

Bedford and Higher Folds Children's Centre

St Thomas' C of E Primary, Astley St, Leigh, Wigan, WN7 2BP

Inspection date	20–21 June 2013		
Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- There is inconsistency in the quality of services provided. Those designed to improve adults' literacy, language, mathematics skills and chances of employment are too limited.
- Health services, adult education providers and JobCentre Plus do not share information with the centre sufficiently well. This means that it is difficult for centre leaders to make decisions, in the light of changing trends, about the needs of local families and the impact of the centre's work.
- Leaders do not monitor and quality assure in sufficient depth the centre's own provision or that of the many local services that it commissions and uses.
- The collaborative leadership committee is at a very early stage in fulfilling its role of holding the centre to account for its work.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Dynamic, determined leadership from the centre co-ordinator has led to strong staff teamwork and local parents seeing the centre as a reliable source of information, support and refuge.
- In response to creative outreach work, the centre's broad range of provision and good data about attendances, the numbers of families and young children that are registered with the centre and use its services are increasing rapidly. This improvement is true for all target groups and others whose circumstances make them likely to be vulnerable.
- The centre has a good number of volunteers, and parents have an increasingly strong voice in shaping its provision.
- Some services, such as those to enhance parenting skills and children's language skills, are having a good impact. By the end of Reception the achievement gap is narrowing between the lowest-attaining children and other children.

Information about this inspection

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

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, local authority representatives, staff members, a range of partners with whom the centre works, volunteers and parents. They also held informal discussions with parents.

Inspectors observed activities held at Higher Folds Community Centre, All Saints Church and at the centre's reception and information centre, and also visited the community allotment.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation such as safeguarding information, data about registrations and attendance, case files, the centre's procedures for monitoring the quality of its performance and its development planning.

Inspection team

Sarah Drake	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
-------------	--------------------------------------

Wendy Pawson	Additional Inspector
--------------	----------------------

Barbara Wearing	Additional Inspector
-----------------	----------------------

Full report

Information about the centre

Bedford and Higher Folds Children's Centre is a stand-alone, phase 2 centre which has a 'campus setting', with no central base. The centre is managed by the local authority with governance provided by a collaborative leadership committee which comprises parents and a range of other stakeholders. The centre leader is also headteacher of St Thomas' C of E Primary School which, until recently, housed a small base area. The centre is staffed by the co-ordinator, one link worker and one receptionist/information assistant. The reception and information centre is in a former retail unit with offices above. The centre provides access to a range of support, educational and health-related activities. Most take place in community venues across the area.

There are 1095 children aged under five years within the area. One quarter of the area is within the top 10% most deprived areas nationally; almost one half is within the top 30% most deprived areas. There are high levels of worklessness and the majority of families are dependent on benefits. Most families are White British but the proportion of families belonging to minority ethnic groups is above average. No one minority group predominates. There are also significant numbers of lone and young parents, and families with disabled children or parents. Children's skills on entry to Early Years provision are below expectations for their age.

The centre is linked to St Thomas' C of E Primary School and St Thomas' Pre-School. Their most recent reports can be found on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve the provision to increase parents' skills in language, literacy and numeracy, and to increase their chances of employment.
- Improve the partnerships with health, adult education providers and Jobcentre Plus, particularly so that the centre is better able to target and evaluate the impact of its work.
- Increase the rigour with which:
 - centre leaders at all levels monitor and evaluate the quality of the centre's work and that of its locally commissioned and accessed services
 - the co-operative leadership committee holds the centre to account.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Increasingly streamlined data, on new birth registrations and families' attendance at activities, are used well to prioritise those identified as in most need and encourage them to benefit from the centre's services. Every new registration leads swiftly to a telephone call and offer of a home visit, opening up opportunities to start building relationships. The link worker accompanies particularly nervous parents to activities when necessary.
- This, and staff's high profile in the community through, for example, involvement in the allotment and the Youth Group for those aged over seven years, have increased parents' confidence and trust. As one said, 'You realise that you don't have to be in trouble to be involved with them.'
- Most parents have knowledge of the wide range of services available which are organised to capture their interest. This means that activities, such as parent and toddler groups, drop-in groups for childminders or specific sessions for disabled children, are well attended.
- Over 80% of potential users are registered, and attendance by workless, lone and young parents, and those belonging to minority ethnic groups ranges between 70% and 80%. In response to staff's hard work, the attendance of fathers, while significantly lower than this, is increasing.
- Generally good liaison between partner agencies ensures that particularly vulnerable children and families have access to the services they need. These include funded early education places for two-three- and four-year-olds and specific sessions to enhance children's language development.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre's wide range of services are open to all in the main, with some being targeted to children's or families' specific needs. This ensures equality of opportunity and effectively helps to break down barriers for those likely to be more vulnerable.
- The provision to enhance children's skills and well-being is effective. Some activities, such as those which cater for babies' and toddlers' different developing needs and those which enhance parenting skills, are of good quality and highly prized by families. Other activities, while valuable for developing social skills, are less targeted on progression.
- The sharply focussed work of the qualified teacher, in liaison with speech therapists and others has reversed a falling trend in children's skills at the end of their Reception year. These are now slowly rising and although reducing, inequalities are still below those achieved nationally.
- The incidence of local mothers breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks has increased by 12 percentage points over two years to 35%, and obesity levels in Reception-age children have reduced to below the national average. Health agencies provide no other information about children's and families' health, such as the incidence of smoking, immunisations or accidents to local children. This prevents the centre from accurately targeting its work.
- The provision to support adult learning and enhance parents' chances of employment is limited. Sessions to promote adults' basic literacy and numeracy skills are too often cancelled at short notice. A JobCentre Plus information point is available within the reception area but there is no regular on-site presence.
- Staff signpost families to relevant agencies, such as housing or benefits, and willingly help with form-filling although they do not have specific skills in these areas. Adult learning and JobCentre Plus partners share minimal information with the centre.
- The centre is very successful in attracting volunteers and nurturing their skills. They run sessions, undertake non-confidential administrative work and make a strong contribution towards helping the centre make the best use of its resources. Four have progressed into employment.
- Staff's understanding of, and prompt response to, the needs of those in crisis are at the heart of their work. In liaison with other services, they are tireless and effective in helping to remove children and parents from potential harm and building their self-esteem. One parent spoke for many when saying, 'If I have any concerns, it is here I will come to.'

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**Requires improvement**

- Appropriate arrangements are in place to monitor the centre's work, evaluate its performance and ensure that it runs smoothly. Staff receive regular supervision and have good access to training which enables them to respond professionally to the challenges that their work presents. Regular meetings between the centre's leadership team and local authority representatives monitor the impact of the centre's actions and identify further areas for improvement. Leaders' interrogation of data and evaluation of the quality of the centre's own provision and that of others, lack rigour. Consequently improvement in the outcomes for young children and their families is not sufficiently rapid. For example, effective consultation with parents led to a change of provider for Early Years activities that were found to be wanting. However, the quality of other activities, such as those to support adults back into work, shows little sign of improvement.
- Development planning does not provide a sharp enough focus on key priorities or how the impact of any actions will be measured. There are some inconsistencies in the implementation of policies and procedures.
- While the collaborative leadership committee includes parental representation and meets quarterly, members' attendance at meetings is irregular and it is only beginning to carry out its full governance role.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Staff are vigilant and users understand the importance of adopting safe practices. Staff's knowledge and record-keeping play an important role in meetings with other professionals about those subject to the common assessment framework (CAF) arrangements or child protection plans. Case studies demonstrate that the centre's involvement has helped to reduce the level of support needed for some highly vulnerable families.
- The head of centre plays a strong part in helping to develop children's centre provision across the local authority. The co-ordinator's considerable strengths in building relationships and negotiating good deals ensure that the centre acts as the highly valued hub of the community that improves the well-being of young children, making best use of available resources.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Children's centre details

Unique reference number	20240
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	421432
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1095
Centre leader	Barry Foster
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01942 672730
Email address	bfoster@leighsaintthomas.wigan.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

(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.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

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 St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

