

Dunstable North Children's Centre

Main Base Beehive Children's Centre, Westfield Road, Dunstable, LU6 1DW

Inspection date 3–4 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a good centre.

- The centre reaches a large majority of families living in the reach area and many other users across central Bedfordshire including those most in need of support. All benefit from the good quality services provided. The well planned use of community venues enhances the work of the centre. As a result, the centre is successfully engaging with those groups which it has identified as in need of additional support including families living in the most disadvantaged communities and victims of domestic abuse.
- Leaders and managers know the local area very well and make good use of other information to make sure the programme of activities meets families' needs well. Families are really satisfied with the quality and range of services and the centre is highly valued by all those that access it.
- Children who attend the centre regularly make good progress because of the good range of activities on offer. Adults are improving their parenting skills and have been able to access suitable training or further education to gain skills to improve their lives and to get jobs.
- Partnerships with the health specialists and the Early Intervention Team at one and two-year – old developmental checks help to address any concerns at this early stage.
- Leaders manage the centre well and are improving services further with some good support and challenging targets set by the local authority.

It is not outstanding because:

- Centre staff do not carry out sufficient checks to make sure families are attending and do not drop out of programmes early.
- Tracking systems to measure the performance of the centre are still at an early stage and the collection and analysis of data to plan improvements are underdeveloped.

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 the centre manager, senior leadership team, family outreach workers, officers from the local authority including the Early Intervention Team and a range of partners. These included representatives from health services, education, housing, employment and other training services. They also met with parents, volunteers and representatives of the advisory board. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation including the self-evaluation form, action plan, a sample of case studies and files, parental satisfaction surveys, safeguarding policies and procedures and a variety of assessment files for the range of activities delivered. Visits and observations were undertaken jointly with centre staff and the centre manager and senior leaders attended all the meetings of the inspection.

Inspection team

Catherine Stormonth, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Ann Janssen	Additional inspector
Anthony Mundy	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre/group

The centre became operational in 2008 as the phase 2 stand-alone Beehive Children's Centre attached to Beecroft Lower School URN 109445. Following the local authority's restructuring of children's centres in April 2012, the centre amalgamated with the Eaton Bray Buttercup Centre to form the Dunstable North Children's Centre. The centre serves part of the town of Dunstable and the surrounding rural catchment. The centre is governed by the school's governing body and a sub-committee advisory board of key partners and parents. The acting headteacher is the Centre Manager and line manages the Centre Co-ordinator and Centre Strategic Officer.

The centre provides early education, childcare and health services, family support and adult learning courses. Most children enter early education with skills that are lower than those expected for their age, especially in communication and language development. The centre operates from a small purpose built building alongside Westfield Nursery and Beecroft Lower School which are both subject to separate inspection arrangements. The centre's reach area includes 1619 children under five years of age most of whom are White British at 87%. The biggest ethnic minority groups are "White Other" from Poland, Hungary and Lithuania and there is a large local traveller population on the Chiltern View site. The area is very mixed socially and economically with pockets of deprivation. For example Dunstable Northfields and the Dunstable Central Ward have four of the 20-40% most deprived lower super output areas in England. Data shows that 23% of children live in workless households, 17.1% are lone parents and there is a high rate of teenage pregnancy. Key target groups include vulnerable children and mothers, expectant teenagers and teenage and young parents and victims of domestic violence.

What does the centre/group need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of the centre leadership by:
 - ensuring that the processes of self-evaluation accurately inform the centre's planning priorities and set more wide reaching and challenging targets for improvement
 - monitoring the attendance of target groups to ensure more sustained access to services
 - implementing more robust tracking processes to demonstrate the impact of services and the progress that children and families make
 - ensuring that data is in an accessible format to enable the advisory board to challenge the work of the centre and hold the centre to account more effectively

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Most families with new born babies receive a visit from centre staff within two months. This helps to promote the work of the centre and ensure that the large majority of families are registered, including those living in the most deprived neighbourhoods.
- Engagement rates are good because services are delivered from local community outreach centres conveniently located around Dunstable town centre and Eaton Bray. These include early childhood services, getting ready for school and programmes for new and expectant parents. Those families in most need of extra support benefit from taxi tokens to get to activities and arrive on time.
- There are a large number of referrals for help and support for families that are in crisis with homelessness, debt, substance and alcohol abuse, and serious health and welfare difficulties. The centre manages these referrals well and ensures that families receive the early help and support they

need.

- Parents say that they always feel welcome at the centre and that staff are 'bright and bubbly and help you feel good.' Staff establish and maintain contact with key target groups. This excellent rapport also applies with other users and helps a large majority of pregnant teenagers, teenage mothers and some fathers to use and benefit hugely from the services.
- Working with families in their own homes is successful and leads to increased confidence and families attending the centre services more regularly. New mothers attend 'Baby Massage', the breastfeeding 'Brasserie' as a result.
- The holiday messy play, football and active play sessions are very popular and are oversubscribed. Trips to the zoo and an open farm have also improved contact with groups such as those from ethnic minority backgrounds and traveller communities.
- The centre's systems for monitoring access to services, attendance and participation are less well developed. Some targeted families have patchy attendance or drop out of programmes early and they are not sufficiently followed up to ensure they re-engage with the centre.
- The very large majority of three and four-year-old children attend pre-school settings or nurseries because of the good information and encouragement by centre staff. Nearly all targeted two-year-old children take up their free entitlement to early education which is commendable.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The quality, range and relevance of services are all good. Baby clinics are well attended by teenage and young parents as they offer the chance to socialise as well as receive expert guidance and advice on parenting. The impact of the good support is reflected in increased sustained breastfeeding rates in the local area and an increased number of parents who have stopped smoking.
- High quality early learning experiences with a strong focus on communication and language development are an important aspect of the 'Bumble Bees' and 'Cheeky Monkeys' stay and play sessions. The new assessment checks show that targeted children are making good progress from week to week. Assessments are however not consistent for the range of activities and some do not record children's starting points. As a result the centre is not always able to measure progress accurately.
- The proportion of children who achieve the expected level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is broadly average. However, the gap between the lowest attaining children and their peers is closing rapidly as a result of good partnership working with schools and pre-school settings. A key strength of the centre is the one-to-one help and support from the Early Intervention Team. Effective co-operation and the sharing of information between professionals enables families to get the help they need as early as possible. The impact for families in greatest need, especially those who are disabled or those children who are most at risk, is outstanding.
- A large majority of targeted families are able to extend their parenting skills through nurturing and safety awareness programmes such as the 'Parent Puzzle' and the 'Teens and Tots.' Evaluations show the positive impact on improved family life.
- The centre provides access to a range of further education or training providers to help parents get the advice, training and qualifications to improve their economic stability and chances of employment. The 'Money Matters' course and the debt counselling are outstanding and have helped families manage their finances more effectively. Partnerships with Jobcentre Plus have helped some parents back to work but the numbers are low. Several volunteers confirmed that they have been given the chance to work at the centre and make worthwhile contributions to events and activities.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Centre staff are a strong cohesive team with a passion for wanting to help and support the most vulnerable families. They provide easy access to a range of support services which sometimes

families say they find daunting. This effective support helps them with a wide range of issues including housing problems, bereavement and domestic violence.

- The local authority provides good support to the centre and sets challenging outcome and performance targets based on secure data about targeted families in the area. However, the centre does not always analyse data and management information well and this leads to weaker improvement planning.
- Governance arrangements are well established but data is not presented in a format for the advisory board to provide effective challenge and hold the centre to account. Parents have an effective voice that is channelled to their advisory board representatives and are involved well in decision making. The range of strategic partnerships for collaborative working to make sure the centre can commission or deliver all the services needed is excellent. Links with the voluntary sector and the housing associations provide particularly rewarding outcomes for some families in desperate circumstances.
- The culture of safeguarding is a key strength with strong policies, procedures and practice in place. This ensures that safeguarding and the welfare of children is a top priority for the centre's core purpose. The centre works successfully to reduce the risk of harm to children on child protection plans, those deemed children in need and those subject to Common Assessment Framework multi-agency support plans.
- Resources are used efficiently and effectively to meet the locally agreed priorities for children and families. The small children's centre building is used well and staff have been creative in using many outreach community centres to deliver and maintain services including the attached school facilities.

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

Unique reference number	20250
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	427787
Managed by	The Local Authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1619
Centre leader	Robert Hutchings
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	01582 699092
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