

Leighton Buzzard Children's Centre

Main Base The Moorings Children's Centre, 201 Vandyke Road, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 3HS

Inspection dates	3–4 December 2014
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not applicable	
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.

- The large majority of families who live in the area are registered with the centre. Most children and families who are most in need of support are known to the centre and are accessing the services it provides.
- Partnerships with other agencies are strong. As a result most children are healthy and ready for school.
- Effective multi-agency working means the centre knows what each family needs and enables them to access well coordinated early support so that children and parents improve their well being.
- Skilled staff provide and plan a good range of services which help parents to support their children's learning.
- A high number of parents attend a wide range of adult education sessions. The centre provides effective advice, guidance and support for families who are suffering from domestic violence.
- The centre manager is highly effective and is the driving force behind the centre's strength and good capacity for sustained improvement.
- There are robust reporting procedures to the local authority and the advisory board and as a result managers are effectively challenged and supported.

It is not outstanding because:

- The number of children of the newly arrived families from Eastern Europe who are registered and engaging with the centre is not high enough.
- Not enough two year olds access their free entitlement to early education.
- The information available, including some provided by partner agencies, is not always used effectively to track achievements, demonstrate the impact of services and enhance planning.
- The centre is unaware of the impact of services delivered by partners through service level agreements with the local authority.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the large majority of families from the Eastern European community are engaged with the centre and help to support their English language needs.
- Ensure most eligible two-year-olds take up their free entitlement to early education.
- Improve tracking and assessment systems by more accurately measuring the impact of services particularly on the progression of adults' learning and employability skills.
- Ensure that the local authority reports back relevant outcomes from its monitoring of service level agreements to increase the centre's awareness of the impact of what partners deliver in the reach to better inform planning.

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 centre staff, a representative of the local authority, the children's centre co-ordinator and Action for Children's service manager. They also met the chairperson and members of the advisory board; parents and users of the centre; and representatives of organisations who work in partnership with the centre.

The inspectors visited the two main delivery sites at The Moorings and The Roundabout centres, and observed sessions delivered at outreach venues in Hockliffe Lower School and Toddington Methodist Church Community Room.

They observed the centre's work, carried out a joint observation with the centre co-ordinator and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Geoffrey Dorrity, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Lesley Talbot-Strettle	Additional inspector
Ann Taylor	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Leighton Buzzard Children's Centre is one of nine children's centres which serve Central Bedfordshire. It is a stand-alone centre managed by Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. Governance of the centre is shared between the local authority, Action for Children and the centre's advisory board. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the centre manager, who also manages another centre on behalf of Action for Children and who oversees a team of nine staff.

Following a restructure by the local authority in 2012 the centre comprises of a base site, and two satellites, which were previously children's centres in their own right. The centre's main delivery site is at The Moorings, where there are offices, an activity room, and meeting rooms. The centre also operates from the Roundabout Centre, based at St George's Lower School, Leighton Buzzard, which has an office and an activity room; and The Helter Skelter Centre, at Toddington St George's Lower School, where there is an office base. Activities are also delivered from community buildings in the area. The school's are subject to a separate inspection and the reports can be accessed on Ofsted's website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre works with a wide range of partner organisations to offer a variety of services for parents and young children such as family support, stay and play activities, health services, and adult education. It also refers them to other specialist providers. The centre does not provide day care for young children.

The centre's reach area is extensive. It is centred on the town of Leighton Buzzard and the larger village of Toddington, but covers many outlying villages. An estimated 3362 children under the age of five live in the area. Most families are White British. Just under 10% come from minority ethnic backgrounds; this includes some families from Traveller communities. The area is one of relative affluence, but there are pockets of deprivation near to the centre where levels of unemployment and the proportion of families dependent on benefits are above those for the surrounding area.

The centre has identified its key priority groups as: children living in the most deprived part of the reach area; children from minority ethnic families; and lone parents. In addition, the centre prioritises those from the local authority's target groups which include: teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers; children living in low income or workless households; children living in families where there is domestic abuse, substance abuse or adult mental health problems; and children living in vulnerable circumstances.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Leaders have been successful at increasing the numbers of families registered with the centre, so that nearly all families who are most likely to need some help and support are registered, with a large majority of the rest. They have made services as accessible as possible by delivering in outreach venues in outlying villages, and by providing travel tokens for those who are most isolated.
- The centre works well with its key partners to identify expectant families and children under one year of age, with all these families being contacted and the vast majority seen. The information enables leaders to plan precisely services and activities to meet their needs. As a result staff are successfully supporting most of these families as they prepare for the birth of their child through to their first steps.

- The centre is very good at reaching those families most in need of help. Support workers attend professional and voluntary group meetings, and effectively use the Early Help Assessment process. This means they provide timely support for families and work successfully to help keep children safe. All of the most vulnerable children and teenage parents in the area benefit from what the centre offers, with most children from the priority groups engaged and accessing services, including those from the traveller community. However, the small number of children and their families recently arrived from Eastern Europe are less likely to attend.
- Leaders have good links with community partners in the area and this has enabled the centre to establish good quality outreach services in the outlying villages. For example the Playtime Rhyme sessions delivered at Toddington Methodist Church, is well attended and means staff are able to identify needs early and support those families in most need.
- The large majority of those families dependant on workless benefits attend sessions run by the centre and benefit from the advice and guidance of its partners. For example adults are helped to develop their budgeting skills and begin to develop their employability skills through adult learning.
- Those who are suffering from domestic violence are exceptionally well supported, and the vast majority attend the centre because what the centre offers them meets their needs and builds their confidence and self-esteem.
- All those who are eligible for free early education are contacted and the offer is effectively promoted to them. This has resulted in a large majority of children aged two taking up their offer, with most of those who live in the more deprived areas attending pre-school settings. Almost all children who are three and four take up their offer. The centre makes sure that if children are not taking up the offer in a setting then they will attend sessions and activities offered by the centre.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The centre's work with families, both in their own home and in the centre or its outreach sites, is highly effective and makes a considerable difference to those concerned. Parents state that 'the staff are welcoming and approachable' and 'they don't judge you and are there to help.' Others report that having attended courses and activities they are more confident in their parenting skills, and in keeping their children safe from harm. Records show the improvements that have been made to families lives, and the safety and well-being of their children over time.
- Staff are skilled at using the Early Help Assessments to identify which services will help individual families, and agree a plan with them. They then work with partner agencies where needed to make sure that parents and their children receive the right services and achieve their goals.
- Many of the parents most in need of help go on to take part in courses such as the Parenting Puzzle. The evaluation of these courses by those who have attended show improvements parenting skills in areas such as establishing routines and managing their children's behaviour. 'I know how to say 'No' and stick to it', said one parent.
- The centre tracks children to the end of the reception class in school. This shows that children who attend this centre are doing better than those children who do not. This is because the centre provides good quality, well-planned services delivered by highly skilled staff, focussing on the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Story and Rhyme sessions effectively promote children's early learning and social skills. In one session children demonstrated how they understood and followed routines, with little support from adults. They developed their language skills, repeating rhyming couplets while reading a

story, and their physical and cooperative skills whilst playing parachute games together. At the same time staff were demonstrating excellent role modelling, and giving advice and guidance to new parents.

- The majority of health outcomes are met in the area. Obesity levels are well-below the average level. This is because of the successful promotion of healthy lifestyles by the centre. Breastfeeding Brasseries are particularly popular, which has improved the number of mothers who continue to breastfeed at two months. Inoculation rates are high, and staff are due to be trained to deliver the winter flu vaccinations.
- A small number of parents volunteer at the centre at any one time. This is because the centre helps them to develop their skills, and they quickly move on into further training or employment. A very large number of parents are accessing adult education at or through the centre doing a wide range of courses to meet their needs. There is some evidence of how parents are moving on to higher levels of qualifications, however, the tracking of their progression and whether they move into employment is not focussed enough to inform the centre of its impact.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre manager leads by example and has ensured there is a very motivated team. They share her high aspirations through their full involvement in decision making and in reviewing targets for the centre. The stability of the staff is a testament to this.
- Performance management and supervision are well established and methodical. This includes direct observation of sessions and interactions with families. Staff training and appraisals are carefully linked to the centres priorities. Staff access a range of courses to continuously improve their skills and knowledge.
- The highly skilled, dedicated team successfully focuses its efforts on having the maximum impact on reducing inequalities and improving the well being of local families. The professional discussions at the advisory board contribute well to improving outcomes.
- Staff take their duties towards safeguarding very seriously. Policies and procedures are thorough and the Early Help Assessment process is used well to assess need and co-ordinate support for families including the most vulnerable, looked after children, children in need and those on a child protection plan.
- The local authority hold a variety of service level agreements with other agencies and monitor these quarterly. However, the centre does not receive reports of this monitoring relevant to its reach area, which means it is not fully informed.
- The centre gathers an impressive amount of data, however, this is not always analysed effectively. This means that the centre is not always aware of the progression of children and parents.
- The advisory board now receives reports and budget information which is used to challenge and support the centre. This format has recently been introduced and is not yet fully embedded, however this has not inhibited the board who have previously challenged the centre with regard to registration figures for example. This resulted in all partners becoming more active in promoting the centre services, a streamlining of the registration process, and a subsequent rapid increase in registration. Their challenge has also resulted in more effective targeting of services and better scrutiny through the new reporting arrangements.
- The local authority effectively monitors the centres impact on children and parents who live in the area covered by the centre. They have an accurate picture of how successful the centre is, and

have set stretching targets for the centre to work towards. These targets are based on robust data, and are reflected in the accurate self assessment by the centre. The well written and measurable service development plan, which informs the centre's delivery plans for the future has clear responsibilities and descriptions of what success should look like.

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	21797
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	447479
Managed by	Action for Children on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3490
Centre manager	Hazel Jeffrey
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01525 384368
Email address	hazel.jeffrey@actionforchildren.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. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email 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.

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.

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
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 130186