

Hertfordshire - Hertsmere: Bushey Group

Harcourt Road, Bushey, WD23 3PE

Inspection date		4–5 February 2014	
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
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:

- Not enough families from target groups are accessing the centres' services. Most families are registered with the centre, but there are not yet good levels of engagement with a minority of some groups, including lone parents, workless families and families living in Otterspool.
- Leaders do not always ensure they collect or make enough use of information from all partners to show the difference services are making to families lives. For example, they are not tracking the progress of individual children's achievements at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage to help measure the impact of services.
- The monitoring of case files by centre leaders is not robust enough. There is evidence of close partnership working but no clear audit trail to show the decision-making process.
- Not enough boys and children who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) in the Bushey Mill area are ready for school. The centres are working with key partners to reduce this inequality gap and to increase the number of two-year-olds taking up their entitlement to high quality early education to gain a head start in their learning and development from a young age.
- Not enough unemployed parents and lone parents attend adult learning programmes and as a result, do not receive sufficient help to enable them to return to training and employment.
- Too few families are involved in or know how they can be involved in shaping services and the governance of the centre.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Leaders, staff and the advisory board are enthusiastic and have high aspirations for the centres which are improving. Leaders are supporting staff with the implementation of new systems to assess, monitor and measure the impact of their work.
- The centre has worked successfully with the local Traveller community. As a result, in the last year 25 out of 30 children now access early years provision.
- Staff develop good relationships with parents and gain their trust. As a result, families in most need of support, including those experiencing domestic violence receive the support they need to make positive changes in their lives. One parent told inspectors, 'The support has been immense. The centre has played an important role in keeping my family together.'

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. The centres that form part of this children’s centre group are Reddings Children’s Centre and Bushey Mill Children’s Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with representatives from the commissioned provider Hertsmere Leisure, representatives from the local authority, health partners, a representative from Genesis Housing Association, the police community support officer, traveller education, early years providers, the head of Highwood Primary School, the linked social worker, children’s centre staff, parents and members of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited a range of activities and sessions held at the two centres, Hartspring Community Centre and First Place Nursery. Visits to activity sessions were undertaken with the commissioned provider, who also attended team meetings. Inspectors looked at the group’s self-evaluation documents, activity plans, case files, safeguarding procedures and a range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Wendy Ratcliff, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Joanne Caswell	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Catherine Stormonth	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Bushey Children's Centre group in Bushey, Hertfordshire is run by Hertsmere Leisure on behalf of the local authority. The group is made up of two centres: The Reddings Children's Centre and Bushey Mill Children's Centre. Hertsmere Leisure has been responsible for running the centres since they opened in November 2009. There is a single advisory board, comprising of key partners and a parent representative, which assists in the governance of the group. Hertsmere Leisure employ a children's centre leadership team to oversee the running of the centres and a team leader is responsible for the daily running of the two centres in the Bushey group.

The group delivers services for children and families from both the centres and from community venues, including Bushey Library, Kings George recreation ground, Hartspring Community Centre, St Paul's Church Hall, St James Church Hall, Bushey Grove Leisure Centre and Bushey Community Centre. The centres are open five days a week as well as some evenings and weekends.

Since February 2013, a team of Watford General Hospital Midwives have been based at the Reddings Children's Centre. The Bushey Mill Centre is on the same site as Highwood Primary School.

Bushey is a residential town two miles from the centre of Watford. The centres serve an area with mixed levels of deprivation, with Otterspool and the Farrington Estate most deprived. There are 1587 children under five years living in the Bushey Group area. Around 11% of children are considered to be living in poverty. The majority of the population are White British with smaller percentages of families from minority ethnic groups. There is a small traveller community in the area. Children's skills vary when they start in early years provision but are typically average with weaker aspects in communication and language.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Leaders, managers and those in governance should ensure that systems to monitor and track the work of the centre are fully embedded by:
 - making the best use of all available data in order to demonstrate the impact services have for identified priority children and families
 - working with schools and early years providers to track the progress children make
 - effective recording and follow up of actions given to staff after formal observations
 - ensuring the procedures for monitoring case records are robust and provide a clear audit of decision making and action taken.
- To increase the number of families from workless households and lone parents accessing services, particularly adult learning and opportunities to return to employment.
- Increase the number of families from all target groups involved in shaping services and the governance of the centre.
- Continue to strengthen partnership working with early years providers and schools to:
 - reduce inequalities between groups of children, particularly for FSM children in the Bushey Mill reach area and boys
 - increase the number of eligible two-year-olds accessing early years provision.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Most three-and four-year-olds access funded places. However, not enough two-year olds are taking up their entitlement to free early education. The centre is working with these families to offer support and guidance and has set up a tracking system in order to monitor the progress of this group.
- Too few unemployed parents and lone parents attend adult learning programmes. This means not enough families receive sufficient help to enable them to return to training and employment.
- Leaders are looking closely at the full range of information to monitor the number of families who are registered and accessing services. As a result, registrations are increasing and leaders have identified where they need to focus their efforts to increase the number of target families accessing services. For example, registrations in Otterspool are high and leaders are looking at why only half of these families are participating in what the centre has to offer, including groups such as 'Fun with stories' held at Hartsping community centre where attendance levels are low.
- At 82%, most children under the age of five are registered with the centre and a large majority have been seen by the centre or one of its key partners in the last year. Leaders know the main trends of the area, and have used information it receives and local knowledge to deliver a range of services across the community. As a result, the number of families from target groups is increasing, including families living in Farrington, fathers and families from minority ethnic groups, including the traveller community.
- The centre works in close partnership with health and other professionals to prioritise families most in need of support. Nearly all families attend one-year and two-year-old development checks. Speech and language therapists hold regular drop-in sessions at the popular play and stay sessions held in the community. Strong partnership working enables early identification specific needs, such as communication delay.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centres are not yet measuring the impact of some of the key work they are doing with children and families. For example, written evaluations for activity sessions do not always draw well enough on data to show the full effect for families and celebrate some of the best work that is being done.
- Overall children's attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is in line with local authority average and above national average. However, there is some variation between different groups, for example, in 2013 around 66% of girls achieved a good level of development compared to 55% of boys and 19% of children eligible for free school meals. The centre has rightly identified this as an area to improve and partnership working with local schools and early years providers is developing well. However, the centre has not yet tracked individual's progress in order to measure the impact of the centres' work.
- The centre works effectively with a number of agencies to share information and identify those families at risk or most in need of support. The Common Assessment Framework process shows how services link together closely to target programmes of support. As a result, fewer numbers of children are now becoming subject to a child protection plan. However, the centre does not effectively track its involvement in complex cases and measure progress through rigorous case file recording.
- The adult learning programme does not sufficiently prepare parents for training and employment. Systems are not yet in place to identify each parent's learning needs and set individual goals for

achievement. Adult learning services are not aligned closely with volunteering opportunities. This means learning programmes are not yet purposeful in helping families, particularly those from workless households and lone parents, to return to employment.

- Families receive individual support to adopt healthier lifestyles and as a result breastfeeding rates are improving and obesity rates falling. New mothers receive effective support and guidance from the breastfeeding champions and sustain their breastfeeding longer. Courses run in partnership with health visitors, such as 'Welcome to the world' helps parents to bond with their baby, keep their baby safe in the home and supports their emotional wellbeing.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders are aware that the impact of the centres' work is not always clear. Leaders have developed improved systems to assess, plan and monitor the impact of the centres' work. They are supporting staff with the implementation of these systems to ensure they are effective. Such as the process to formally monitor the quality of activity sessions. However, this process does not yet identify actions for individual staff to make improvements in their work.
- The monitoring of case files by centre leaders is not sharp enough. Decisions made during staff supervision are not routinely included. This means case files do not clearly evidence decision making process and the impact of the centres' work with the most vulnerable groups.
- The local authority undertakes termly visits to the centres to monitor and measure the effectiveness of the group's work. The local authority has an accurate understanding of the centres' strengths and where it needs to improve and visits lead to precise and accurate target setting. The centre responds enthusiastically to agreed targets in order to improve its practice further.
- Not enough families are involved in the governance of the centre. Attempts to establish a parent forum have not been successful and the centre has looked at different ways to ensure families' views contribute to decision making, such as using social media sites.
- The safety and welfare of families underpins the centres' work and staff have a good knowledge of how to protect children. The centres provide a friendly, welcoming environment and good attention is paid towards security. Children's services praise the work of centre staff in working with some of the most vulnerable children. A local social worker told inspectors, 'children's centres are crucial to our work with vulnerable families. The work of the Bushey children's centres is excellent.'
- Advisory board members show a clear commitment to the centres' work and understand their role in challenging and monitoring the effectiveness of services by undertaking 'learning walks' with senior leaders.
- Resources, including staff deployment, are used appropriately to meet the needs of children and families. Community venues, such as First Place nursery are used for popular universal 'Play and stay' sessions and the toy library. A crèche is provided for parenting courses such as, 'Family toolkit' to ensure families who need the most help can access the services they 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.

Children's Centre Group details

Unique reference number	80154
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	430094
Managed by	Hertsmere Leisure on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,587
Centre leader	Madeliene Honour
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0208 9501112
Email address	Madeliene.honour@hertsmerereisure.co.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- H7 Bushey Mill Children's Centre URN 21334
- H8 The Reddings Children's Centre URN 21335

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