data
 - developing an effective strategy to meet the needs of families with disabled children
 - continuing to improve the integration of services to promote and support breastfeeding.

- Improve arrangements to support adults seeking to increase their education and training by recognising and recording achievement and encouraging them to progress to higher levels.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families enjoy attending the centre and have fun in many of the activities available. Good attention is given to providing high-quality support and information which families use to help them choose healthier lifestyles. This includes: smoking cessation; dealing with domestic violence; parenting and general health; child

development; and, weaning. This has contributed to the area's low obesity rate. There is a particular focus on breastfeeding which has increased the number of mothers attending the centre for support with breastfeeding. The centre places a strong emphasis on promoting the emotional health and mental well-being of all users including those most vulnerable. One parent told inspectors, 'The centre was there for me when I needed a lot of support. I could not have continued without that help.'

Parents are given opportunities to make a positive contribution to the centre and the wider community by becoming members of the parents' forum and through their involvement on the advisory board. They feel that their views are listened to and acted upon by staff through face-to-face meetings, evaluations of activities and satisfaction surveys. The numbers of young parents and fathers receiving support is increasing, which improves outcomes for many families.

The centre provides good and increasingly effective support to promote users' economic stability, for example, in accessing local training courses, experience through voluntary work, gaining qualifications and returning to work. However, monitoring of this is not thorough enough. There is a strong partnership with Jobcentre staff who visit the centre each month to meet with parents seeking work. One parent told inspectors 'The centre is not just about children, it supports the whole family and helps you plan for the future. They helped me get a job and this has made a big difference for us.'

The centre works effectively in ensuring that parents and children keep themselves and each other safe. The most vulnerable children are quickly recognised and effective packages of support are put in place for the whole family. The centre staff work very effectively with social workers and health staff to support children who are subject to child protection plans and those considered as children in need. Staff have a very good understanding of child protection procedures and make a significant contribution to making sure children are safe through their partnership work and in using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). In the last year, 13 parents have benefited from attending the programme for support to address domestic violence.

The centre has a strong commitment to helping individuals develop and learn. An increasing number of parents are improving outcomes for their families by successfully completing mathematics and English courses and receiving help with parenting skills through attendance at structured parenting classes. Children make good gains in their learning, given their varied starting points, and this ensures they get off to a positive start at school. Learning and development are the central feature of almost all of the activities and services available. Support for the development of speech and language is very effective. Children are starting school with a good range of skills in communication and language. Families benefit from the very strong links that exist between the centre and co-located school.

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	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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre has experienced and well-qualified staff who use their skills very effectively to understand the needs and interests of the families in the local area. The centre team works hard to provide accurate assessments, which ensure services are well matched to meeting needs. There is a wide range of good services and the centre meets its core purpose well. The Common Assessment Framework processes are well-embedded and strong partnerships with other agencies ensure that assessments are detailed and effective.

The centre provides good support for users. There are clear programmes in place to promote the health and social well-being of users, including a strong emphasis on providing emotional support to boost their self-confidence. One parent commented, 'Meeting my friends at the centre gives me a boost. Staff go out of their way to help you.' Staff provide and promote opportunities for purposeful learning well, and activities are of good quality. Staff and partnership organisations have high ambitions for users, which they reinforce by encouraging users to build on their achievements and by regularly celebrating their success with praise. However, education and training achievements are not monitored well enough.

The centre is very popular and meets the needs of all groups in the area well. Staff have worked effectively to establish a positive reputation in the area. Outreach work is very well resourced and increasingly effective because staff receive structured supervision and use detailed case records to ensure outcomes are improved. Support for childminders and childcare providers is highly effective.

Parents are very appreciative of the way staff are discreet and sensitive to their unique and changing circumstances. The quality of care and individual support for children and parents is good. This is because support and advice are precisely targeted to meet individual needs and are highly personalised. One parent

commented: 'When I first came to this area I was very isolated and this seemed worse after my baby was born. The family workers handled this very well, helping me to make the right decisions at the right time.'

The centre provides an extensive range of high-quality information, for example, on smoking cessation, sexual health, adult training and breastfeeding, which is presented well and matched to the needs of many users. Case studies and users' evaluations demonstrate the high levels of progress and improved outcomes, which have resulted because of the very effective support.

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre leadership team has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement for the centre. It receives very good support from the local authority and has made significant investment to develop staff and improve outcomes for families. The centre has an active and enthusiastic advisory board which plays an increasingly effective role in supporting the centre. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood. The centre provides good value for money. The staff are highly committed and, through their energy and determination, they motivate parents and model good parenting skills.

There is clear commitment to equality of opportunity and the inclusion of all children and their families is central to the centre's work. For example, staff are very careful to remove barriers for all users to the activities and services on offer by varying the times and venues of courses and providing good crèche facilities. The centre has conducted an equality audit to help monitor and improve its offer. Families from minority ethnic groups make good progress at the centre and have benefited from the provision of English language courses. The centre has its own website available in a range of languages and runs a programme of international days where users can try different foods and learn about a variety of cultures.

The self-evaluation process uses parents' evaluation material very well and highlighted almost all of the areas for development identified by inspectors. The thorough approach to improvement has resulted in the centre becoming more effective and successful at helping and supporting families.

The centre ensures users are safe through good safeguarding arrangements which

are regularly reviewed. Local authority procedures and guidance for safe recruitment are followed closely. Managers make sure that all staff and volunteers have been subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check and are trained appropriately in child-protection procedures. Well-integrated services ensure the centre works effectively in partnership to protect children and vulnerable adults through early intervention, close cooperation between all agencies and through the Common Assessment Framework procedures.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
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	2
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	2

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

The outcome of the inspection of the co-located primary school has been taken into account in preparation of this report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Eatons Children's Centre on 4 and 5 July 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We enjoyed our visit to your centre and meeting so many of you and your children.

We found the centre to be welcoming to all families with lots happening. The outdoor play area is very well organised and provides good opportunities for you and your children. Many of you told us how much you enjoy the activities provided through the centre. You told us that staff are friendly and hardworking and they give you good support.

We saw how children confidently explore their learning environment. We were very impressed by the positive and supportive relationships you have with one another and with your children.

We found the staff to have a high level of expertise and offer good practical and emotional support to families who need it. The centre does some things especially well, such as helping children prepare for school and promoting healthy eating and active play.

There are many examples of professionals from different agencies working very well together to make sure you receive the right advice and support.

The centre does not always receive enough information about the needs of families with disabled children so we have asked the managers and health staff to improve this.

The crèche arrangements are good, and staff make sure your children are safe at the centre. They give high priority to ensuring all families feel included and make good progress. The centre has an exciting range of sessions and activities on offer. This means that you and your children enjoy your visits to the centre and value what the staff do.

The centre provides some good opportunities for you to undertake education and training courses, but it does not monitor your progress well enough. We have asked for this to be done so that more of you receive better support and encouragement to progress with your learning.

We met with some of you from the centre's parents' forum and we noted how active and involved you all are in supporting each other. The centre leaders provide strong and effective management and are supported well by the local authority and the advisory board.

We found that staff have a good understanding of your needs and are constantly striving to improve what they do. The number of mothers who choose to breastfeed their babies is low so we have asked the centre to work more closely with the health authority to improve this. We have also asked for health-related data to be used more accurately to plan other support services.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We enjoyed meeting you and wish you every success in the future.

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