

Inspection report for Eastcotts CC (Bedford Borough)

Local authority	Bedford Borough Council
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Reporting inspector	Deavon Baker-Oxley HMI

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Date of previous inspection	Not Applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not Applicable
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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff and representatives from the local authority, South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation (the centre's managers), members of the advisory board, parent panel and representatives from some of the centre's partners. They had informal discussions with parents and users of the services.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Eastcotts Children's centre serves the Shortstown and Cotton End area of Bedford. It is a phase one centre, originally designated in February 2008. It provides drop-in sessions, family support, child and family health services, Jobcentre Plus and a citizens' advice bureau. Staff provide advice and guidance to families about other services locally.

In September 2011, the centre moved to its current premises. The centre has a temporary manager, an administrator, two early years and family support workers and one early years play assistant.

The area that the centre serves has some pockets of deprivation as well as more affluent areas. It has 340 children under five, 20% of children in workless households, over 31% of families in receipt of workless benefits and 20% lone parents. Ninety per cent of families are of White British heritage though in recent months there has been an increase in the number of Eastern European families moving to the area. The remaining 10% represents a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Children's levels of skills and experience when they start school are amongst the highest in the borough.

The centre is currently managed by South Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation on behalf of the local authority; however, this is under review due to reorganisation planned by the local authority from January 2013. The centre's steering group, whose members consist of key partners and families, ensure the centre meets the need of its community.

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

Leadership and management are good. A strong culture of continuous improvement is underpinned by effective evaluation, and supported by a highly motivated and cohesive team of professionals. The acting centre manager continues to improve the good standards established before her appointment to the temporary position during a year of significant change.

Eastcotts Children's Centre offers good quality care, guidance and support to families and young children, and serves its community well. 'These guys are always here for me.' 'I'd go mad if I was stuck in the house and couldn't come here.' 'They don't judge you, no matter how bad it is.' These sentiments were repeated in many different ways by the families interviewed. Effective partnerships provide universal, targeted and specialist programmes valued by parents and their children. A clear focus on target groups ensures equality and diversity are promoted well.

The centre provides a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment. It provides particularly good quality support for children and families who are vulnerable or are at risk of having a poor start in life. The work of the centre is making a noticeable difference to the start children are making at school. Programmes aimed at adults are raising their aspirations and provide practical help and support for parents and families to achieve better futures. The safety of families at home and in the centre is a vital part of the centre's work. The safeguarding of children and adults whose circumstances make them vulnerable, such as families in crises, is very good.

Assessment of need is good. Data are used very well to record children's progress, and to set challenging targets to improve the outcomes for families. Most parents

and children achieve well, gaining in confidence through the extensive range of provision. A good range of learning opportunities, combined with good guidance and support, are increasing the number of parents who progress from users to volunteers, to further learning and/or employment.

The local authority along with NHS plays a key strategic role through its challenging annual review of the centre's effectiveness and its own self-evaluation. The outcomes of data analysis are used effectively by the centre to enhance the quality of the provision. As a result, most outcomes, including health and children's achievement, are improving steadily. The drive for continued improvement, based on clear priorities and a good understanding of the reach area, combined with effective leadership that motivates staff, are ensuring that the centre's capacity to sustain and develop the provision is good. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation ensure that the management team remains clearly focused on improving the quality and impact of the services and activities provided. Families are engaged well in the evaluation of programmes and activities.

Managers recognise the need to analyse data better to demonstrate that key performance indicators are being met, and to set clear, measurable and challenging targets. English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses are needed to support families whose first language is not English. Monitoring of outcomes for adult learners following signposting to other provision does not provide enough information for centre management to assess the effectiveness of this provision.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the analysis of data to demonstrate that key performance indicators are being met, and to set clear, measurable and challenging targets.
- Provide English language courses to support families whose first language is not English.
- Improve the monitoring of outcomes for adult learners and families following signposting to other provision to enable centre managers to evaluate this aspect of provision more effectively.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Staff improve the health outcomes for children and families with increasing success. Obesity rates are low for children in the Reception Year. Families receive good support to keep children healthy, for example 'plot to plate' scheme, which encourages families to grow their vegetables. The centre benefits from the advice of

a dietician. They provide healthy snacks for children and families during group sessions. Good outreach work with pre-school promotes children's understanding of healthy eating, for example, centre staff run cooking sessions at the pre-school.

The good emotional support offered to parents means that they are better able to understand the needs of their children, for example parents report that the groups makes a big difference to their week. They feel better able to cope and to understand their children's emotional development and needs.

Good partnership working with the health visitor and midwife means parents have a good range of antenatal care, postnatal care, breastfeeding support and advice for healthy living. Good liaison means that families receive consistent information.

The centre provides good services for children who have disabilities. They understand the needs of the individual children and offer appropriate support to parents. Centre staff ensure that they can meet the child's needs within the centre, for example by consulting the Child Development Centre for information.

The existence of very few child protection cases demonstrates that staff take swift and appropriate action when safeguarding concerns are identified. Children and vulnerable adults show improvement in their confidence and skills. Activities are well organised and supervised with thorough risk assessments. Discussions with parents demonstrate that they feel safe at the centre. Parents report that parenting skills courses help them develop better strategies to keep their children safe and healthy. One-to-one support and advice helps parents keep their children safe, for example from domestic violence.

Activities engage all target groups very well in a variety of well-planned experiences. Children make good progress in learning. Very well organised group sessions, for example 'Stay and Play' and 'Play Together', provide excellent opportunities for parents and children to play, have fun and learn together.

The excellent use of initiatives to help parents gain a greater understanding of how children learn through play, improve their child's learning and ensure that they are better prepared for school. Additionally, parents become better able to work in partnership with the schools. Pre-school and head teachers have noticed the positive impact of the parenting skills course, for example in improving children's behaviour and better learning at home. These initiatives are actively used in the planning process to address children's individual needs.

A high proportion of children achieve good outcomes in Early Years Foundation Stage. Children are well prepared for the transition to pre-school and school.

Parental involvement in the centre governance is good. Adults' views are listened to.

There is a display showing the actions the centre has taken in response to feedback received, for example changes to the 'Saturdays' group to meet fathers' specific needs. Parents feel they are consulted through on-going discussions and evaluation of sessions. They are able to contribute to decision-making through the Parents Panel.

The good support offered to parents means they are better able to make informed decisions and can take control of their children's health and well-being. Families and staff treat each other with respect. There are four volunteers currently at the centre and all have been users of the centre.

The good use of school and other local facilities means that the centre is able to reach more families and so is accessible and establishing itself at the heart of the community.

Jobcentre Plus and the citizens' advice bureau provide drop in sessions giving information and support that enables families to access benefits, and plan for their expenditure, improving outcomes for their families.

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	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
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	2
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre works in close partnership with a wider team in the local authority, health service and other services to assess the needs of the most vulnerable children and families within the reach area. Detailed assessments lead to clear individual plans for children and families. Plans are reviewed regularly to ensure that services continue to meet the needs of families. Parents are treated with respect and sensitivity, which they appreciate. The centre has a good level of contact with targeted groups in the area and this is increasing year on year. Eighty per cent of families use the centre,

and 100% of teenage parents. The services for teenage parents are very well attended and supported by professionals including health visitors and midwives. These services provide a very good environment for young parents to meet each other for support and to develop friendship groups. The family support workers effectively promotes the centre to families in the target groups who lack confidence in attending the centre.

The centre promotes learning and development effectively. All activities are purposeful, promote good learning and improve outcomes for children. It celebrates the achievements of children and families with displays of children’s work around the centre. The centre enables adults and children to improve their educational and personal development, and increases their confidence and self-esteem.

There is strong evidence demonstrating that families in crisis receive effective care, guidance and support. Discussions with parents and case studies show that staff initiate appropriate support for families. Strong partnership working with other agencies and effective signposting ensure that families receive the services and support they need to overcome a wide range of personal and social problems, such as domestic violence, debt and potential homelessness.

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The governance and accountability of the centre are good with clear links to the local authority priorities, and good focus on the target groups. The centre is the responsibility of the local authority, with the day-to-day responsibility shared between the health authority and the children’s centre manager. The acting head of centre ensures that there is a good day-to-day management arrangement in place for the centre. The staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. There are meetings at all levels to ensure effective management. There is good financial management of the budget. The governing body members, who are members of the advisory board, are very committed and very active in monitoring the work of the centre, contributing to its self-evaluation, which is effective. However there is insufficient use of quantitative data to set challenging measurable targets. The governing body plays the role of a critical friend, able to challenge the centre manager regarding performance. The centre is making a very positive impact on the community, demonstrating good value for money. Service level agreements between all the partners are effective, with clear objectives, monitored at regular intervals. Effective recruitment procedures are in place. Opportunities for professional

development are based on staff appraisal and the needs of the centre.

Safeguarding is given a high priority, and all policies and procedures are consistently implemented. Robust vetting and recruitment processes are in place for all staff and volunteers. Training in safeguarding and child protection is given high importance. The centre plays an important role in ensuring that children are safe, and where necessary, child protection plans are implemented effectively. Case studies demonstrate that staff take swift and appropriate action when safeguarding concerns are identified.

Effective partnerships provide an integrated approach, to ensure that families in the target and reach groups have improved opportunities in life and improved outcomes. The centre actively promotes equality of opportunity and has zero tolerance of discrimination. Parents and carers are welcoming, improving community cohesion. The centre is proactive in meeting the needs of its diverse community, for example providing sessions for fathers on a Saturday. Displays and photographs throughout the centre celebrate diversity and promote inclusion. Feedback from families and children are used to improve the quality of the activities on offer.

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	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
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	2
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	2

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

none

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Eastcotts CC (Bedford Borough) on 27–28 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us. You told us that the work of the centre is valued, is changing lives, and is improving the chances for your children and families, and we agree with you.

Your children are making good progress relative to their starting points. You receive good guidance and support in parenting skills, and this is enabling your children to do well when they start school. Children who have attended the children's centre do better at school than those who do not.

The centre provides you with good access to specialised services, and many of you told us you would not use these services if they were not provided locally at your centre. You value and trust the information, advice and guidance that you are receiving.

You have access to high quality resources and you use them to the best advantage for your children. The centre staff have very good knowledge and experience, and they use these to provide you with the services and activities that you want and need.

Many of you attend the 'Parenting Puzzle', 'Baby club', 'Stay and Play' and 'Play Together' weekly sessions, and complete family questionnaires. Please continue to do this as it gives the staff at the centre good opportunities to hear your views, and to make the services even better. The centre does good work with those who wish to volunteer their services. The volunteers live in the local community and are doing a good job. As a result of volunteering, a number of parents have moved into paid employment.

The centre is successful at safeguarding the families who use the centre. Its arrangements for this are good, and its partnerships with other agencies are effective at reducing the number of children who are at risk of harm in the area. The centre is giving good advice and guidance to improve safety in the home, and improve child safety through improved parenting skills.

We have asked the centre to make a number of improvements. We have asked it to improve the analysis of data to check that the key performance indicators are being met, and to set clear, measurable and challenging targets. We have asked the centre to provide English classes for families whose first language is not English. We have

asked the centre to improve the monitoring of outcomes for adult learners and families following referral to other provision.

Thank you for speaking with us and best wishes for the future.

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