

# Inspection report for Beacon Children's Centre P3-1

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<b>Local authority</b>	Thurrock
<b>Inspection number</b>	407190
<b>Inspection dates</b>	21–22 November 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Susan Walsh

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

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

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

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers, the outreach worker, health professionals; and representatives of the local authority and the chairperson of the advisory board who is also the head of a local primary school. They observed the centre's work, looked at a range of relevant documentation and spoke with parents and users of the centre.

## Information about the centre

Beacon Children's Centre is a local authority run centre situated within a two-storey community centre which is managed by All Saints Church group. It was designated as a phase three centre in 2009. The Beacon Children's Centre serves the central locality of the local authority and is based in Chafford Hundred and covers the wards of Chafford and North Stifford, South Chafford and Stifford Clays. This reach area has arisen from the merger of a number of smaller centres. The children's centre now serves 1,779 children aged under five years, of whom 1336 (75%) are registered with the centre.

The children's centre is situated in the heart of a new community with good access to childcare providers, a range of schools, and local amenities and shops. The Chafford Hundred area has seen a large growth in population since its inception, with many city workers living there due to the relatively easy commute into central London. Therefore the number of children in the area is rapidly rising and this is reflected in the expansion of local primary schools. The centre does not provide any childcare.

Beacon Children's Centre's reach area is predominately affluent but there are pockets of economic and social disadvantage in areas such as Stifford Clays. Around 13% of children live in workless households that are dependent on benefits. At ward level, the proportions of children living in poverty are relatively low, ranging from 8.2% to

18.9%. Families are mainly from White British backgrounds although a small number of families come from a very wide range of other ethnic heritages. Children in the centre's reach area enter early years education with skills, knowledge and abilities that are in line with those expected for their age.

The centre is managed as part of a locality model. The centre shares its advisory board and most of its staff with Thameside Children's Centre, the other centre in the locality. Thameside is subject to a separate inspection. At present, the local authority has ultimate responsibility for the children's centre but the service is currently out for tender. Its future will be decided soon and by April 2013 it will no longer be managed in the same way as Thameside Children's Centre. The locality manager is currently absent. Since September 2012 this role, which also involves being the named manager for this centre, has been assumed by the senior locality manager.

## 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**

<b>3</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

**The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management**

<b>3</b>
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## Main findings

The effectiveness of the centre in meeting the needs of its wider community is satisfactory. Parents who use the centre say that staff are friendly and approachable and listen carefully to their views. The centre offers a range of suitable activities such as the 'Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it!' (MEND) programme and 'Life Behind the Buggy'. Parents enjoy these activities and they help them strengthen their understanding of how to keep their children healthy and safe and recognise how children learn through play. However, the majority of activities and sessions have to be pre-booked and cater for relatively small numbers of families and there are often waiting lists. The centre lacks activities where families can just 'drop in' and managers have not yet considered other venues in the locality which may have larger rooms that would be more suitable for this type of activity.

Some services, such as the parenting courses and the parent café, support the emotional well-being of both parents and children because they help parents manage their children's behaviour successfully and address issues of social isolation. Currently there is no set routine to establish first contact with all families in the reach area and

to robustly identify families in target groups including those whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable. As a result, despite some good work to support families whose children have special educational needs or long term health issues, the centre's contribution to promoting equal opportunities is satisfactory rather than good.

Relationships with partner agencies are generally good, although not all are yet fully involved in planning or evaluating provision. A range of health promoting services is offered in the building and these are very much appreciated by parents and help them lead healthier lives. However the centre's work with partners to provide opportunities for adults to improve their learning and skills is not yet sufficient. Additionally the achievement of adults is not being adequately monitored. Despite offering a range of activities that effectively promote children's learning and development, outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are inconsistent and there is no clear pattern of improvement. The centre has not yet fully developed partnerships with schools and other early years settings which focus on improving children's learning and promoting school readiness.

The centre had stopped moving forward but timely and effective action by the local authority has strengthened leadership and management and the rate of improvement is now accelerating. Since the arrival of the new management many important improvements have been made. For example, the attention paid to policies and procedures now ensures that safeguarding requirements are consistently met and which it is essential are sustained in order to overcome the shortcomings of the shared building. Although record keeping is improving there is still work to do to make sure that documentation relating to staff training and case files is always well organised and useful. The well led advisory board provides valuable support while keeping a strong focus on accountability. However, the local authority has not yet given sufficient consideration to the arrangements for establishing a new advisory board when the centre's management changes in April 2013.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The centre is increasingly aware of its own strengths and weaknesses and which groups it should be reaching. There is evidence of good quality outreach work having a positive impact on a small number of families but the supervision of case files is not sufficiently robust. Nevertheless, the centre is now moving forward. For example, enhanced data analysis is helping to shape provision. Although more work remains to maximise its use to inform improvement planning and to carefully measure the impact of the centre's work, staff are receiving training about the use of data and have started to improve their skills. Therefore the centre's capacity to improve further is satisfactory.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Increase the number of families that register with the centre and the proportion that regularly attend activities by:
  - developing clear methods for making first and successive contact with families
  - developing rigorous ways of recognising families from target groups and identifying those whose circumstances make them vulnerable
  - providing a greater range of activities that do not have to be pre-booked and exploring the use of alternative accommodation in the local community.
  
- Strengthen the way that partnerships contribute to the quality of provision and the learning and development of adults and children by:
  - developing links with local primary schools and private and voluntary settings that focus on school readiness and children’s learning and development
  - working with providers of adult education to make sure that the achievements of adults are carefully measured
  - improving the involvement of partners in the planning of developments and the evaluation of the centre’s work.
  
- Improve the impact of leadership and management on outcomes for families by:
  - enhancing the organisation and analysis of data and making better use of it to inform development planning and to measure the impact of activities
  - ensuring that improvements to safeguarding procedures are sustained in relation to issues concerning the shared use of the premises
  - improving the accuracy of record keeping including keeping better records of staff training and strengthening the supervision of case files
  - working with the local authority to develop an independent advisory board that will provide strong governance from April 2013.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>3</b>
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Previous data suggests that rates for sustaining breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks fall as low as 19% in some of the wards served by the centre. Staff are working effectively with partners to bring about improvement in this area. For example, there is a well attended ‘Yummy Mummy’ breastfeeding support group run by ‘Community Mums and Dads.’ Additionally the centre has developed a private space for those mothers who do not wish to feed their babies in the cafe area. Obesity rates at the end of the Reception Year are above those seen nationally. The centre is working to tackle this by hosting courses such as ‘MEND’ which are praised by parents because they provide opportunities for children to exercise and have fun while expanding parents’ understanding of important issues such as portion control. The centre recognised that early tooth decay was an issue in the area and has worked with oral health practitioners to help parents to learn how to brush their children’s teeth properly. Adults are successfully supported towards better emotional and mental health through the availability of counselling services and the work of the parental outreach workers. Parents say, ‘I know support is there if needed which is very

reassuring.'

Many parents in the area do not live close to other family relations and are sometimes relatively isolated after the birth of new babies. Parents describe the centre as a nice place to be where they have made loads of friends. They appreciate that it has had a positive impact on their emotional well-being and are particularly pleased with the parenting courses because they help parents to manage their children's behaviour more effectively.

There is a satisfactory emphasis on helping children and parents to be aware of how to keep themselves and their families safe. Very few children who live in the area are subject to child protection plans or are looked after by the local authority, but, when necessary, staff have appropriate involvement with families who are facing challenging circumstances. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) procedure is used appropriately to identify the levels of support that are needed and to share important information between agencies. However the completion of the form and the process of review by the multi-agency group can be a fairly slow procedure which the local authority is working to improve. The behaviour of the children in centre activities is good and relationships between parents and staff are cordial.

The proportion of children in the area who go on to reach a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage varies significantly between local schools. In some schools, outcomes have improved considerably and are above average but in others outcomes have recently declined and are below average. This level of variability is especially true for children's personal, social and emotional development and their level of skills in communication, language and literacy. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest has closed in some local schools but widened in others. Support received from the speech therapy service at a neighbouring children's centre and several activities run in this centre have a positive impact on children's language development. The quality of crèche provision is improving and an increasing focus on helping parents to understand how their children learn through play is helping to boost children's development. The centre responds appropriately to parents' feedback and through their participation in governance they contribute to centre decision-making.

The activities on offer in the centre help children to build skills for the future and develop their knowledge and understanding as they investigate the activities that are available to them. Many parents in the area are well educated and economically stable although this is not true for all. The 'Wishes' programme is helping some parents who might want to change their career, and advice on issues such as debt is available during the regular sessions provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau. Opportunities for family learning and improving literacy skills are offered locally but the centre cannot be sure who is attending these courses or how they progress.

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>3</b>
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<b>lifestyles</b>	
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>3</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>3</b>
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Although 75% of parents have registered with the centre, fewer families make full use of the services. The centre has done little to try to contact the 25% who are not registered and to encourage more local families to use its services. Additionally the centre lacks a coherent system for making early contact with families and identifying those whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable. The centre has considered the needs of the different target groups and has developed aspects of provision such as the 'Parents' Café' to overcome the barriers faced by socially isolated families. However it cannot be totally sure that it reaches all the families who are in most need of its services. In many ways the growth of the centre is restricted by the limitations of the building which it shares with the church. Rooms are small and activities are oversubscribed but the centre has not fully explored using other facilities in the local area to widen engagement and further increase participation rates.

Activities at the centre are generally of good quality and effectively provide purposeful learning and promote better health outcomes for families. The centre is currently developing systems to improve the tracking of children's progress but has not yet fully considered how it can monitor the achievements of adults. The planning of crèche sessions has improved and is closely linked to the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However the centre has not worked closely enough with local primary schools to enhance children's school readiness and their learning and development, or to specifically address the wide variations in outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage within the local area.

The quality of care, guidance and support is satisfactory. When families whose circumstances make them vulnerable are identified they receive suitable tailor-made support from skilled parent outreach workers. There is good evidence of the centre providing effective outreach support that has a positive impact on some families' lives across target groups. The centre has suitable links with social services that help keep children safe. The centre ensures that suitable written information about how to keep children healthy and safe is freely available to parents in addition to advice



about stopping smoking.

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

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

<b>3</b>
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The local authority clearly holds the centre to account. It was aware that the impact of the centre's services on local families was not being maximised. Effective and timely action has been taken and the centre is now starting to move forward once again. However there is still some way to go to ensure that data is always used effectively to inform planning and to measure the impact of services on local families' well-being. The managers are aware of the centre's strengths and weaknesses and the advisory board asks important questions about the quality of provision and the effect it has on outcomes for families. Partnerships result in suitably coordinated provision, for example in the CAF process. However, not all partners are sufficiently involved in evaluating the impact of the centre's work and planning future improvements.

New leaders and the local authority are strongly motivated to build for good effectiveness. The welfare of staff is important to managers, and staff have plentiful opportunities to talk about their work and receive appropriate supervision. However case files are not always rigorously examined, and therefore the centre cannot always be sure of the impact of support for families. Although the current advisory board provides suitable governance, and includes active parental representation, not enough thought has been given to the future when one advisory board will be expected to serve the interests of two independent centres with very different management structures.

Safeguarding is seen as important. The suitability of staff is carefully checked and staff undertake appropriate training. Staff are sensitive to child protection issues, particularly those relating specifically to domestic violence. Action has been taken to improve many aspects of safeguarding, including developing clearer guidelines on the use of mobile telephones, improving security in the centre and working more closely with the church to ensure that any potential risks to children and their families are quickly identified and addressed. It is essential that these new ways of working are sustained in a building that has shared usage.

The centre satisfactorily promotes equality and diversity. All families are made welcome irrespective of their background and there is specific support available for

families for whom English may not be their first language. As a result, the centre reaches a higher proportion of families from minority ethnic groups than other target groups. Disabled children, and those with special educational needs, and their families are supported effectively, including by staff from the local Sunshine Centre. The parental support workers also ensure that parents with additional needs are able to access help when needed.

The centre sometimes struggles to overcome the difficulties of shared accommodation and the different priorities of the church and the centre. It tries to make the best use of a building where the surroundings can seem stark by using attractive mobile displays, including strings of cheerful flags from different countries. Resources are allocated and managed sensibly which, together with the satisfactory outcomes achieved, demonstrate that the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>3</b>

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

Not applicable

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

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Beacon Children's Centre P3-1 on 21 and 22 November 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank all the families who spoke to us when we visited the centre. We were pleased to hear that you and your children enjoy sessions such as 'MEND' and 'Life Behind the Buggy' and that you find the centre to be a friendly place. We have judged the overall effectiveness of the centre to be satisfactory because outcomes for families and the quality of what the centre provides are both satisfactory.

Breastfeeding rates are below average in the area. However we were pleased to hear that a good number of mothers are attending the 'Yummy Mummy' sessions and benefit from the good advice provided by the 'Community Mums and Dads'. The centre is aware that a lot of children have put on too much weight by the time they join the Reception class. You told us that you have found the 'MEND' sessions very useful because you have been able to encourage your children to eat different foods and have found out about the importance of portion size.

The centre is aware that children in this area have high rates of tooth decay so they have worked together with oral health coordinators to put on sessions that help parents understand how they can prevent poor dental health. The centre provides you with lots of written information about how to keep your children healthy and safe and you told us that you find this useful. You said that you valued the provision of health services such as the availability of baby weighing in the centre. It was really good to hear parents describe how parenting courses help them to understand and effectively manage their children's behaviour.

Many parents in the area do not live near to their families and sometimes miss the support other relations can offer. This means some parents feel isolated after the birth of a new baby. You told us how the centre had helped you to get out and make new friends. You also described how parental outreach workers had helped you to deal with particularly difficult situations.

The centre has not done enough to make sure it registers families and identifies their needs in a logical and well planned way so we have asked staff to improve this. You told us that your children love coming to the centre and we would like more families to be able to take advantage of what the centre offers. Whilst the centre provides an appropriate range of enjoyable activities, many of these sessions have to be pre-booked and are oversubscribed with waiting lists. The centre has few activities where parents can just 'drop in' so we have asked centre managers to consider arranging more activities where you can just turn up and not have to book in advance. We

have suggested the centre makes better use of facilities within the local community that might be able to accommodate more parents and their children.

Assessment data show that children's skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are very variable so we have asked the children's centre to work more closely with local schools to address this and to make sure that all children are ready for school.

The centre receives appropriate support from the local authority. They have made sure that leadership and management has been strengthened. In addition to helping current staff improve their skills the local authority has recently appointed a very experienced manager who has quickly brought about important improvements. Although the way that data is organised, analysed and used is improving, those who are involved in running the centre know that there is even more to do to make sure that data is always used well to drive improvements. Additionally more needs to be done to make sure records are well kept and that case files are checked properly. We have asked the centre's leaders to address this and to make improvements to the quality of data and the organisation of documentation.

The centre listens very carefully to the views of parents and tries hard to act upon them. The centre is not yet working with all partners to develop and evaluate the work of the centre and has more work to do with providers of adult education to track the achievement of parents. We have asked the centre's leaders to ensure closer links are made with training providers to ensure accurate records are maintained of parents' learning and development.

The advisory board is well led and is asking important questions about the future of the centre but the local authority has not given sufficient thought to how the board will be organised when the responsibility for management of the centre changes in April 2013. We have asked the local authority to address this.

The centre helps families to keep their children safe and works well with social services in this respect. Checks are carried out on all staff to ensure they are suitable and safe to work with children. Important new improvements have been made to safeguarding procedures. These now need to become an established part of routines. For example, to ensure the safety and security of families, it is important that centre users support the centre in its efforts to discourage the use of mobile phones.

Once again, thank you for your contributions and best wishes for the future.

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