

Inspection report for Wycombe East Children's Centre

Local authority	Buckinghamshire
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Reporting inspector	Wendy Ratcliff HMI

Centre leader	Liz Martin
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Ash Hill Pre-school – EY292339

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 senior children's centre coordinator, representatives of the local authority, members of staff, partner agencies, including a representative from health, members of the advisory board and the parent forum. They also held informal discussions with families using the centre services.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. This included the action plan produced by the local authority in relation to findings from the previous inadequate inspection, key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents and data about users of the centre.

Information about the centre

Wycombe East is a phase two children's centre. The centre was designated in 2007 and is run directly by the local authority. The local authority is part of the payment by results trial. The day-to-management of the centre is the responsibility of the centre coordinator and two full-time family support workers. The centre coordinator took up post in February 2012 and also manages the Hampden Way Children's Centre.

The advisory board contributes to the management of the centre and includes representatives from a number of community and statutory partners. There is a parent forum whose views inform the work of the advisory board. The centre is open from 9.00am to 5.30pm, Monday to Thursday, and from 9.00am to 5.00pm, each Friday, for 52 weeks of the year.

The centre serves one of the 40% most deprived areas nationally. The centre's reach covers the wards of Micklefield and Ryemead. Around 84% of families in the wider community are White British. There are smaller percentages of families from other minority ethnic groups, including Pakistani and Caribbean heritages. There is a

growing Eastern European community. There are 995 children under five years of age living in the reach area and around 28% of these children live in households dependent on workless benefits. The skills, knowledge and abilities of children on entry to early years provision are typically below the level expected for their age, with communication, language and literacy being the weakest area.

The children's centre is based in the grounds of Ash Hill Primary School and shares its building with Ash Hill 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 those seeking employment. The centre provides some services at community venues including Micklefield Library, Marsh School and the Polish Community Centre. The centre also runs services jointly with the Hampden Children's Centre.

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

Following the last inspection, the local authority produced an action plan that has been effective in bringing about improvements. As a result, Wycombe East Children's Centre now provides satisfactory support to children and families accessing its services, leading to satisfactory and improving outcomes for families.

The centre is warm and welcoming. Staff have a caring approach and have built high levels of trust with families. They are committed to helping families to improve their life chances. Relationships are positive and families feel well supported, particularly when they are experiencing difficulty. One parent reports, 'The family support worker has been great and supported my family through some difficult times.' Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Parents feel safe and say that the centre is a secure place to bring their children. Case studies show that family support work, such as the holding hands programme, is effective in helping families to develop strategies to manage their children's behaviour. There is evidence of improved outcomes for the few children subject to either child protection plans or Common Assessment Framework interventions.

The centre promotes the inclusion of children and their families soundly. Parents from different cultures say they feel welcome and included in activity sessions. They value opportunities to learn more about each other's cultures as they celebrate key festivals and cook healthy meals to share and enjoy together.

Self-evaluation is accurate and correctly identifies strengths and areas for development. The centre is at an early stage of demonstrating the full impact of its work. The current action plan includes seven key priorities for improvement, such as children's readiness for pre-school and nursery and increasing the number of children from workless household accessing services. However, planning for improvement does not identify precise outcomes and measureable targets by which staff and the advisory board can judge whether they have been successfully met. Leaders and managers have developed systems to enable better monitoring of the effectiveness of the centre's work. However, these are not yet consistently applied.

In the last 12 months the centre has increased the number of children registered from 49% to 58%. The centre is able to show that an increasing number of families from target groups are accessing services, including children from minority ethnic groups, children with disabilities and lone parents. However, the centre recognises these increases are small. The centre is becoming increasingly confident in using the data supplied by the local authority to plan services to meet the needs of families, although the absence of relevant data, such as health information, is hindering the centre in identifying the families who would benefit most from its services. The advisory board, whose governance role is developing well, has set challenging monthly targets for the centre to continue to increase the number of families from target groups engaging in services. Improvements made in recent months in engaging families from vulnerable groups and the commitment of both staff and advisory board members indicate the centre's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should work with partners, and in particular health services, to improve the range, quality and presentation of data in order to support the centre in its analysis of this information and its use to shape services that meet the needs of all target groups.
- Leaders and managers at all levels should embed the systems for monitoring and quality assuring the performance of the centre, ensuring targets are fully met within agreed timescales.
- The centre should continue to develop the system for monitoring and evaluating the impact of its work by:
 - ensuring that action plans have clear and measurable success criteria that identify the precise outcomes the centre aims to achieve and includes appropriate timescales for completion
 - devising ways of tracking the longer term impact of the centre's work

- using data on the area it serves more precisely to increase the identification and engagement of the number of families from target groups that would benefit from its services, particularly those most in need of support.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre is focused on improving the health, safety and well-being of families, and outcomes overall are satisfactory and improving.

Families are developing a satisfactory understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy. Staff plan sessions such as the Cooking Club and walks in the community to promote healthy eating and the importance of regular physical exercise. The percentage of Reception Year children living in the reach area who are obese has reduced to 9%, which is slightly above the local authority average but below the national average.

The Cuddles Club is successful in supporting families into parenthood, providing a range of advice, for example parents report an increased confidence in weaning. Breastfeeding is encouraged at the centre. Around 52% of babies in the area are partially or fully breastfed at six to eight weeks, which is just below the county average. Partnerships with health professionals are developing well and the postnatal group and baby massage sessions are supporting parents' emotional well-being positively and reducing the risk of isolation. One parent identified that she 'got to know my neighbour really well by attending the centre'.

The centre is a safe environment as appropriate attention is given to risk assessments and site security. Various activity and training sessions, such as first aid courses and a Sun Fun Day, raise children's and families' awareness of keeping themselves safe. Stimulating resources and activities on offer at drop-in sessions encourage children to play together, to share and take turns. Parents say that such sessions help them to understand how their children learn and prepare their children for a smooth transfer to pre-school. The percentage of children living in the area reaching a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage improved from 2010 to 2011. However, the gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers increased from 28% to 32%. The centre has begun working with early years providers and schools to identify where to focus activities and has placed appropriate emphasis on developing children's language and communication skills. For example, a teddy bears' picnic emphasised the importance of reading stories and singing nursery rhymes with children.

Parents make satisfactory progress in their education and personal development. Participation rates on family learning courses are increasing. For example, the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) play and language course is successful in giving families ideas about how to support their child's language development through fun activities. There is evidence to show that some families are

improving their confidence and economic stability. A very small number of teenage parents has been supported with a grant, enabling these parents to return to education. Staff have successfully supported a few families on low incomes, or experiencing redundancy, to receive a fuel allowance and how to cook meals on a budget.

Families are seen as important partners of the centre. Parents encourage their children to have a voice as they select a happy or sad face to share their feelings about activity sessions. Parents provide regular feedback about services and participate in the parent forum, which contributes to the governance of the centre. Parent forum members take forward views of other families and, as such, play a sound role in the centre's decision making.

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

Since the last inspection a review of provision has been undertaken to ensure that there is an appropriate range of services and activities at both the centre and other sites. Staff use their local knowledge and access some data about the reach area provided by the local authority in order to tailor services to match the needs of families. They have been successful in increasing the numbers of target families accessing services. However, data are not always up to date and do not include the full range of information, such as live birth data. The analyses of data are not used effectively enough to demonstrate the impact of the centre's work.

The care, guidance and support families receive are satisfactory. All parents who spoke to inspectors identified how positively the centre is helping them and their families to improve their lives. A recent satisfaction survey confirms this. Families who have been identified as in greatest need benefit from one-to-one work in their home and such intervention is having a positive outcome on family life. Effective

partnerships with the interpreter, health visitors, Parent As First Teachers (PAFT) worker and Relate ensure families access the correct support they require. Case studies demonstrate how the centre has supported families facing difficult issues, such as domestic violence, and how they have been empowered due to the centre's timely interventions. One parent told inspectors how the family support worker has helped her access support for her child with disabilities and what a difference this has made.

The provision in place to support learning and development is satisfactory and success is celebrated. Adults access courses, such as preparing for pre-school and parenting courses. The frequency of courses is increasing as staff work with partners to identify families' needs. For example, an entry level ESOL course is being run in September. Purposeful learning is promoted through popular drop-in sessions at Marsh School and the Polish community centre. Parents' knowledge of how children learn is developing well. Parents appreciate these sessions, for example one mum commented, 'As we live in a flat it's great to be able to get out and give my son the opportunity to play with new toys.' Another said, 'I have enjoyed the interaction with other parents.'

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	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre coordinator and staff are fully committed to supporting families to make positive changes in their lives. Day-to-day management arrangements are clear and activity sessions run smoothly. Staff undergo regular performance management and feel supported in their work. The local authority did not carry out its annual quality performance check following the last inspection as the action plan was in place and proving effective in helping the centre to bring about improvements. Leaders and managers at all levels carry out a range of monitoring and audits on the centre's work and identify where improvement is required. However, targets set are not consistently checked within an agreed timescale.

The recently appointed chair of the advisory board is driving the group forward. Representatives are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The advisory board is beginning to analyse available data and provide challenge during meetings about the centre's work. Staff are working to meet the ambitious monthly targets set by the

advisory board to increase the number of families from target groups in the wider community using the centre. However, the advisory board recognises that the information the centre receives from the local authority or key partners about the area does not help it fully extend its reach.

The centre is implementing new systems to demonstrate the impact of its work through the payments by results trial, including the 'family star' assessment tool. The centre recognises the need to measure longer-term impact and is working with the school to analyse the Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores to track the progress of children who have accessed centre services.

Staff take action to ensure children and families are safe. All staff are trained in child protection matters and demonstrate a clear understanding of their role and responsibility to ensure the safeguarding of children. The centre has effective systems in place to ensure all adults who work with the children are suitable to do so and enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosures are securely in place. Family support workers have worked effectively with a few families who have been subject to child protection plans.

The views of children and families are satisfactorily taken into account. The parent forum is developing well and is involved in shaping services, for example it is working with staff to develop a group for fathers.

The centre is making effective use of resources and provides satisfactory value for money. Volunteers help at activity sessions, for example during the inspection parents helped to organise and set up the teddy bears' picnic. Parents are supported to use available space to gain work experience. For example, a parent who is a hairdresser is using space at the centre next term to offer children's hairdressing at a low cost to families.

The centre promotes the inclusion of families soundly. Children with disabilities in the reach area and vulnerable two-year-olds receive support to access early years provision. In the last year, sixteen children have accessed early years provision and are now in receipt of government funded places for three- and four-year-olds. However, the centre recognises more needs to be done to narrow the achievement gap. The centre is working effectively with the interpreter to increase the number of Asian families accessing the centre, such as meeting with the imam at the local mosque to promote activities available at the centre.

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	3
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

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Wycombe East Children's Centre on 14 and 15 August 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Your children's centre was inspected twelve months ago and was found to be inadequate overall. Following the last inspection, the local authority produced an action plan that has been effective in bringing about improvements. As a result, the centre now provides satisfactory support to children and families accessing its services, leading to satisfactory, and improving, outcomes for families.

We enjoyed talking to you during activities. You were clear when making your views known about the centre. We agree with you that staff at the centre are caring and welcoming and provide you with an appropriate range of guidance and support. You told us how much you enjoy the different activity sessions that are helping your children to learn and develop. It was good to see so many of you enjoying healthy food at the teddy bears' picnic.

We could see that relationships are positive and you feel well supported, particularly when you are experiencing difficulty. One of you said, 'The family support worker has been great and supported my family through some difficult times.' Staff are trained in safeguarding children matters and ensure children are well protected. You told us that you feel safe and say that the centre is a secure place to bring your children. Case studies show that family support work, such as the holding hands programme, is effective in helping some of you to develop effective strategies to manage your children's behaviour positively.

The centre actively promotes the inclusion of children and families. You told us that families from different cultures get on well together and everyone feels welcome and included in activity sessions. You value opportunities to learn more about each other as you celebrate some festivals and cook healthy meals from different cultures.

The centre has an accurate self-evaluation and correctly identifies what it does well and where it needs to improve. The centre is at an early stage of demonstrating the impact of its work. The current action plan includes seven key priorities for improvement, such as improving your children's readiness for pre-school and nursery and increasing the number of children from workless household accessing services. We have asked staff to look at how they set targets for improvement as they do not identify the precise outcomes to be achieved and how they will measure their success.

In the last 12 months, the centre has increased the number of children registered at the centre from 49% to 58%. Staff are able to show that an increasing number of families from target groups are accessing services, including children from minority ethnic groups, children with disabilities and lone parents. However, they recognise that increases are small. The centre is becoming increasingly confident in using the data supplied by the local authority to plan services to better meet the needs of families. However, the absence of some data, such as health information, is hindering the centre in identifying families who would benefit most from its services. We have asked the local authority to work with partners to improve this and to look at how it presents information. It was good to hear that some of you are involved in the governance of the centre through the parent forum. You told us that data are not presented in a user-friendly format. We were pleased to see that the advisory board, whose role is embedding well, has set challenging monthly targets for the centre to continue to increase the number of families from target groups engaging in services. Improvements made in recent months in engaging families from vulnerable groups and the commitment of both staff and advisory board members indicate that the centre's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

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

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