

# Inspection report for The Chalfonts Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	384157
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25–26 July 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Wendy Ratcliff HMI

<b>Centre leader</b>	Brian Roohan
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	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.

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 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

The Chalfonts Children's Centre is a phase two centre. The centre was designated in 2007 and is one of the 21 centres in Buckinghamshire run directly by the local authority. The centre is based at Chalfont St Peter Youth Club. There has been some staff turbulence until recently. The centre coordinator had been in post for six weeks at the time of the inspection, and also manages the Ivers Children's Centre. There are two family support workers, one of whom works part time.

The advisory board contributes to the management of the centre and includes representatives from a number of community and statutory partners. The parent forum is being developed. The centre is open from 9.00am to 5.30pm, Monday to Thursday, and 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 Chalfont St Giles, Seer Green, Chalfont St Peter, Chalfont Common, Gold Hill and Austenwood. The area that the centre serves is predominantly affluent but has smaller pockets of deprivation. Some wards are ranked higher in terms of deprivation because geographical barriers create isolation within the community for some families. There are a total of 1,184 children aged

under five in the reach area. Around 15% of children, aged from birth to four years, are living in households dependent on workless benefits. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision are broadly at the level expected for their age with their communication, language and literacy skills being the weaker area. Around 96% of families are of White British heritage with small percentages of minority ethnic groups, including a Traveller community.

The children's centre offers a range of services for families and children under five years both at the centre and within community venues such as the library, health clinics, community centres and on the mobile play bus.

## 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

The children's centre has experienced significant turbulence in its staffing arrangements until recently and this has had an impact on its effectiveness overall. The centre has successfully registered 53% of families; however, it is not doing enough to reach the wider community, including those from their target groups and those who are considered to be in most need of support.

The leadership and management are inadequate because governance and accountability arrangements are not clear and understood. The centre receives some data from the local authority but these are not up to date. They do not include the full range of data from partners to enable the centre to prioritise and target its services for those families who would benefit the most. The local authority's commissioning team identified concerns about the centre's work at its quality assurance visit in the autumn of 2011, but has not undertaken further assessments to check the progress the centre has made. The advisory board has also experienced change over time. It is now starting to develop in its role and a new and enthusiastic chair is in place.

A newly-appointed staff team has quickly established a harmonious working relationship. The members show a strong commitment to improve. Together they have accurately identified the centre's strengths and the key priorities for

improvement. However, the centre's action plans do not include specific measurable targets, and systems to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the centre's work are under developed. Not enough time has passed for the new staff team to demonstrate the impact of recent changes. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve is inadequate.

For those families who engage with the centre it provides a safe, warm, welcoming and inclusive environment. Children and families who access the centre are respectful of one another. Parents reported positively about the activity sessions the centre provides. For example, the stay and play sessions are popular with families and well attended. Parents say that the range of well-planned activities help their children become more confident and provide an opportunity for them to make friends, preventing isolation.

During the inspection, community police officers attended the stay and play session, helping children and families to increase their understanding of road safety. Adults have some opportunities to evaluate sessions through questionnaires and an annual satisfaction survey. The parent forum is at an early stage of development, with a very few parents having recently attended their first meeting. At present, too few families are involved in decision-making at the centre.

A small minority of families benefit from the Holding Hands parenting programme as part of outreach sessions in their home. This programme is successful in helping parents to gain confidence in managing their children's behaviour in positive ways. However, not enough families from the wider community who are considered to be in most need of support are accessing services. The centre provides some information on job vacancies and finding childcare. There is little evidence of how services are helping families to improve their economic stability.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- The local authority should work with partners to ensure:
  - accurate and up-to-date information about the area served by the centre is accessible
  - governance and accountability arrangements enable all those responsible to work together to prioritise services so they reach target groups and those identified as in most need of intervention and support
  - the advisory board develops in its role, holding the centre to account for its services and providing more challenge.
- The centre should develop systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of its work by:
  - ensuring that action plans have sufficient detail and clear, measurable targets through which to demonstrate improvement in outcomes for users
  - devising ways of tracking the longer term impact of the centre's work

- using data on the area it serves to reach those families that would benefit from its services.
- Develop the parent forum to systematically engage families in shaping services and the governance of the centre.

## How good are outcomes for families?

4
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The centre is at a very early stage of demonstrating the impact of its work. Too few families from identified target groups are benefiting from services, such as disabled children and families living in areas of deprivation. There is a lack of involvement in decision-making by current users and the wider community. Some partnerships are still to be established and there are limited opportunities for families to develop their employability skills. Therefore, outcomes are inadequate overall.

Children behave well and parents say they feel safe at the centre. A small proportion of parents have undertaken first aid courses to help them gain the necessary skills in the event of their children having an accident. A very few families, who have been subject to a child protection plan or part of a Common Assessment Framework process, have received an appropriate level of support. Staff provide home safety packs to families during postnatal groups and help them to develop skills to keep their babies safe in the home as they become mobile.

The take-up rate of mothers whom fully breastfeed or partially breastfeed their babies at eight weeks increased in 2011, but remains below the local authority average. The centre supports families to develop an adequate awareness of leading healthy lifestyles. They enjoy activities that promote physical exercise such as Dinky Dancers. Parents say their children benefit from opportunities to try new and healthy snacks, for example a healthy eating champion from a local supermarket visits stay and play sessions with a range of fruit for the children to try. Parents feel able to share their views and evaluate sessions and have requested the introduction of a healthy snack more frequently. The recent satisfaction survey shows that 90% of parents feel comfortable at the centre and 70% of parents have made friends, helping to prevent isolation.

Parents appreciate the range of activity sessions that the centre provides, such as Singing Stars and the stay and play sessions. Sessions are planned well by staff and encourage parents to play and learn with their children. Opportunities to sing together and the use of signing are helping to develop children's language and communication skills. In 2011, 67% of children achieved good levels of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, which is an increase from 2010. However, the gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers increased to around 29% from 21% in 2011. The centre has begun working with local schools and early years providers to fully establish the impact its work is having on these scores. For example, a school in Chalfont St Giles has identified that children do not enjoy 'getting messy' when they start school. Staff are planning to work with the school to run sessions to encourage messy play and language and communication.

They are considering how they will track the impact on children's school readiness.

The centre signposts parents to family learning courses at other centres, such as cooking on a budget, and their achievements are celebrated. There are a few examples of staff signposting families to training, but they recognise not enough is being done to provide opportunities for parents to gain skills and qualifications that will help them on their journey back to, or into, employment. This is confirmed by the recent satisfaction survey, with 100% of responses stating parents have not started work or training as a result of attending the children's centre.

*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 lifestyles</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>3</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 new centre coordinator is leading the team to use the available data and develop local partnerships further in order to assess the needs of the community. He has rightly identified that, whilst 53% of families are registered with the centre, the current range of services is not meeting the needs of the wider community, including those in target groups and those whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. The centre's current data show that a very small minority of lone parents, children living in workless households and families from minority ethnic groups, including the Traveller community, are accessing services. During the inspection local partners referred to a number of families in the wider community who have disabled children. The centre was not aware of this and therefore is not doing enough to reach this group. The centre has a relationship that is developing well with local health partners so they can offer support to a few vulnerable families. However, the centre is not receiving the full range of health data, including information about new births in the area.

Families who are accessing services, including the small number benefiting from the tailored one-to-one home visits, appreciate the support they receive and talk about

the positive impact this has on their lives. Outreach work is slowly increasing with five families currently receiving this support. The centre is adequately supporting children's learning through activity sessions and these are based in different venues in the community, including the mobile play bus, and are beginning to engage some target groups. There is less of a focus for adult learning and development, although sessions at other centres, such as 'story sacks' are well received and individuals' achievements are celebrated.

The care, guidance and support that the centre offers are satisfactory because there is evidence that services are making a difference for some families. For example, parents report, 'There is great support. Me and the children love coming to the centre,' and, 'Staff are very approachable and I can ask for any advice.' Parents comment on the frequency of staff changes, but speak highly about the current family support workers and the commitment and enthusiasm they show, particularly when they require specific guidance and support.

*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>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>

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

**4**

The new centre coordinator and his team are passionate about taking the centre forward and securing improvements for children and their families across the area. The centre management team is now clear on the centre's strengths and significant weaknesses because its recent self-evaluation is reflective. It has begun to take steps to address these. However, not enough data are accessible and up to date to identify accurately where services need to be targeted. Leaders have made a positive start in setting actions to address weaknesses, such as raising the profile of the children's centre. However, targets do not consistently include clear and quantifiable measures in order to demonstrate when priorities have been achieved. Systems to evaluate the longer-term impact of the centre's work are underdeveloped.

Whilst the management of the centre ensures that it runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis, there is weakness in the governance and accountability arrangements. The advisory board is in the early stages of developing its effectiveness at challenging the centre and holding it to account. The last quality assurance visit undertaken by the local authority's commissioning team identified significant concerns about the centre. Following this visit, the centre management team drew up an action plan. It has yet to receive feedback on the appropriateness of this plan and this inspection has



identified significant ongoing weaknesses.

The centre is appropriately focused on safeguarding and takes the necessary steps to keep children safe, including effective recruitment practices to ensure staff are suitable. A detailed range of policies and procedures is in place. Child protection arrangements are effective, and there is some evidence of improvements for a very few families with children on child protection plans. Supervision arrangements are in place, including professional supervision for the Holding Hands programme with the educational psychologist. Staff undertake risk assessments for each activity session; however, they recognise these need further detail, particularly during school holidays when older siblings also attend activity sessions.

The centre promotes the inclusion of children and their families. It is working to develop community cohesion. It meets its duties and requirements. However, too few families from target groups are accessing services, including children with disabilities. The centre is unable to demonstrate its effectiveness in closing the achievement gap, therefore equality and diversity are inadequate. Although too few families are engaged in the governance of the centre, staff seek their views, for example children select happy or sad faces to indicate if they have enjoyed a particular activity. Therefore, user engagement is satisfactory.

The partnerships between key partners are increasingly clear and understood. Partnerships with health practitioners are strengthening. Health partners commented that they now feel more confident to make referrals for outreach support for individual families. Staff work well with other local centres, for example to support teenage parents at the 'tiny toes' sessions. Partnerships with early years providers are in their infancy, but underway, and the centre recognises they need to build on further partnerships across the area in order to provide integrated services. Staff use space available within the youth centre well and leaders are working with its landlord to improve signage. However, the services currently offered do not reflect the needs of families in the area and, as a result, value for money is inadequate.

*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</b>	<b>3</b>

<b>adults</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>3</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>3</b>

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

None.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected The Chalfonts Children's Centre on 25 and 26 July 2012. We judged the centre as inadequate 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 that staff at the centre are caring and welcoming and provide you with appropriate guidance and support, especially when you need specific advice. You told us how much you enjoy the stay and play sessions and how they provide opportunities for you to play and learn with your children. You recognised that the children's centre has experienced turbulence in its staffing arrangements. The inspection confirmed that the difficulties in staffing over time, including the leadership and management, have an impact on the centre's effectiveness overall.

The centre has successfully registered the majority of families and children in the area but it is not doing enough to reach the wider community, including those from their target groups and those who are considered to be in most need of support.

You told us about changes to leadership and management. We judged the leadership and management as inadequate because governance and accountability arrangements are not clear and understood, so we have asked the centre to make these more effective. The centre receives some data from the local authority, but these are not up to date. They do not include the full range of data from partners to help the centre prioritise and target its services for those families in the area who would benefit the most. We have asked the centre, the local authority and partners to work together to improve this. The local authority recognised there were some concerns about the centre's work at its quality assurance visit in the autumn of 2011,

but it has not undertaken a further assessment to check how well the centre is now doing. The advisory board has also experienced change over time and is now developing in its role. We recommend that it challenges leaders more to improve the centre's effectiveness. Whilst it was encouraging to hear that a few of you have met as a parent forum, too few families are currently engaged in decision making at the centre. We would encourage you to continue to meet and use your enthusiasm so more families can benefit from its services.

The new centre coordinator and his team have quickly established a positive working relationship. They show a strong commitment to improve. You told us how much you appreciate their support. They recognise what they do well and the key priorities for improvement. These priorities are set out in an action plan, and targets are in place. However, these targets are not easy to measure and systems to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the centre's work are under developed. Not enough time has passed for the new staff team to demonstrate the impact of recent changes. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve is inadequate.

For those of you who engage with the centre, it provides a warm, welcoming and inclusive environment. You are respectful of one another. You were positive about the activity sessions the centre provides. For example, the stay and play sessions are popular and well attended. You said that the range of well-planned activities helps your children become more confident and provides an opportunity for them to make friends. During the inspection, community police officers attended the stay and play session, helping you and your children to increase your understanding of road safety. Some of you have opportunities to evaluate sessions through questionnaires and an annual satisfaction survey.

A small minority of you benefit from the Holding Hands parenting programme as part of outreach sessions in your homes. This programme is successful in helping you gain confidence in managing your children's behaviour in positive ways. However, not enough families from the wider community who are considered to be in most need of support are accessing services, such as disabled children and families living in areas of deprivation. The centre provides you with some information on job vacancies and finding childcare. There is little evidence of how services are helping you to improve your economic stability.

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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).