

Hazlemere and Loudwater Children's Centre

43 Highfield Way, Hazlemere, Buckinghamshire, HP15 7UW

Inspection dates

Not previously inspected

9–10 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:		
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.

- Three quarters of all young children living in the centre's reach area are registered and the large majority of families, from most priority groups, use services regularly.
- Centre users have high levels of satisfaction and many believe strongly that centre services make an important difference to their lives and well-being. 'Staff are welcoming, friendly and have helped me and my child build confidence – we both love coming' is a typical parent's comment.
- At 73% the proportion of Reception-age children achieving a good level of development is higher than seen locally or nationally. Good quality centre sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Let's Go to School' contribute to this positive picture.
- The centre's close partnership work with health professionals underpins the very good health outcomes. It also helps expectant, young and new parents engage with services and supports them in caring for their children.
- Effective services are available to enhance parenting, assist family learning, support further education and advise parents on financial matters, including about benefits and debt management. Well trained volunteers enjoy beneficial work experience and improve their employability skills as well as adding value to the centre's tight resources.
- Good leadership and management are taking the centre forward. The advisory board is well informed, supportive and challenging. There is good capacity to sustain improvements.

It is not outstanding because:

- Some information provided by the local authority is not sufficiently accurate, timely or detailed enough and this hinders leaders' ability to fully evaluate the centre's performance.
- Not enough focus has been given to engaging with the small but significant number of workless families with young children, particularly those living in Loudwater.
- New planning and assessment systems to check target children's learning and development are being implemented but as yet the centre cannot prove that all make good progress.
- The checks made to ensure that families benefit from the services they receive currently lack cohesion and this makes it hard for leaders to see what impact they are having on improving outcomes.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority to improve the timeliness and detail of the information provided about the engagement of all the centre's specific priority groups and use this to inform the quarterly checks on the centre's performance and ensure their accuracy.
- Increase the access and engagement of workless families with young children, especially those living in Loudwater.
- Sharpen the planning of sessions to ensure that target children's next steps are consistently identified and extend the work with early year's partners, to ensure that children's progress is checked over time.
- Press ahead with implementing the tracking tool that has been designed to pull together all the checks made on centre services and the impact they have on improving the outcomes for children and families.

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 local services coordinator, centre staff, Barnardo's senior staff, local authority officers, partners, parents and members of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited a number of activities held in the centre, one jointly with the local services coordinator and looked at electronic case files with family support staff.

Inspectors took into account parents' views as expressed directly to them during the inspection, as well as through their recorded evaluations about the centre's work.

Inspectors also looked at a wide range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Susan Metcalfe

Additional inspector

Janet Dinsmore

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Hazlemere and Loudwater is a stand-alone children's centre which opened in 2009. In February 2014 it formed a collaboration with Amersham Children's Centre. Little Breaks (URN EY 444855), providing respite care for disabled and those with special educational needs, currently operates from the children's centre one afternoon a week. Both of these settings are inspected under separate arrangements. Their reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The management team consists of an assistant director who oversees all of the Barnardo's services in Buckinghamshire, including the 16 children's centres managed on behalf of the local authority, an area manager who oversees the work of the local services coordinator who manages this centre and three other children's centres. The centre's staff team consists of the local services coordinator, a family support worker and play leader. An advisory board and parents' forum are established.

There are 1,012 children under the age of five living in the reach area which is located in the east of the Wycombe district of Buckinghamshire. It comprises the wards of: Hazlemere North, Hazlemere South, Tylers Green and Loudwater. The reach area as a whole is affluent with high employment but also has isolated pockets of disadvantage, mainly in Loudwater. Most families are White British. Children's skills, knowledge and ability on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are generally at the level expected for their age. The centre which is situated in Hazlemere, provides a range of services to meet local needs which include a growing number of outreach services in Loudwater.

The priority groups identified by the children's centre include: children living in Loudwater, disabled children, two year-old children eligible for free education, children and families in greatest need, new parents and grandparents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families **Good**

- Registrations are rising and are not far short of the 80% target which the centre is working towards. The very large majority of children and families from priority groups, including those expecting children, are registered. All disabled children, and the large majority of grandparents, young and new parents use services often. Children and families in greatest need have contact with the centre through effective one-to-one support, or from centre coordinated specialist services, until their needs are met.
- Some 84% of eligible two-year-olds take up their free education place and all of them have attended the centre three or more times in the last quarter. Virtually all three and four year-olds from the reach area access an early year's setting, which for the most part are of good or outstanding quality.
- Long awaited data on new births is to be provided by the local authority in October. Through its effective partnership with health professionals, the centre has worked around this and been able to build useful information about families, particularly those who most need support. For example, a number of health clinics are run from the centre supported by centre staff and this means that there is early contact with expectant, new and young parents. Specific groups such as 'Bumps and Babes', 'Tiny Toes' and 'Baby Sing and Sign' have been initiated to meet assessed needs and result in the good engagement of very young children and families.
- The centre gathers and analyses information about participation levels, including when families access other children's centres, and follows up quickly when attendance dips. Some families have been helped to overcome barriers such as limited transport with specific funding so they can access activities. Future actions are also identified such as inviting children and families to attend a particular session that might benefit them.

- Though increasing rapidly, currently just over a half of children living in Loudwater sustain engagement with services but the centre is working effectively to improve this. Despite the centre's endeavour it has been difficult to find suitable venues in Loudwater, a neighbourhood which is some distance from the centre building. A range of weekly sessions now take place, including 'Fun with Stories' and 'Stay and Play', which are very well attended.
- The information provided by the local authority about workless families suggests that only 6% access services. However, concerns have been raised by leaders about its accuracy. The centre has worked hard to identify workless families and has made contact with 21 who have young children, mainly in the Loudwater area. Leaders have recently carried out a survey of their needs and devised a very clear improvement strategy.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- There is a good range of services which balance those available to everyone with ones specifically for priority groups such as young parents and disabled children. Feedback from children and families about the quality of the services they receive is very good. Working parents greatly appreciate the monthly Saturday activities which help build positive relationships and enable families to enjoy quality time together.
- The centre staff lead a range of activities open to everyone such as 'Stay and Play' that are designed to promote good quality early learning. Planning links well to the three prime areas of communication, personal development and physical development, and resources are well chosen to help children learn through first hand experiences. Learning journeys are in place to record how well target children make progress during sessions but the outcomes are not being used consistently to plan their next steps. This is a missed opportunity to ensure their good development.
- Grandparents, many of whom look after their grandchildren attend a weekly session which has a clear focus on promoting children's high quality learning experiences through positive play with ideas for continuing this at home.
- The centre works effectively with partners to reduce inequalities and help children prepare for the next stage of education and school-readiness through sessions such as the five-week programme 'Let's Go to School'. In 2013, the proportion of reception-age children from the reach area who achieved a good level of development was 20% higher than the national level. This year the proportion is slightly higher but the national average is not yet known. Work is at a very early stage to find out how well children who have accessed children centres services achieve when they are five years old, particularly target children, so that the impact of the centre's interventions can be more fully evaluated.
- At 7.2% childhood obesity is lower than average and at 72% the level of sustained breastfeeding is very high. Weaning sessions run by the centre in collaboration with health visitors are well attended and help promote good eating habits early on. Cooking courses provide useful information about diet and nutrition as well as how to prepare economic, healthy family meals.
- Care, guidance and support are good and family case files are maintained well. The tool used to show how much families' lives improve, following support from centre staff, identifies significant benefits, especially in their mental health and physical well-being
- Parenting courses are run in collaboration with other children's centres in the locality and evaluations demonstrate the good impact they have particularly on positive behaviour management. Families' economic well-being is supported effectively by partners' services such as regular Citizen Advice Bureau sessions held at the centre to give general financial advice or provide one-to-one support to families in need.
- Young parents benefit from wider Bernardo's services through a dedicated worker who helps build their skills and confidence to aid progress to work, education and training opportunities. Volunteering provides a valuable service in helping run the centre through a variety of roles including administration, assisting play workers and updating the high-quality displays. Volunteers become much valued team members. Some have progressed successfully to paid work and higher-education.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**Good**

- The local services coordinator leads the centre well and has the full support of the enthusiastic small staff team. Induction and supervision arrangements run smoothly and tie in well to staff appraisal and their on-going professional development.
- Those responsible for leadership evaluate the centre's performance accurately and the action plan for 2014/15 is focussed on the right priorities to drive positive change. Resources are deployed sensibly; the collaboration with other children's centres in the locality aids efficiencies and supports the centre in achieving good effectiveness.
- The well-attended advisory board comprises key partners and parents and has a firm grasp of the centre's strengths and areas for development.
- The local authority undertakes quarterly contract reviews that look at how well the centre is doing against agreed targets. However, the system being used does not provide a fair reflection of progress towards these targets and as such most outcomes are rated as 'red' which flags concerns. This is at odds with other performance monitoring which suggest the centre is performing well. The absence of data about the level of engagement by all the centre's specific priority groups curtails reliable accountability checks.
- 'Touch base' visits to a range of activities are carried out by the area manager and local services coordinator in order to keep an eye on the quality and impact of services. Recording is detailed and evaluative with helpful feedback given to the staff leading the session. A tracking tool has recently been designed to pull together all the checks made on centre services and the impact they have on improving the outcomes for children and families but has yet to be implemented.
- Safeguarding is at the heart of the centre's work, and its policies, procedures and practice all meet requirements. Risk assessments concerning home visits have been sharpened in the light of a serious case review experienced elsewhere. There are currently no children subject to a child protection plan or looked after. The very small number assessed as 'in need' have support planned directly by social care services.
- Collaborative working, to ensure that early help reduces the risk of harm to vulnerable children, relies heavily on the good quality relationships among professionals at the operational level, including with the resilience team. Developments concerning multi-agency working and information sharing to support safeguarding matters are currently being progressed at the strategic level. A link social worker has just been allocated to the centre but has yet to make contact.
- Parents and children have plenty of opportunities to put forward their views which the centre listens to carefully and uses to help shape services. Partners hold the centre in high regard and value the opportunities to work collaboratively in meeting local needs. The words of one partner sum up others: 'Stuff happens, it gets sorted – communication is excellent.'

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

Unique reference number	21424
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	451676
Managed by	Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,012
Local services coordinator	Joanne Lawrence
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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