

# Northumberland Heath Children's Centre

141 Brook Street, Northumberland Heath, Kent DA8 1JD

## Inspection date

23–24 October 2103

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
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.

- Families have access to a wide range of exciting and well-attended groups, activities and services specifically designed to meet their needs.
- The advisory board knows the children's centre and the families it serves well. Its members are very supportive and challenging of the centre's leaders and the work of the centre. This effective governance contributes to driving improvements.
- Effective partnerships with key agencies, parents and family members, early years providers, employment services, the partner academy and most schools play a major role in the success of this children's centre. One partner said, 'If you have families in this centre, they will be ok because the manager puts herself out to provide whatever is needed.'
- Reducing the risk of harm permeates the work of the centre. Good information sharing, especially in relation to the most vulnerable children, and strong multi-agency involvement mean that individual families who have been identified as needing support receive the help they require.
- The one-to-one early help that families receive, often when they have multiple and complex problems, is very effective. Parents speak very highly of the staff and the support they receive across many aspects of their lives, summed up by one parent who said, 'They give me the tools I need to be a better father to benefit my children.'

### It is not outstanding because:

- The centre is not yet engaging with certain groups in the community such as disabled children and families from Black and minority ethnic groups.
- The centre's targets, set by the local authority, do not always provide enough specific measurable information to allow the centre to know when it has been successful.
- The local authority, health services and the centre do not always have data specific to the area that they provide services to.

## 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. It was carried out at the same time as the inspection of St Augustine's Children's Centre, which works collaboratively with Northumberland Heath.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and managers from the local authority, Woodland Academy Trust, the managers of St Augustine's and Northumberland Heath, centre staff, health, education and social care partners, parents, early years practitioners, schools, training consultants, employment partner, volunteers and representatives from the advisory board and parents' forum.

The inspectors visited St Augustine's Children's Centre and various sites where activities were taken out in to the community, including the health bus. They saw a number of activities, including the Step Up Project, Toddler Stay and Play, Baby Group Child Health Clinic, and a Baby Basics session for the Birth, Baby and You ante-natal group.

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

## Inspection team

Susan Crawford	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead inspector
Susan Mann	Her Majesty's Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Northumberland Heath is a phase two children's centre which was designated in 2007 and delivers the full core offer. 4Children Day Nursery, managed independently, is located on the same site and is subject to a separate inspection. It is situated on the site of Northumberland Heath Primary School which is part of The Woodland Academy Trust. It works in partnership with the Trust to deliver services to local families. The centre is managed by the centre manager who is responsible for the day-to-day running. It now works to a cluster arrangement with two other children's centres in the locality, namely St Augustine's and Danson Children's Centres. Danson was inspected June 2012 and was judged as good. Some services are commissioned across the borough, including the outreach and Positive Steps teams. Outreach and family support are coordinated from St Augustine's.

The children's centre has 635 children aged from birth to five years in its reach area. The children's centre reach area has a mixed social make-up with pockets of severe deprivation adjoining areas of affluence. It is situated in the North of the London Borough of Bexley serving Northumberland Heath ward. The area is largely populated by a White British community with a growing population of residents from Eastern Europe and of Asian and Black African heritage. There are three primary schools in the ward, 67% of the population are employed, the number of residents educated to degree level is the lowest in the borough and Northumberland Heath has the third highest household size in the borough. Children's skills vary when they start in early years provision but are typically below average.

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

- Continue to increase the percentage of users engaging in the services provided by the centre, especially those families in most need.
- Work with the local authority and health services to improve the quality of information provided so that data, including that for the nursery education grant and health outcomes, are specific to the centre's reach area.
- Continue to improve the centre's business plan so that targets are measurable, with success criteria that are specific so that the centre can easily see when targets have been met.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The very large majority of families in the community are registered with the centre and large proportions access a range of good quality services and activities that they find interesting and useful. This is because staff know the local community well and plan and provide services that are relevant to families, particularly in the areas of most deprivation.
- The centre works hard to reach the families and children whose needs are greatest, but too few are engaging with the centre, especially disabled children and families from Black and minority ethnic groups. Many opportunities are taken to distribute information about the centre's services through leaflet drops, attendance at community events and by visits to local services such as the library and supermarket.
- Sessions such as Step Up which provides work and employability training help parents to improve their life chances. A large majority access good quality learning and training activities at the centre; this enables them to improve their knowledge and skills.
- The only data available to show that most children in the reach area take up early education is for Bexley overall, through the centres close partnership working with other providers of nursery education funded places they are able to gather data that show that they are in line with Bexley.
- The successful Very Important Person scheme (VIP) ensures that those families who attend the centre who are in most need of help, can access services for free. This ensures families have

equal access to services through the removal of barriers.

- Home visits managed by outreach and family support workers provide highly personalised support and access to other services. Staff work well with families, developing trusting and constructive relationships to support improving outcomes.
- Some good communication exists with health partners and the designated health visitor. This means that the centre is kept well informed about the data concerning expectant parents who may need support, and all new births in the area. This enables the right support to be planned and delivered, including home visits by outreach workers and weekly sessions such as Baby Group run from the centre alongside the health clinic, to ensure families' well-being and a healthy start in life for young children. Other data are less useful because they relate to Bexley overall and are not specific to the reach area, however good communication with health services ensures that health needs are identified and met because local knowledge is shared about what services are needed.

### The quality of practice and services

Good

- The effective links and partnership working established with Woodland Academy Trust, some local schools, day care providers, childminders and early years providers mean that the centre has been successful in supporting free entitlement to early education, especially for disadvantaged two-year-olds. The vast majority of provision in the area is judged good or better.
- Although the scores at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are lower than the national average there is evidence that the gap is closing. Through the centre's effective tracking it is able to show that those children who attend 10 or more sessions are better prepared for school, and at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage their scores are much better than those of children who attend less or not at all.
- Regular antenatal, postnatal and child health checks held at the centre, as well as much appreciated breastfeeding advice, mean that expectant mothers and families have good access to early childhood services. Strong partnerships ensure that families who need additional support are referred to the centre.
- Well-targeted courses build many vulnerable parents' confidence and equip families to better manage their children's behaviour. Comments such as, 'It is nice to know that it is not just me having problems with my children' demonstrate the positive difference they make. The es-t.e.a.m course for parents of two-year-old funded children provides opportunities to build self-esteem and at the same time complete a practical activity such as dressmaking.
- The good partnership working of the outreach and family support workers is a strength of the centre's services, and results in good care, guidance and support. Staff are effective when helping families, especially in times of crisis. They tap into specialist services quickly in order to respond to families' often complex problems, which routinely include bad debt, poor housing, domestic violence and a breakdown in relationships. Case studies provide good examples of the impact the centre's work has in helping families to build resilience, overcome challenges and improve their lives.

### The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Leadership, management and governance arrangements are effective. The advisory board scrutinises the work of the centre and uses the available data well to monitor its performance. As a result, the centre receives effective support and challenge from the board. There are good links between the advisory board and the parents' forum.
- Inclusion and equality are actively promoted and every effort is made to reduce inequalities, to remove barriers and to challenge discrimination. The success of the centre in this regard is seen in the narrowing of the achievement gap for those children who do well and those who do not

across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

- Supervision and performance management provided by the executive head of the academy are good. The centre manager and headteacher conduct joint observations of the services that they provide which ensures good quality of provision.
- Monitoring from the local authority is good in some respects. However, the business plan does not consistently provide measurable targets to drive improvement.
- The centre ensures that families are at the heart of its work by involving them in a range of decision-making processes. Parents are represented on the advisory board and also contribute to the running of the centre through their roles on the parents' forum. They also contribute ideas for activities and their views are routinely captured through processes such as, 'You said, we did.' As a result of all of this, levels of satisfaction from families are very high.
- Partnership arrangements are strong and very effective. This enables the centre to provide access to a wide range of services and activities delivered across the locality. The centre links in to the 'Worklessness and Skills Forum' developed by St Augustine's Children's Centre, which includes representatives from Jobcentre Plus, Bexley Adult Community College, the local housing organisation and a representative from a local supermarket. This forum has been instrumental in helping adults in the locality to access employment and work experience and by identifying skills' shortages and offering suitable vocational training in the locality.
- Safeguarding arrangements, including the use of the Bexley Early Assessment of Need process to assess needs of families, are good. The centre and its partners do their very best to ensure that families are kept safe from harm. Through partnership work with its designated social worker and other agencies, the centre is able to provide early help to families at risk of harm and provides good support to families with children subject to child protection plans, to looked after children and to children in need.

**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.

<b>Unique reference number</b>	22208
<b>Local authority</b>	London Borough of Bexley
<b>Inspection number</b>	427517
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	635
<b>Centre leader</b>	Teresa Blackman
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01322 448441
<b>Email address</b>	teresa.blackman@bexley.gov.uk

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