

# Inspection report for Bullion Lane Children's Centre

---

Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	367767
Inspection dates	24 - 25 October 2012
Reporting inspector	Daniel Grant

Centre leader	Chris Peverall
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Gray Avenue Chester-le-Street Durham DH2 2EL
Telephone number	03000 261511
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	Chris.peverall@connexions.durham.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY312551 Buttercup Nursery

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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080).

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



No.100080

© Crown copyright 2012

## 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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with parents and representatives from the local authority.

The inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Bullion Lane Children's Centre is a phase one centre which opened in September 2005 and fulfils the core purpose in its services. It is managed by the local authority and based on the same site as Buttercups Nursery. The majority of children live in areas within the 30% to 70% most deprived in the country, with pockets of greater deprivation. It provides services from the main centre and through seven other locations within the local area.

A total of 1557 children under five live within the area. The number of children attending school who are known to be eligible for free school meals is high. Approximately 21% of the children in the area are living in households dependent on workless benefits. A very large majority of families within the area served by the centre are of White British heritage. Most children typically enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities below those expected for their age.

The local authority and its health partners recently completed a major restructure of the delivery of services to children and families. The centre is now part of an integrated hub-and-spoke model.

The centre provides a wide range of supporting services, incorporating outreach and home visiting, health clinics and support, parenting courses, volunteering opportunities and workshops. Governance of the centre is overseen by an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and parents. The centre

manager has responsibility for one other children’s centre and a team of staff including five family support workers and four health visitors. In addition to working at the centre, the centre manager and her team have other responsibilities for delivering public services within the area.

## 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 overall effectiveness of Bullion Lane Children’s Centre in meeting the needs of users and in demonstrating the capacity for sustained improvement is inadequate. Leadership and management are failing to secure improvements to the provision. Although the centre’s self-evaluation has accurately identified some of its weaknesses, this has not sufficiently improved provision or outcomes for families. The local authority does not provide sufficient staff to deliver services or manage the centre. Monitoring and quality assurance procedures do not provide enough challenge or rigour. Systems to help the centre work with partners are not fully developed. The centre does not know its local communities well enough to have an accurate understanding of their needs.

The centre is not effective in targeting and promoting its provision to those families and groups most in need of early intervention and support. The number of families engaged with the centre’s activities is low and outreach work is limited. Partnerships lack impact because services are poorly integrated and do not lead to sufficiently improved outcomes for families. Care, guidance and support do not focus sufficiently on the children and families in target groups. Promotion of equality and diversity is ineffective.

Safeguarding arrangements are also ineffective. The local authority provides clear policies, written procedures and adequate training for safeguarding, and family workers have good awareness of how to keep families safe. However, these are not always used appropriately because protocols for the exchange of information about families with children subject to a child protection plan and those facing the challenges of disability are lacking. Local authority and health staff share office space but services are not sufficiently integrated to improve

outcomes for families. Supervision of senior staff is not regular enough or sufficiently thorough to ensure families facing the greatest challenges are safe and adequately protected.

Obesity rates are in line with national averages but breastfeeding rates are very low. Health outcomes are not good enough because leaders do not sufficiently analyse management information related to outcomes such as low birth weight, dental decay and immunisation in order to set measurable targets for improvement. The number of children making sufficient progress in developing their skills, knowledge and abilities is low. The centre does not have sufficient methods in place to measure the progress of adults and children, so it is unaware of the value of its contribution.

There is no coherent strategy to establish effective arrangements to support adults seeking to improve their education and job prospects. Although some benefit from the provision, there are no tracking arrangements in place to monitor their progress.

The centre does not regularly seek the views of users in order to develop the provision. Parents told inspectors they were unaware of the centre's processes to influence decision making and that leaders do not listen to them. The advisory board does not have an independent chairperson or a parents' forum. Consequently, families are not sufficiently involved in decision making about shaping the centre's services. Resources are not deployed effectively and efficiently to meet families' needs and are having little impact on improving outcomes.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Increase the effectiveness of development plans and decision-making processes by setting specific and measurable targets, establishing a parents' forum, appointing an independent chair for the advisory board and encouraging more parents and key partners to become active board members.
- Increase registration and user participation through better promotion of the centre's provision, extending outreach work, and by more precise identification and targeting of those most in need.
- Improve outcomes for families by ensuring staff receive regular and frequent supervision, and by establishing clear and effective strategies with key partners which better integrate the delivery of services.
- Improve the assessment of adults' and children's knowledge, skills and abilities so that the centre has an accurate view of how well they achieve and can adjust provision accordingly.
- The local authority should support the centre to improve by:

- providing high-quality data and supporting a thorough assessment of the needs of the local population
- ensuring adequate staffing arrangements both to manage and deliver services
- increasing the rigour, challenge and frequency of the monitoring, quality assurance and quality improvement arrangements for the centre
- establishing clear protocols with health visitors and other partners to ensure the centre receives full details of families with disabled children and those subject to child protection plans.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>4</b>
----------

The centre does not improve health outcomes for the majority of families, particularly those with greatest needs. Those who do attend enjoy the activities and value the support they receive from the staff, but too few families use the centre's services. The number of mothers who choose to breastfeed is very low. However, the continuation rate is higher than the county average and is increasing. The obesity rate is slightly lower than the national average. The centre does not receive sufficient data about local health matters. Families do not benefit from the centre's outdoor play area because it is not fully developed and only occasionally used. The centre offers an adequate range of information relating to healthy diet, exercise and immunisation but it is not clear how many people use this information. There is a very narrow range of services directly available from the centre itself but a small minority of families do attend workshops in linked venues. Too few families are encouraged to make a positive contribution towards decision making at the centre.

Staff have an adequate understanding of procedures for keeping families safe but they do not work effectively enough with key partners to ensure support is sufficiently well targeted for families who need it most. Parents and children who met with inspectors feel safe at the centre and a few families benefit from structured parenting programmes. One parent told inspectors, 'As my daughter gets older her needs change and I have to learn about how to meet those needs. The family workers are brilliant; they help me to do this.' Behaviour is satisfactory. Staff work effectively with partner organisations to use the Common Assessment Framework, but the centre does not routinely receive information about children who are subject to a child protection plan or disabled children. The centre does not receive data relating to accident rates or emergency hospital admissions.

The number of children in the area who make sufficient progress developing skills, knowledge and abilities is improving slowly but remains significantly below the national average. Children and adults cannot enjoy a full range of experiences because staffing is too stretched to provide more. The gap between the lowest-achieving 20% and the rest is narrowing slightly, but there is little evidence to suggest that the centre is making a positive contribution to this improvement. The centre does not have a sufficiently effective approach to setting targets for, or monitoring the progress of, families. Adult education and support for those seeking training or paid work are underdeveloped so too few adults develop adequate skills, economic stability and independence.

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</b>	<b>4</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>4</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</b>	<b>4</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</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</b>	<b>4</b>

## How good is the provision?

<b>4</b>
----------

The range of services, activities and opportunities does not meet the needs of families, including those in target groups. The centre does not have a sufficiently clear understanding of the local population to help it plan provision to meet its needs. For example, the centre is unaware of the number of disabled children who live in the area.

The children's centre has ineffective partnership arrangements with health visitors, Jobcentre Plus and adult learning providers. Services are not integrated sufficiently to improve outcomes for families. Family workers are skilled and experienced, and their work with a few families is very effective. However, two of the four family worker posts are vacant and the local authority has no immediate plans to recruit new staff. Current staffing levels limit the centre's capacity to increase the volume and quality of its work.

Outreach services have too little impact. Individual needs are not recognised because key partners do not routinely share important information with the centre. Care, guidance and support are at unacceptable levels because not enough families benefit and target groups are not sufficiently prioritised. One parent told inspectors, 'Most people in the area do not use the centre because they do not know what is on offer.' The centre does have a satisfactory range of information displayed but it is not clear how this information is used.

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>4</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.</b>	<b>4</b>

## How effective are the leadership and management?

4

Governance and accountability arrangements suffer because centre resources are spread too thinly. The centre manager has wide-ranging responsibilities for other services and is also the chairperson for the advisory board until an independent chairperson is appointed. Insufficient time and resources are used to manage and improve the centre, such as supervising key members of staff, analysing data, targeting priority groups and developing the outdoor play area. There is insufficient management capacity to build or maintain key partnerships, clarify protocols, develop an effective outreach service and focus on ensuring that the needs of the local population are thoroughly understood. However, the staff have made the centre attractive and welcoming.

The centre does not provide value for money because too few people benefit from the services it offers and managers have not made sure outcomes for families improve. Partnership arrangements with key organisations such as schools, health visitors, other local authority departments, Jobcentre Plus and providers of adult learning are not sufficiently integrated and do not lead to improved outcomes for the majority of families. Users and partners are not sufficiently involved in evaluating and developing the provision. Currently, there is no parents' forum and too few parents and key partners play an active role on the advisory board. Several parents told inspectors, 'The centre does not listen to our views; they moved our group to an office that is not child-friendly. We now have to catch a bus to get there.'

Self-evaluation does not lead to improvement. The local authority does not provide sufficient management information and data, and there is no useful analysis to help the centre begin to understand the needs of the local population. The local authority does not have effective arrangements to improve the quality of the centre's work because there is insufficient critical challenge or rigorous assessment of the impact of the centre's work. Registrations and user participation are not good enough. Only a minority of local families use the centre and arrangements for encouraging more families to register and become involved, including those with the greatest needs, are underdeveloped. Staff supervision, performance and annual appraisal are not sufficiently well matched to the development targets for the centre.

Although the centre fulfils its statutory duties, it does not have relevant insight into the needs of different groups of users to ensure that it pays effective attention to the promotion of equality and diversity. Neither does it actively promote the engagement of some target groups, such as teenage parents, those from minority ethnic groups and families with disabled children. The centre does not measure its impact on community cohesion.

Safeguarding is not given a sufficiently high priority and families are, therefore, not adequately safeguarded. The centre does not focus sufficiently on identifying and meeting the needs of vulnerable groups. The monitoring and supervision of senior staff are inadequate and so outcomes for the majority of families are not improved. Systems for recording information related to the vetting and recruitment of staff are



effective. Security arrangements, such as a record of visitors to the centre, are adequate and protect users in the building. Guidelines and procedures are effective and staff have undertaken appropriate training for their roles.

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 secures 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 adults</b>	<b>4</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>4</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>4</b>

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

The judgements from the most recent inspection of Buttercups Nursery were taken into account in this report.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

### **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Bullion Lane Children's Centre on 24 and 25 October 2012. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

Those of you who attend the centre for appointments with the family support workers receive valuable support because the staff make sure your needs are met. You told us how effectively the sessions were run and how you enjoyed and benefited from learning new ways of feeding your children and promoting their development.

The centre offers you valuable opportunities to enjoy time with your children and you receive practical advice that you appreciate. However, not enough families are registered with the centre. The centre has not established itself thoroughly enough in your community. The local authority has not done enough to help the centre improve. The centre does not promote itself well enough or encourage more people to register and use it. We have asked the managers to make sure more families benefit from the centre, especially those facing the greatest challenges.

The centre does not work effectively enough with other organisations such as the health service to make sure services for all families are effective. We have asked the centre to improve partnerships by sharing more information with each other and agreeing how things can be improved.

You told us that you feel safe at the centre and we found that the centre has clear procedures in place to make sure the activities and the building remain safe for you. The outreach service has helped a few parents with difficult issues and this has been done well. We found that, although the centre has all the appropriate policies in place and is keen to include everyone, it is not actively seeking the families who most need support. We have asked managers to provide staff with more supervision to help the centre improve.

The centre is not providing enough opportunities to involve partner agencies or families in making decisions about the way it is run. Many parents do not know that the centre has an

advisory board. We have asked the manager not to act as the chair for the advisory board but to find someone else to do it who is independent.

There are no formal groups such as a parents' forum for you to join. We have asked the centre to improve this so that you are given more opportunities to 'have your say'. The centre is not yet working effectively enough to support those of you who are interested in seeking paid work or who wish to attend training or education.

The staff have good experience and are dedicated to making sure families benefit from the centre's services. However, because of the staff shortages there is not enough care, guidance and support available for families. We have asked the local authority to make sure that there are enough staff so that families in most need are identified and offered support.

The local authority and the centre staff want to improve the work of the centre but, currently, we are not confident that it will be able to do so. We have recommended that the local authority monitors all aspects of the work of the centre more closely and provides data and resources to help the centre reach realistic targets for improvement. We have also asked the local authority to share more information with the centre and to encourage better links with other partners.

We would like to say a special 'thank you' to those of you who took the time to come in and talk to us and for helping with our inspection. We wish you all the best for the future.

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