

Ivinghoe and Pitstone Children's Centre

Brookmead School, High Street, Ivinghoe, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 9EX

Inspection dates

Previous inspection date

14–16 October 2014

Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
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 is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Although the large majority of families in the area are registered with the centre, only 50% are accessing centre services. Too few unemployed parents, and families living in rural isolation, are engaging with the centre.
- Services to help parents into adult learning and employment require development.
- Systems to track children's learning and development have only recently been introduced. It is too soon to know whether children are making good progress.
- Monitoring and observation of sessions by leaders are too infrequent. The centre's plans lack precision and links between plans, priorities, targets and training for staff are not always clear.
- The advisory board focuses too much on preparing children for starting school and needs to broaden its challenge and support of the centre.
- Partnerships with children's social care, the family resilience service and some primary schools require further development.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Centre staff are positive role models who provide good quality care, guidance and support, especially for families during times of crisis.
- The centre is a safe, welcoming place with a wealth of information attractively displayed.
- Parent involvement in the centre is strong. The centre provides good volunteering opportunities.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the centre and drive improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the engagement of all families, but especially children from birth to four years of age in workless households, and families living in rural isolation so, as a minimum, the large majority regularly access services.
- Embed systems to observe, assess and track children's progress and further develop work in partnership with schools to ensure all children are well prepared for school and make good progress.
- Ensure that those parents who would benefit from adult learning and employability services access them, and track how these services make a difference to families' lives.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring plans are precise and indicate clear links between performance management, identified areas for development and staff training
 - appropriately expanding the membership of the advisory board so that members can better challenge and support the centre to meet key priorities
 - monitoring and evaluating more frequently the quality of group sessions to improve practice and inform future activities
 - clarifying and embedding links with professionals in social care.

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, working in conjunction with the inspectors leading on each of the other two simultaneous inspections.

The inspectors held meetings with Barnardo's managers and staff; parents and volunteers; partners in health, education, social care and community services; advisory board members; and representatives from the local authority.

The inspectors visited the centre, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Alan Comerford-Dunbar, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Shagufta Shahin	Additional Inspector
Rob Mottram	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Ivinghoe and Pitstone Children's Centre serves a rural population. It was designated in 2009. There are approximately 560 children under the age of five years living in the centre's reach area. Almost all families are of White British heritage and about 8% are from a number of minority ethnic heritage groups. Children enter school with skills, knowledge and abilities that match those typical for their age. There is no onsite childcare provision.

The centre is governed and managed by Barnardo's on behalf of Buckinghamshire County Council. The day-to-day running of the centre is carried out by a service coordinator, supported by the Barnardo's area manager and a national team. The centre works in a cluster with Wing, and Waddesdon and Whitchurch Children's Centres to provide a range of activities and services at the centres and at outreach venues. It has its own advisory board. The inspections of Wing Children's Centre and Waddesdon and Whitchurch Children's Centre took place at the same time and their inspection reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk

The area covered by the centre is varied, with generally affluent villages containing pockets of deprivation and some unemployment. Housing is mostly owner occupied, although the centre serves some areas of social housing. The number of looked after children and children subject to protection plans is low. Around 33 families have a lone parent with children aged under five years.

The centre has identified its target groups as families with two-year-olds entitled to funded early education, children under five from multiple birth families, children from referred families and those at risk of being in greatest need, and children living in workless households.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Although recently improved, for example by the acquisition and use of live birth data, information on priority families lacks clarity. This makes it difficult for leaders to judge the impact of strategies to engage with some groups. A recently conducted external review of the centre has enabled leaders to create appropriate plans to increase registrations and engagements still further.
- Strategies for encouraging families to attend the centre regularly are not fully effective. Too few families, especially children aged from birth to four years living in workless households and families living in rural areas, attend services on a regular basis. Centre leaders have been very successful in engaging with families referred to the centre by other professionals.
- A majority of eligible two-year-olds and the large majority of three- and four-year-olds take up their free entitlement to early education. Antenatal and postnatal classes held at the centre are well attended and highly valued by parents. As one mother said, 'What a resource ... I never knew how much help there was available.'
- Families enjoy accessing the centre. They feel safe, valued and enjoy attending the bright welcoming centre. Good use is made of wall space and displays to reinforce key messages, celebrate achievement of users and ensure all visitors are aware of the centre's priority to support families.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The quality and impact of practice and services require improvement because not enough families make use of the good provision. Families benefit from a good balance of services and activities open

to everyone and those aimed at specific groups. The quality of activities is overwhelmingly good. However, too few courses are run to meet the needs of the local community and attendance at sessions is sometimes low.

- The latest Early Years Foundation Stage information shows that the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception year is above national and county averages and improving. The centre has good working links with some pre-schools and primary schools in the area. However, further analysis of data and information sharing is required to ensure that the centre's work helps children develop the skills they need for starting school and narrows the achievement gap for those children from less affluent families.
- Individual family files capture the impact of services on outcomes through the early help assessment and the use of this is becoming embedded as more staff are trained. An appropriate tracking tool to help leaders and managers monitor the effectiveness of the work is just being implemented. This will enable the overall impact of the centre's work on family outcomes to be better collated.
- Family support work is of good quality and leads to positive outcomes for most families and children, including those with additional needs and disabilities. Staff refer families to children's social care appropriately when concerns escalate. However, case recording systems are currently unwieldy and time consuming. Action planning is completed and updated regularly, but is not currently outcome focused and sometimes lack timescales.
- Not enough families access adult education opportunities and are supported into employment due to low engagement with workless families and under-developed links with agencies. For those that do access these services, outcomes are not sufficiently tracked or focused on improving life chances or reducing inequalities.
- Well established and effective joint working arrangements with health professionals ensure that health outcomes in the reach area are good. Obesity rates are significantly better than local and national averages at only 7%. However, staff are not complacent and provide good support in this area, for example through healthy eating workshops and healthy snacks served in all groups.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- There is a lack of coherence between individual action plans and the strategic plan, written to address the centre's key priorities. Timescales and success measures are not always precise. Staff attend training events, but these opportunities are not closely linked to the key priorities identified in the plans. The observation of direct practice is not sufficiently frequent or focused on improving staff performance.
- The advisory board membership is too narrow and requires expansion. Despite significant recent improvements due to the positive impact of the new Advisory Board chair, too much focus is on children and helping them to acquire the skills needed for starting school. Members lack the necessary expertise to check other aspects of the centre's work, such as worklessness, adult provision, employability and housing issues.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Children who are looked after, subject to child protection plans, and those deemed to be children in need are well supported. Parents understand the importance of adopting safe practices. Staff have good knowledge and keep detailed records which are closely supervised.
- Centre staff make best use of available resources to provide a range of services and support to families at risk of greatest need. The centre is well resourced and provides a safe and welcoming environment. Good liaison is made with relevant professionals to ensure that children with disabilities access services through the Barnardo's Little Breaks service.
- Partnership with health professionals is strong, especially so with the local midwifery team. Health visitors often promote the work of the centre with families, which has led to an increase in registrations. However, greater clarity is required of the roles between centre staff, the family resilience team and social care colleagues.
- Volunteers and parents make a good contribution to centre activities. An active parent forum and

parent representative on the advisory board ensure that parents' views are heard. Good use is made of volunteers to increase capacity at the centre.

- Leaders know what they need to do to improve and self-evaluation is accurate. A recent, robust quality improvement assessment review (September 2014), conducted by Barnardo's, is helping leaders to understand better the challenges facing the centre. Appropriate actions are now being planned by leaders, although it is too early to judge the impact of these plans.
- Managers provide good leadership for staff, who are well qualified and passionate about reducing inequalities for families. They come from a range of professional backgrounds, and supervisions ensure that they deal with issues in a professional, yet caring, way. The stretched frontline staff are dedicated and hard working.

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.

Group details

Unique reference number	21617
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	451388
Managed by	Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	560
Centre leader	Sarah Elliott
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