

# NH8 Bluebell Children's Centre

Bluebell Children's Centre, Standhill Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG4 9AF

<b>Inspection dates</b>	16–17 July 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b> Previous inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
		Not applicable	
Access to services by young children and families		Outstanding	1
The quality of practice and services		Outstanding	1
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is an outstanding centre.

- Over the last few years, the centre has proved highly successful at reaching its targeted and most vulnerable families. At 95%, the registration of families in its area is high and the centre knows almost all families.
- Most of those registered make very regular use of the centre's services, including those most in need. This is because the quality of the centre's services is consistently high.
- Across its large, 144 square mile area, the centre ensures it provides families with excellent access to its services, including those living in its more isolated rural areas and villages.
- The highly skilled staff know and understand the needs of its widespread local communities very well. This is because families are enabled to have a clear voice in the development of the centre and its services. There is a 'You Say – We Do' approach.
- Discussions with parents and carers, and the centre's regular surveys of its families, all point to exceptionally high levels of appreciation and satisfaction with the centre's work.
- Comments such as, 'The staff always know who to go to, and where to get help and advice. They are a great support at all times.', and 'The centre always does more than we expect. They go that extra mile – and more.', are typical of the views expressed to inspectors.
- Parents, carers and grandparents commented on the excellent quality of care, support and guidance provided by the centre and its staff; many say this has had a major impact on improving the quality of their lives, and that of their children and families.
- The centre's leaders provide excellent leadership. The centre manager leads by example, alongside other staff; this results in outstanding teamwork, including with other agencies.
- Partnerships with health, social services and education partners are all strong. Links with childminders, pre-school settings and local schools all ensure that children are prepared well to transfer to schools. Children attending the centre get a good start to their school life.

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

- Strengthen the centre's effectiveness in its assessments of children's development by ensuring the more frequent completion of children's learning journey logs, both to record their progress more regularly and to enhance the ways the centre enables parents to have an understanding of their children's learning, and how to support this even more effectively.

## 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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with: representatives from the local authority; the Pre-School Learning Alliance (PSLA); the centre's advisory board; the centre manager and staff of the children's centre; various groups of parents, grandparents, users of the centre and volunteers. Inspectors held discussions with representatives of organisations who work in partnership with the centre including: health and midwifery; social services; Job Centre Plus and Connexions; childminders and Early Years Foundation Stage teachers at local schools.

The inspectors visited a number of sessions held at the centre and at venues within the community, including outreach work in the centre's more isolated village areas.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation and action (development) plans, parents' evaluations and key policies. Inspectors explored the centre's procedures, including those relating to health and safety, safeguarding and child protection.

## Inspection team

Michael Miller, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Sandra Teacher

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Bluebell Children's Centre offers a range of services directly from its own premises and at other venues across its area. The centre serves not only Hitchin South but also the villages of Whitwell, Wymondley, Preston, St Ippolytts, Graveley and Breachwood Green.

The Pre School Learning Alliance (PSLA) manages the centre on behalf of the local authority. The centre is supported by an advisory board and a parents' forum.

The centre's reach area covers 144 square miles across the southern side of Hitchin and a number of rural, isolated communities with diverse needs. The centre's two highest levels of deprivation cover part of Hitchin South, known as Sunnyside, and the area covering the villages of Wymondley and Graveley.

There are approximately 891 children under five living in the reach area. The area is socially diverse and includes some of the most deprived areas in Hitchin as well as some which are more affluent. Nearly 8% of children aged 0–4years within the centre's area live in poverty.

Most families in the area are of White British heritage; there are a few families from other ethnic backgrounds, including families from Asian or Asian British heritage, mainly Indian, and others of White European heritage, mainly from European Union countries.

The centre has identified its key target groups as: children living in households with adult mental health issues; children living in low income households, including those eligible for the government's 2-year-old early education funding; children being cared for by members of extended families, mainly by grandparents; and children living in areas where rural isolation has been identified as a barrier to their development.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

### Outstanding

- The centre places a clear focus and priority in contacting and supporting those families who have been identified as most in need. There are clear systems for contacting and engaging those known to be starting families. The centre is conscientious in following up this information through letters, 'phone calls and particularly home visits. There is an excellent team approach to 'door-knocking' which is effective in even the most isolated areas.
- Registrations have improved steadily month-by-month over the past two years; the latest figures for the current month show that 95% of children under five, and their families, are registered at the centre. Most use the centre, and its outreach services, on a regular basis.
- Access to services is excellent because the centre has a 'can do' approach. Staff have their ear close to the ground and go out of their way to listen to families and assess their needs effectively. They also use their local knowledge really well to put on services which meet both current and future need. An example of this is the way it has responded recently to enabling a specific group for the growing number of families with twins and triplets.
- There are few families in the reach area, with children under five, with whom the centre has not yet made contact. Staff continue to pursue such families, if only to say 'hello' and advertise their services. Together with health and social services they are assiduous in the ways they follow up new birth information. A representative of the local authority described the centre staff as being 'like a dog with a bone' in this; the centre thrives on challenge.
- Data show that currently 100% of some key target families are being reached; this includes: families where there is the need for a CAF (Common Assessment Framework; a method for assessing needs for children to support earlier intervention and joint working between support agencies); children with a child protection plan; looked after children; Traveller families; families with disabled children or those with special educational needs; and families where there are adult mental health issues. This is an impressive record.
- In providing access to its services, the centre not only looks for short-term but also long-term gain for its children and families. A number of parents and carers pointed out that the staff always seem to find ways around things and problems. Comments such as: 'The centre is good at putting people together who can help each other.' were typical.

### The quality of practice and services

### Outstanding

- The impact of the centre's services is excellent because staff have a very positive approach when helping families. Through its wide range of universal and targeted services, the centre puts the building blocks there, and is successful in encouraging and enabling its more vulnerable families to re-build their lives. The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the staff is excellent, particularly for those families who are facing challenging circumstances.
- The quality and impact of the centre's services can be summed up by the comments of various parents and carers when they told inspectors: 'The centre has supported me every

step of the way, and built up my confidence.'; 'If it wasn't for Bluebell I wouldn't be where I am now.' The centre clearly has the 'personal touch' which is much valued by its local community.

- The centre is very successful in its support for new mothers in encouraging breastfeeding. The proportion of mothers breastfeeding their baby for six-to-eight weeks is above that seen both nationally and locally. A recent survey shows that over half of the centre's mothers continue breastfeeding to six months or more.
- Very well-organised support, advice and training are improving the quality of early years provision in the local area. In 2013, 72.6% of children living in the reach area achieved a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage which is well above the national average. The latest 2014 data indicate that the proportion of children who have used the centre's services, and gone on to achieve a good level of development by age 5, is above that of their peers locally. The gap in attainment between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is 10% less than seen nationally, and is better than for the local authority as a whole.
- The centre has focused very productively on provision for its Under 1s, and has proved very successful in helping almost all families to gain funding for free early education or childcare for 2, 3 and 4 year old children. It has excellent partnerships with local schools to enable 'transition' courses for children transferring from pre-school to school Early Years Foundation Stage settings.
- There is just one area where the centre can develop further its established good practice; this relates to the 'learning journey logs' the centre maintains on its group activities for children. The centre assesses children's progress and development very well, particularly on an individual basis, but does not always keep some of the group activity learning journeys consistently up-to-date. Records in these logs are not always entered frequently enough.
- Very effective partnerships with adult education providers and voluntary organisations promotes the development of adults' employability skills which, in turn, helps increasing numbers to gain employment. Adults have good access to training, one-to-one advice on such things as benefits and job applications, and volunteering opportunities that improve their employability skills. There are effective arrangements with a local firm of solicitors to provide advice on family law.

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management** Outstanding

- The outstanding leadership of the centre ensures that staff are always available when they are needed. Staff are invariably friendly and helpful, and always have a 'can do' attitude.
- The manager is keen to help staff to focus and reflect on what they do right, and uses regular supervision and evaluations of staff performance productively to help them develop both their personal and professional skills and to keep children safe. Staff use their knowledge and expertise of the parents as well as their own; they value everyone, and are good at motivating people. The centre is good at helping parents to 'prove' themselves to themselves as effective parents. This sort of approach has enabled the centre to meet consistently, and most often exceed, its targets.
- Leadership ensures that the centre is an inclusive place. It is clear that people from

different backgrounds get on really well at the centre. As one parent said, 'People don't get left behind at this centre; it is good at breaking down barriers. They don't put labels on you.' This approach, and a strong partnership with the local Ethnic Minority Forum, results in the centre being successful in welcoming and supporting minority heritage families.

- The safeguarding of families, and their general health and safety, have a high priority. Staff are well-trained to support parents in cases of domestic abuse. One such mother told inspectors, 'They helped even before the baby was born. The centre's Freedom Programme helped me say 'No' to a violent partner.'
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are applied rigorously. Families identified as needing additional help, such as through a CAF, child protection plans or those deemed in need are supported well.
- The governance and monitoring of the centre's work is exemplary, not only through the centre manager, but also cooperatively through its advisory board, parents' forum, the local authority' improvement partner for the centre, and line management through the Pre-School Learning Alliance (PSLA). Those responsible for the governance of the centre provide excellent strategic leadership.
- The centre manager and the PSLA maintain prudent control over the centre's finances. Resources are used particularly well, including the use of a 'campervan' to ensure they can be transported to the centre's more isolated locations. As another user declared, 'They do so much constructively in such a small space.' The centre manager has also proved very successful in gaining additional grant funding to extend the centre's work and impact; for example to promote healthy lifestyles.
- The final word should be given to another two of the centres users who stated, 'Nothing is too much of a problem for the Bluebell Children's Centre.', and simply, 'Bluebell is the best!'

## 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.

## Centre details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	22148
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	442858
<b>Managed by</b>	The Pre-School Learning Alliance on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	891
<b>Centre leader</b>	Heather Crouch
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01462 459043
<b>Email address</b>	heather.crouch@pre-school.org.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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (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](mailto: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.

This template is available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130186](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/130186).

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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

No. 130186

© Crown copyright 2014

