

# Inspection report for Moorlands Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Milton Keynes
<b>Inspection number</b>	404493
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12–13 September 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Christine Field

<b>Centre leader</b>	Angus Forsythe
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Moorland Centre Nursery School (URN126565) inspected in May 2011 and Moorland Infant School (URN 110361) inspected in September 2011
<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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, other staff, a range of partners, volunteers, advisory board members, local authority representatives and parents. They also observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the self-evaluation form and service delivery plan.

## Information about the centre

The centre was designated in 2009 as a phase 2 centre and began to deliver services to meet its core purpose in February 2010. The centre serves the four main areas of Beanhill, Coffee Hall, Leadenhall and part of Oldbrook. Beanhill and Coffee Hall are identified as falling within the 10% most deprived areas in England. Some 29% of families in the reach area live in workless homes and 38% are in receipt of the childcare element of working tax credit. Educational attainment is well below the level seen nationally with nearly three quarters of post 16-year-olds without any qualifications at GCSE level or above.

There are 776 children aged from birth to four years living in the reach area. Most are from White British families with small numbers coming from a wide range of other ethnic backgrounds including Indian, Bangladeshi and African. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities when the children enter early education are typically much lower than the level expected for their age.

The centre is located in Beanhill and forms part of a facility that includes a community centre, nursery school and online centre. The day-to-day management of the centre is the responsibility of the centre manager and the team employed by Milton Keynes Council. Some aspects of service delivery in Oldbrook are shared with Pebbles Children's Centre which is subject to a separate inspection. The centre's work is overseen by an advisory board comprising representative partners and

parents. The local authority is the accountable body. The centre is open Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 5.30pm throughout the year.

## 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

The centre is effective in meeting the needs and improving the lives of an increasing number of families who use it, and outcomes are generally good or improving. The centre has made good progress over the last two years in reaching out to the heart of the community and engaging with the majority of families most in need of support. The comments of one mother are typical. ‘The first time I came I was a stay at home mum and very isolated on the estate. The centre gives me time out of the house and a break. It cheers me up and gives me something to look forward to.’

Activities, such as Messy Play, are well planned and enable the youngest children to learn and develop a range of skills successfully. Data show that children who have attended the centre achieve as well as their peers by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The community has a strong say in decision making and makes a good contribution that helps shape provision to respond well to their needs. For example, the volunteering programme is helping a high number of parents to build good self-confidence and aim high through the ‘can do’ culture promoted.

The centre works hard to help families live healthier lives and there are well-documented successes in the case studies inspectors looked at. Despite some positive health-related outcomes, obesity levels in young children are increasing and, at 12%, the proportion of obese five-year-olds is much higher than seen nationally.

Strong partnerships with the various agencies in the area enable the effective sharing of information and dovetailing of provision. This results in a secure safety net of support for children and families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used appropriately because of the trust and respect the centre has built over time. Staff know families and their individual circumstances well and tailor support accordingly. Outreach work, including home visits, is particularly effective in helping some families, for

example sufferers of domestic abuse, to live safer and more positive lives.

The centre works with a growing number of families facing debt or having difficulties managing their budget. Case studies show that interventions are enabling some to achieve better financial stability, but there are limited data concerning the impact of the centre's actions, for example in identifying how many families are being helped to get back into work and secure improved economic well-being. Target groups are represented in all activities but the proportion of lone parents and those from workless homes who have regular contact with the centre is lower than for other groups.

Leadership, management and governance are good. Self-evaluation processes are providing an accurate appraisal of the centre's effectiveness and enabling a sensible number of priorities to be pursued to build on its good track record. Partnerships are strong and service evaluations provide useful feedback which effectively helps shape provision and makes an important contribution to moving the centre forward. However, it is not always possible to pinpoint the value for money secured from the children centre's allocated resources as distinct from the community centre services. The centre has already identified the issues raised by this inspection in its action planning and as such has good capacity to continue to improve.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve value for money by precisely targeting resources so that more families use the centre, especially lone parents and those from workless homes, and regularly check the impact services are having on improving the employability and economic well-being of families with young children.
- Work with partners to increase the proportion of young children with healthy weights and reduce the level of obesity so that it meets, or falls below, the local authority average of 9%.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>2</b>
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Mini Strikers is well attended and engages children in good quality physical exercise. Activities such as Stay and Play involve a healthy snack which families are encouraged to help prepare. Parents identify that their children enjoy carrot sticks, sliced peppers, breadsticks and hummus, and are more willing to try new types of food than previously. Healthy diet and lifestyle are a strong focus of the Moorlands Women's Group who undertakes a weekly 'work out' followed by participants making a pledge about a healthy change they will take forward into the family's week ahead. The centre responds swiftly to priority health concerns, such as high levels of children's tooth decay and increasing mental health problems, with positive outcomes for families. Sustained breastfeeding levels are broadly average; the centre provides

peer support and a breastfeeding café to help improve the proportion of young mothers who breastfeed. The centre is clearly helping families who attend to live healthier lives, but outcomes are currently satisfactory rather than good as there is insufficient impact on reducing obesity levels in young children.

Families have well-placed trust in centre staff that is well reflected in the high level of self-referral for specific support. 'The staff are always there for you and are non-judgemental,' is a commonly held view. Families' often complex needs are robustly assessed and effectively supported through a range of measures, including the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) as appropriate. Structured parenting and nurturing programmes, together with well-targeted intervention work, have good impact on improving families' understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe. Consequently, there are significantly improved outcomes for most children who are subject to child protection plans or 'children in need'. Posters communicating that safeguarding is 'everybody's business' are visible in the centre's entrance and a number of parents have undertaken an accredited safeguarding course. The personal safety and emotional well-being of families are also strengthened by the regular input of Relate and a life coach.

Children make good progress towards the early learning goals from their relatively low starting points, especially those who need more intervention to help with their speech and language skills development. Children's comments are captured in learning journeys that chart their progress. 'I loved giving Doll a bath,' is a comment that typifies their sense of achievement. The centre has begun to follow up the longer-term achievements of children when they move on to school, and this is proving to be beneficial as shared areas for development are now being identified. At 62.1%, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development by the end of Early Years Foundation Stage is above average. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is reducing over time and is narrower than seen nationally. Adults gain a personal sense of achievement from undertaking courses such as the City and Guilds accredited volunteering course. Families, including those from most target groups, enjoy their contact with the centre and some attend activities regularly. As a result of parenting programmes, parents have improved their understanding of behaviour management and built positive parenting skills.

Parents are well represented on the advisory board and the parents' forum, known as Community Voices. They make a good contribution to centre decision making and have seen their views taken on board in new services provided, such as the coffee morning and Zumba class. Families use centre services to access advice on benefits, debt management and gaining employment opportunities and some have improved their financial stability. A small number have found subsequent employment, for example following the volunteering course. However, the number of parents with young children accessing training or other adult learning is relatively low, and economic and social well-being is therefore satisfactory overall.

*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>2</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>2</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>2</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>3</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre has worked hard to engage families from its two most severely disadvantaged communities and this has resulted in the majority of families having regular contact, although the participation of lone parents and families from workless homes is less positive than other target groups. Leaders are aware that more work is required to increase registrations from the rest of the reach area, but so far the activities undertaken have met with limited success. An action plan has usefully been established to guide the centre's next steps and things are moving in the right direction. For example, the strong and developing partnership with health services is resulting in information about new births now being shared and the centre's services being promoted during home visits.

Provision to help children learn and develop is good. Well-conceived activities make a positive difference to the lives of families, including those in most need, who are experiencing complex problems. Programmes that involve parents in taking control of their lives have good impact. For example, the nurturing programme is described by participants as, 'amazing', 'greatly enhanced my confidence,' and, 'helped me see that it's not just me having problems'. There is a strong focus in helping families build on their personal achievements. For example, the Continuing the Journey course is in place for those who participated in the nurturing programme and feel they need extra support. The recent introduction of the Book Start initiative has already involved a number of families choosing books to read together and is one example of the way in which the centre is trying to extend basic skills amongst the community.

Good quality care, guidance and support help families that use the centre to develop positive self-esteem, increase personal skills and improve family relationships. Children behave well in sessions such as Messy Play and replicate the good role

models set by the staff as they take turns and enjoy using paint to make footprints on paper. Parents also gain from such sessions as they develop an awareness of good play practice through the staff's skilful modelling. Good support for young parents, for example through baby massage, helps them build stronger bonds and grow in confidence as they enjoy getting to know their new baby. Good quality information about sexual health, drugs misuse and mental health problems assists families in knowing how and where to access services and they feel better equipped to deal with problems as a result.

*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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

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

**2**

Leadership and management are good, with accurate self-evaluation clearly focused on the right priorities to extend the centre's reach and build for even better effectiveness. The advisory board provides a balance of support and challenge which results in good governance. Members share a wealth of information about the community that is used to help shape services that meet local needs. Parents are very involved in the centre's life and development and identify strongly that it has been instrumental in bringing families together, forging positive community cohesion and a strong 'community spirit'.

Day-to-day management of the centre runs smoothly. Professional supervision is effective and results in staff feeling well supported and very willing to embrace the opportunities provided for their professional development. Partnerships are strong, especially with local schools, and these are having a positive impact on enabling young children to make good progress from their starting points. The expertise and experience of staff are well deployed to help meet families' typically complex needs. Careful planning by service providers results in well-integrated provision which is used well by a satisfactory range of families from across the reach area. However, providers' reviews, particularly those from commissioned services, are not always specific to families with young children and evaluations do not pinpoint what impact there has been on target groups. For example, there is very limited data concerning how effective services are in helping the high proportion of adults with young children from workless homes get back into work. For this reason, and despite good outcomes, value for money is judged as satisfactory rather than good.



Mutually respectful relationships are a feature of centre life and families highlight the inclusive nature of all activities and how well people from different backgrounds mix together. The centre is narrowing the achievement gap and improving life chances through the effective level of support provided and this is reflected in the increasing skills and personal development of those who use its services. The centre fulfils its statutory duties in relation to equalities.

Safeguarding is given high status and families say how safe and well protected they feel when they use the centre. Risk assessments are undertaken regularly, both within the centre and at outreach venues such as the community centre at Coffee Hall where Mini Strikers takes place. Staff are up to date with all required training and are responsive to specific local needs, such as the rising amount of domestic violence and alcohol abuse-related concerns. All appropriate Criminal Records Bureau vetting and recruitment checks are carried out. Staff are usefully involved in group supervision sessions to assist their good emotional well-being.

*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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</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>3</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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</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>2</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**

Findings from the linked schools' inspections shown on the front cover were taken into consideration.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected Moorlands Children's Centre on 12 and 13 September 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We looked at evaluations of the centre's work and a range of documents and very much enjoyed chatting to you during activities. Thank you for your contribution to the inspection.

Over the last two years the centre has been successful in encouraging families from Beanhill and Coffee Hall to use its services. Leaders are very clear about the way ahead and have identified the next step as increasing the involvement of families from Oldbrook and Leadenhall, as well as helping more lone parents and families from workless homes make contact.

You told us that the quality of activities is good and that you and your children enjoy experiences, such as Messy Play, because they are so well planned and involve doing lots of things you wouldn't otherwise do, such as finger painting and footprint pictures. You told us that Nurture Group has been really supportive in helping you manage your children's behaviour more positively and because the staff are always on hand with good advice. Children make good progress in their first steps to learning and adults are also helped to extend their skills, for example through the volunteering course.

You have a growing understanding about how to lead healthy lives through the centre's focus on healthy eating and the importance of regular exercise and because there are strong links with people such as health visitors, midwives and the speech and language therapists. However, more work is required because the number of children living in the area who are obese is rising and the overall percentage is well above the level seen elsewhere in Milton Keynes or nationally.

Strong partnerships with the various agencies that deliver services in the area result in a secure safety net of support for those of you who are most in need of help. Staff know what services will suit you best well and tailor their support accordingly. Outreach work, including home visits, is particularly effective in helping some of you, for example sufferers of domestic abuse, to live safer and more positive lives.

The centre works with a growing number of families facing debt or having difficulties managing their budget and this leads to some of you getting back on your feet. The centre is not able to show how well it helps those of you who are out of work to

enhance your employment prospects and get back into work and we have asked the staff to look more closely at this aspect of their work. We have also asked them to make sure that the impact and value for money secured from the children's centre allocated resources is measured separately from the community centre delivered services.

Families feel fully involved with the centre and many of you make an important contribution, such as by attending advisory board meetings or as Community Voice members. You told us that you are more than satisfied with the work of the centre, describing it as 'at the heart of the community'. There is a very clear understanding of what the centre's strengths and areas for development are and the staff at all levels are highly committed to continue to improve outcomes for all families in the community. We think the centre will continue to go from strength to strength and wish you all the best for a successful future.

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