

Inspection report for Wycombe Abbey Children's Centre

Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	384231
Inspection dates	31 October – 1 November 2012
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Centre leader	Debbie Hulme
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Chepping View Primary School: URN 1110321
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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the acting centre coordinator, children's centre operations manager, frontline staff, parents, a range of partners, and representatives from the parents' forum, advisory board and the local authority. They also observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the self-evaluation form and action plan.

Information about the centre

The centre was designated as a phase two centre in 2007 on the site of Chepping Valley primary school and has delivered a range of services to meet its core purpose since December 2009. It is managed by the local authority and serves the ward of Abbey in High Wycombe, which is amongst the top 40% most deprived wards in England. The centre is open Monday to Thursday 9.00am to 5.30pm and Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm all year except bank holidays.

There are 661 children under five-years-old living in the reach area, of which 23% live in workless households. Most families living within the reach area are from White British backgrounds with a significant minority from Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British ethnic groups. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities when they enter early years provision are typically below the level expected for their age.

The day-to-day management of the centre is the responsibility of the full-time centre coordinator employed by the county council. The coordinator also manages Castlefield Children's Centre, which is subject to a separate inspection. The coordinator is currently on long term leave and an acting coordinator has been covering the position since April 2012. An advisory board, comprising a range of partners, provides governance for the 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

The centre has registered the majority of families in its area and achieves reasonable participation rates in sessions of most target groups. The centre is currently working to extend its outreach work into the north of its area in order to engage with more families from minority ethnic backgrounds. Teenage parents are not yet as well represented as other target groups in the good range of activities the centre delivers. The centre is particularly effective in supporting families with children with disabilities. The Bubble Group for children with special needs is well attended and enables those who attend to make good progress in their learning and development.

Satisfactory provision leads to satisfactory outcomes with those families in touch with the centre, including the most vulnerable, who benefit from the centre's timely interventions. Safeguarding matters are given high priority and families are helped to lead healthier and safer lives. Most parents make a sound contribution to the life and development of the centre and the parents' forum plays an important role in helping shape centre services. However, its links with the advisory board and governance are not strong enough.

Children thoroughly enjoy centre activities, such as Happy House where they sing and action the words to familiar songs. A useful start has been made in tracking their achievement with the support of the co-located school. Data show that local outcomes are below the national average and work to develop children's communication, language and literacy skills is under way and bringing improvement. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is closing rapidly and at 25.7% is narrower than seen nationally. A few adults are signposted to services that help them access benefits or manage their finances more efficiently. Others take up further learning opportunities, but numbers are small. The centre has yet to promote the economic well-being of all users to a good level, including developing strong links with Jobcentre Plus, and this is an area for improvement.

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory. The acting coordinator has a clear grasp of the challenges and opportunities facing the centre. Family

support workers are doing a good job in their work with some of the families most in need of support. Partners speak warmly of the good quality relationships with the centre and are unanimous that the centre is moving forward. Parents hold positive views about the quality and impact of services. 'The centre has supported my family for three years, I don't know what I would do without them,' is a typical comment. The advisory board is beginning to inject constructive challenge as well as support in decision making, but would benefit from having a clearer strategic vision and an independent chair. Self-evaluation is accurate and although the action plan lacks measurable targets it is focusing on the right priorities. These features demonstrate the centre's satisfactory capacity to build for further improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Extend the number of families engaging with the centre and in particular families from ethnic minority backgrounds and teenage parents.
- Press ahead with locating appropriate services in the north of the reach area to better meet all local families' needs.
- Clarify the advisory board's strategic vision for the centre, appoint an independent chair and extend the involvement of parents in its governance.
- Sharpen the targets and timelines in action planning so that the pace of positive change quickens and the effectiveness of the centre's actions can be more precisely monitored.
- Strengthen the links with Jobcentre Plus and other organisations that can add value to the economic well-being of families.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre's provision results in satisfactory outcomes for the families who access its services. Groups such as 'Cook with kids' promote the value of good nutrition and one-off events such as the summer picnic and walk in Booker Park help families who participate to develop a satisfactory understanding of how to keep themselves healthy. Baby massage sessions give parents the confidence to be creative in the daily care of their child and help build stronger family bonds. The Big Toddle sponsored walk for young children is organised by the parents' forum annually and raises money for charity. At 7%, obesity levels in the area are below average and, at 56%, sustained breastfeeding rates are in line with the local average.

Most children behave in ways that are safe because staff model their expectations for this during sessions such as Stay and Play. Parents' awareness about safety matters is heightened by talks given by partners such as the co-located school on e-safety and by courses, for example on first aid run by St John's Ambulance staff. The centre distributes a range of home safety equipment to ensure families are effectively protected and has supported a few, for example those suffering from domestic violence, in taking positive steps to keep safe. The Common Assessment Framework

(CAF) and Team Around the Child (TAC) processes are used when required with multi-agency working ensuring effective support for families who are particularly vulnerable. There are currently no children subject to a child protection plan in contact with the centre but past case studies show that these children benefit from the centre's services and are kept safe.

Children make steady progress from their starting points, although a smaller proportion than seen nationally achieves a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre meets regularly with the ten pre-school settings in the reach area and has supported the delivery of learn and play sessions. The centre is working with the co-located school in delivering a shared family literacy day to bring further improvement. Good quality sessions, such as Baby Beeps, involve very young children in singing and signing the words to familiar rhymes and their confidence grows as they take full advantage of the opportunity to share the experience with their parents. One parent's view sums up the impact of the session, 'My daughter has learnt body parts such as nose and toes due to the songs we learn and sing at home too.' Good work with local schools helps children make a smooth transfer when they are ready for full-time education.

Some adults improve their parenting skills and learn how to manage children's behaviour positively through courses such as Holding Hands. A few have accessed English language courses held at the neighbouring centre, whilst others have improved their financial stability through debt counselling and the centre's support in seeking benefits for which they are eligible such as the fuel poverty allowance. Currently there are no volunteers working at the centre despite a few parents identifying their interest.

Parents make a positive contribution to shaping centre services through post-activity evaluations and their annual survey responses, which the centre takes on board. The parents' forum currently comprises six parents, but is looking to swell its number and re-shape its role. The forum has initiated a weekly 'tea and toast' session where ideas can be shared. Members of the forum are invited to advisory board meetings but do not always attend. Minutes from forum meetings are not being consistently presented at advisory board meetings and the centre has yet to find a way to make a stronger link between the parents' voice and governance.

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

Parents who attend the centre are very positive about the impact that services have in helping them improve the quality of family life. Home visits are well targeted to meet the needs of families most in need of support. The well-conceived programme of activities on offer is broadly meeting local needs, with all target groups involved in sessions on a regular basis. The proportion from teenage and minority ethnic families is not as high as other groups and the numbers attending some sessions fluctuate, which parents say is because parking near the centre is an increasing problem. The centre is rightly seeking alternative venues in the north of the area to make access to services easier for the families who live there. A church hall was being used until recently to extend outreach but this is being refurbished. A dads' group has recently got off the ground and plans are in hand to extend the type of activities provided, such as indoor football, in response to their on-going feedback.

Learning and development opportunities are satisfactory overall but currently more effective in promoting children's skills for the future than adults' skills. Children thoroughly enjoy activities, such as Happy House and Action Kids, which promote musical and physical development. Some sessions organised by the centre to develop children's learning lead to good outcomes. For example, the Bubble Group, facilitated by a family support worker in conjunction with the Portage service, helps children with special educational needs or disabilities to practise the skills they need to progress well with their individual milestones. Reasonable numbers of adults participate in parenting courses and sessions that extend life skills such as first aid and cookery classes, but only a very small number sign up to the courses available to extend their academic skills or employability.

The support for families using the centre is satisfactory with good features. Parents say they feel safe at the centre and are able to access good-quality advice from well-trained staff. Relationships are positive and based on mutual respect and, as a result, families readily turn to staff in times of personal crisis. The quality of information provided to parents is good, but there is a huge amount scattered around the centre on wall displays and in racks which would benefit from rationalisation. There are some lovely photographic books about successful events held, such as the bring and share food from your culture with Bollywood dancers, but these are tucked away in a corner and so the unique aspects of the centre's work are not being given a high enough profile.

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

Leadership and management are adequate. Professional supervision works well and links effectively to supporting staff professional development and centre needs. The acting coordinator and staff are a well-bonded team and together are working effectively to make improvement. They have an accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses and a realistic view of the changes required to ensure a good level of effectiveness. The current action plan is focused in the right areas, but there is a lack of precision in target setting and the timeline for actions is not tight enough. These features are barriers to a brisker pace of development and require attention.

Governance arrangements are clear. The advisory board comprises a good range of partners who are keen to support the centre and help move it forward. The role of the board is usefully being re-scoped; however, there remains a lack of clarity about its strategic responsibilities. Minutes show an increasing focus on the use of data and asking challenging questions about why things are as they are which ensure full accountability. However, there is currently no independent chair and the link with the parents' forum is not strong enough. The timings of meetings are not always best suited to parents who would like to attend, especially if there is no crèche available for their children.

Equality matters are given close attention and result in positive community cohesion. There is a strong appreciation of cultural difference with important times from different faiths such as Eid, Easter and Christmas celebrated during activities. Good support is provided for families with disabled children and those with special educational needs. The centre is working to enable more dads to access the centre and is pro-active in trying to extend outreach to engage with more families in the northern part of the area.

Safeguarding matters are given suitable priority and, as a consequence, families are helped to lead safer lives. Policies and procedures meet requirements and a single central register is maintained appropriately. Health and safety checks are regularly undertaken and risk assessment practice is thorough. Staff training in child protection matters, CAF processes and other aspects of safeguarding, such as first aid, is up-to-date, although the acting coordinator has yet to undertake planned safer recruitment

training.

Satisfactory partnerships with a range of providers, including commissioned services, underpin the satisfactory outcomes. The links with local schools and the pre-school setting are a positive feature, as reflected in the improving profile of achievement for young children in the reach area. Resources are used to provide a programme of suitably located services and staff deployment is efficient. In view of the satisfactory level of effectiveness and current satisfactory outcomes, the value for money provided by the centre is satisfactory.

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

The findings from the 2012 inspection report of the link school, Chepping View Primary School, informed this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Wycombe Abbey Children's Centre on 31 October and 1 November 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners, parents' forum, advisory board and local authority representatives linked to the centre. Thank you so much for sharing your views openly and honestly. We have taken all of them on board in reaching our judgements shared below.

The centre is led by a committed coordinator and staff team who work hard to do the best they can for local families. They know the centre's strengths and weaknesses and this means they know what needs to be done to improve things. The action plan in place to drive improvement contains the right priorities, but not all targets are sufficiently precise and some timescales are too long. These features make it difficult to measure the impact of the centre's work and also to get a move on with making things better. We have asked the coordinator to sharpen up this aspect of the centre's work.

The advisory board comprises a good range of partners who are keen to support the centre and help move it forward; however, not many parents get involved with its work for various reasons. We can see from your evaluations that you come up with some good ideas and that the centre responds to these positively, for example by having a cake sale to raise money for charity. It is good to see that the parents' forum is active in its work and is holding the Friday 'tea and toast' session to be able to share ideas. We know the forum is keen to widen its membership and we have asked the centre to support this and to see how the links with the advisory board can be strengthened, and to make sure the board has an independent chair.

The centre has successfully registered the majority of families in the local area and those of you who attend sessions regularly told us how much you enjoy them. 'The centre has supported my family for three years, I don't know what I would do without them,' is a typical comment. Most groups living locally get involved in centre activities, but the number of teenage parents using the centre is relatively low and some Asian families living in the north of the area find accessing the centre difficult and car parking a problem. We have asked the centre to extend its outreach work and increase the level of participation – if you know anyone who would benefit from visiting the centre please tell the staff.

Safeguarding matters are given high priority and you told us that when you attend sessions you are always welcomed and feel well protected because of the staff's sensitive support. It was lovely seeing so many mums and their babies having so much fun at the Baby Beeps session as they played parachute games, saying hello to 'scatty cat', touched toes and noses as you sang the words to various rhymes and moved to the music. Your children thoroughly enjoy centre activities such as Happy House and Action Kids, both of which encourage their musical and physical development. Sadly, we could not see the Bubble Group as it took place earlier in the

week, but we read the files and looked at the children's work and records and could clearly see what a good impact these sessions have on the children's learning and development. It was helpful to find out that the centre has made a start in tracking children's achievement with the support of the co-located school. This is helping staff to build in extra time for ensuring your children get the best start in life, for example by encouraging their language development.

A few parents access services that help them secure the benefits they are eligible for or get help with managing their finances more efficiently. Some take up further education opportunities such as learning English as an additional language, but numbers are small. The centre has strong partnerships with a number of professionals in the field to assist your health, safety, educational and personal achievement and contribution to the centre's life and development. However, the links with Jobcentre Plus are not well forged and this limits the centre's ability to fully support your economic well-being.

Thank you once again for all your contributions and best wishes for a happy and successful future.

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