

Inspection report for Aylesbury (South West) Children's Centre

Local authority	Buckinghamshire County Council
Inspection number	383865
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Reporting inspector	Steve Nelson

Centre leader	Hilda Robinson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, the interim chief executive, centre leader and the chair of the advisory board. They met with a number of representatives of services who work with the children's centre, including health visitors and outreach workers. Inspectors spoke to groups of parents. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation form, business plan, users' evaluations and case study information.

Information about the centre

Aylesbury South West Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre that meets the full core purpose. In 2008 the local authority commissioned the Healthy Living Centre, managed by Buckinghamshire NHS Trust, to run the centre. It is one of two run by the Trust. The centre is undergoing extensive refurbishment and an extension to the building that has reduced room space. The centre serves Hawkslade, Walton Court, Elm Farm and Mandeville wards.

The centre leader supports the centre's development and delivery and along with staff works across the two children's centres. The interim chief executive is responsible for strategic and operational planning. An advisory board provides advice and monitors the centre's performance. It consists of representatives from partner organisations and key stakeholders that work with the children's centre, the local authority and parents.

The centre has 1,005 children aged under five years living in its area. The majority of the families who use the centre are from White British backgrounds. A growing number of families using the centre are of Pakistani origin. About 32% of families

come from homes that are dependent on benefits and where no-one is in work. When children start early years provision, the majority have skills, knowledge and abilities that are below levels expected for their age.

The range of activities offered by the centre includes support at the local community baby clinic, antenatal birth clinic, breast-feeding support and baby massage. The centre has links with health visitors, community midwives and speech therapists. It signposts families to a range of providers that offer adult education, volunteering opportunities and activities designed to support parents and carers back into employment and training. The centre opens 50 weeks each year on weekdays from 8.30am to 5pm.

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

Aylesbury South West makes satisfactory provision for children and families and outcomes are satisfactory. The number of families accessing the centre's provision, particularly those from Pakistani backgrounds, is increasing, largely because of its effective partnership work with another children's centre. Nevertheless, fewer lone parents and workless families currently use the centre's services than other target groups.

The centre provides an inclusive and welcoming environment. The dedication and commitment of staff ensure families feel supported and safe. Comments such as, 'The staff are fantastic' and 'There is something for everyone' are typical. The quality of care, guidance and support is good, as is the quality of support provided for those whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable.

Staff place a high priority on safeguarding. Families and children are kept safe because staff pay careful attention to safety measures. There are good arrangements for multi-agency work to protect children and ensure good outcomes for their safety. Families are encouraged to share their views with the centre. However, there are limited opportunities for them to shape the services and there is currently no specific forum for families to contribute to the centre's decision-making.

The quality and range of services offered are adequate to meet the needs of nearly half the families in the area. Overall, learning and development opportunities are satisfactory. Because assessments of children's starting points in their learning and development are insufficiently clear, it is hard for the centre to measure their progress and to target resources to improve their skills. The centre does not provide a wide enough range of opportunities for adults to participate in further learning programmes, or sufficient arrangements in place to track their progress.

Partnerships are satisfactory and the relationships with a range of agencies are increasingly clear and understood. The centre works particularly well with the local primary school and with voluntary organisations such as the National Autistic Society to enhance opportunities for local families. However, the centre's otherwise good work with health partners is not sufficiently developed to deliver a fully integrated breastfeeding service.

Leadership, management and governance are satisfactory. Centre staff form a committed team that is determined to improve provision and extend services to the wider community. Senior leaders have an accurate view of the centre's strengths and areas for development, despite the development plan targets lacking precision. They are appropriately focused on eradicating any weaknesses and improving outcomes for all target groups, and they receive timely support from the local authority to assist with this. As a result, the centre has satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of families engaging with the centre's services, particularly lone parents and families from workless households.
- Improve outcomes specifically by:
 - increasing the proportion of mothers continuing to breastfeeding at six to eight weeks by working more closely with health partners to promote the benefits of breastfeeding
 - monitoring the development of children who attend the play sessions regularly and setting targets for their next steps in learning based on the Early Years Foundation Stages of development
 - extending the opportunities for adults to access further training and development and track their subsequent progress.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - setting measureable targets for improvement in the centre's development plan
 - establishing a forum in which more parents can take an active role in the centre's decision-making and the shaping of future services.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Health outcomes for families are satisfactory. Data supplied by the centre shows that below-average numbers of mothers, including those from targeted groups, are continuing to breastfeed. Obesity rates at 7.51% are lower than average for the area. The weekly 'Bounce and Rhyme' sessions for children and their parents encourage physical activity at the centre and home. The smoking cessation group has seen half the clients give up smoking. This is having a beneficial impact on their families. A client said, 'The no-smoking clinic has helped me give up smoking and my home is now smoke free.' Families benefit from effective integrated services to promote their well-being, such as those vulnerable families referred for early intervention.

Adults are confident to approach the centre with concerns about family and community issues. Vulnerable groups receive both practical and emotional support and families feel safe enough to openly share their concerns with staff. Children are safeguarded well. Home visits ensure support is tailor-made for those families whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable. Families have participated in sun and road safety events run by the centre and which promote good awareness of keeping safe amongst children. Those who are subject to a child protection plan, including looked-after children or 'child in need' referrals, are effectively supported and, consequently, their outcomes are good. The support for children subject to Common Assessment Framework processes is good.

Children make satisfactory progress in their learning and development. Those who attend play-group activities such as 'Messy Play' and the crèche develop independence and enjoyment of play. One parent said, 'My child loves coming to the crèche and being with other children.' The percentage gap between the lowest-achieving 20% of children and the rest is closing slowly. However, although data shows that the percentage of children gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile has increased, the centre does not yet have data to show how it is contributing to this improvement. Families using the centre make satisfactory progress in developing their skills, including parenting skills, and show improvement in their personal development.

Parents are encouraged to have their say and discuss how their needs can be met through informal discussions with staff. They routinely evaluate courses and activities. However, although parents are represented on the advisory board, a parents' forum is not yet established. Consequently, this limits the opportunities for parents to shape the services offered by the centre and for more to play a full role in decision-making. Children's behaviour is good and they form positive relationships within the centre. Families improve their economic well-being with the centre's support and are very appreciative of the financial advice and guidance provided by the centre. Young parents in particular increase their budgeting skills. The centre has helped a number of families to access childcare funding for two-year-olds so they can return to work or access further education. However, the centre does not provide enough opportunities for adults to participate in additional learning programmes, and

does not have arrangements in place to track the progress of those who do.

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	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	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

The centre works well with other agencies, for example, health visitors and social workers, in assessing the needs of families and providing services that improve outcomes for the most vulnerable families. Effective joint working with the nearby children's centre means teenage parents can access specialised provision at the setting closest to their home. Outreach services effectively meet local families' identified needs and increasingly those of families in the wider area, including the Pakistani community. A parent who attended the 'English at the Doctors course' said, 'I am now able to go to the doctor's on my own.' However, the centre's work with lone parents and workless families is not yet developed sufficiently to involve as many of them in the centre's activities as other target groups.

The centre satisfactorily supports children's learning. Children are provided with a variety of purposeful activities that they enjoy and that support their development. For example, a parent said, 'My two-year-old son now willingly gives up his dummy to staff on arrival.' Resources are age-appropriate and interesting and encourage children's engagement well. However, not all session plans are linked to development stages in order to meet the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements. Consequently, staff are not able to make use of children's achievements to plan the next steps in their learning. Children are appropriately prepared for transfer to nursery. Parents attending the English course say they are better able to support their children's early language and literacy development as a result of their experiences.

The quality of care, guidance and support given to families who access the centre's services is good. The open-door policy provides a listening ear to support children and families all year round. One parent commented: 'The support staff offer is great.'

It is comforting to know there is someone there for you.' The centre works closely with the health visitors to identify vulnerable families, and outreach activities provided by the centre's staff in families' homes are highly successful in improving outcomes for these families. Several families receive regular home visits from the outreach workers, which parents told inspectors they appreciate, especially in times of crisis. Information, advice and guidance on a range of health issues, including smoking cessation, alcohol and drug misuse, and more sensitive information regarding domestic abuse and sexual health is readily available either by signposting or through specific activities for parents.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Senior leaders have successfully managed the changes during the unsettling period of refurbishment and extension of the building. Satisfactory governance arrangements and effective day-to-day management help to ensure that the centre's work is making a difference to the lives of the increasing number of families who access its activities and services. The advisory board, which includes parent representation, has appropriate monitoring systems that hold staff to account and assure the work of the centre's partners. The centre staff have high aspirations and are focused on improving outcomes for all children and families. Self-evaluation processes accurately identify the centre's strengths and weaknesses. Key priorities are clearly set out in the centre's development plan. However, there are insufficient quantifiable targets for improvement included in order for the centre to measure its performance.

The inclusion of all children and families is central to the centre's vision. Equality is promoted, diversity celebrated and discrimination tackled. The centre effectively removes barriers for disabled children, children with special needs and their families. The achievement gap is closing, albeit slowly, reflecting children's satisfactory progress.

Procedures for safeguarding are good and, together with the centre's effective early intervention and multi-agency cooperation, ensure that families feel safe and that their emotional and social needs are effectively met. Checks on the suitability of adults to work with children are thorough and child protection arrangements are secure and updated regularly. Robust risk assessments are undertaken regularly and good records are kept. Training of all staff, particularly in relation to child protection,

domestic violence and for those working with disabled children or adults, is of good quality.

Partnerships are satisfactory and the relationships between different agencies are increasingly clear and understood. Productive links with social workers, health visitors and the local primary school are meeting the needs of families. However, the centre's otherwise good partnership working with health services is not sufficiently developed to ensure a fully integrated delivery of breastfeeding services.

Sustainability is promoted well through the effective use of staff expertise working across two centres and sharing resources, which reduces costs. Staff are effective in reaching out to an increasing number of groups in the wider area that have previously not engaged with the centre. Services are managed efficiently and the centre achieves satisfactory value for money.

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	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	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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Aylesbury (South West) Children's Centre on 27–28 March 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We are very grateful to all the parents, carers and representatives from the centre who spoke to us and the professional partners who took the trouble to come and tell us about the work they do. We enjoyed talking to you and found your comments very helpful. Your children's centre is a welcoming place and provides you and your children with good facilities. Comments such as: 'The staff are so helpful and supportive,' and 'My children look forward to enjoying the activities provided,' are typical of the views you communicated to us. An increasing number of families are accessing services but we have asked managers to specifically target the further involvement of lone parents and workless families using the centre's services.

The groups run by the centre encourage children to be healthy, to have fun playing and learning and to cooperate with each other. The centre gives you advice on the best way to prepare healthy meals for your children, to stimulate them at home and how to keep them safe. The next step is for centre staff to work more closely with health partners to promote the benefits of breastfeeding to even more mothers.

You told us that your babies and children enjoy coming to the 'Messy Play' and 'Bounce and Rhyme' sessions, and that that they are learning to share nicely with other children. Your children behave well at the centre and benefit from playing with other children and from using the good-quality toys and other resources. We have asked the centre to make assessments of children's starting points so that they can better support the progress they make in developing new skills. The support the centre has given in helping your children learn and develop has also been positive because you are more confident in the ways that you can help your children. We have asked managers to increase the opportunities for you to take up further education programmes and for more of you to contribute to the decision-making and development of the centre's services. We have seen that the care, support and advice the centre provides are good. Several parents told us how staff never judge anyone but are always welcoming and supportive. Several of you have regular home visits from the outreach workers whom you say have been much appreciated in times of crisis.

Those of you who use the centre are much better now at looking after your families. We know this because many of you told us of what you had learnt from your experiences, such as sun and road safety events run by the centre. The centre works effectively with other agencies, such as the health service and social services in particular, to help vulnerable children and families. Senior leaders are clear about

where future improvement is required but we have asked them to sharpen the development plan by including measureable targets.

We wish you every success for the future.

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