

COL9 Beehive Children's Centre

c/o Queen Boudica Primary School, Cowper Crescent, Colchester, CO4 5XT

Inspection dates	3–4 March 2015
Previous inspection date	Not Previously Inspected

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

- Although the overall proportion of children accessing services is starting to show improvement the large majority in some priority groups do not yet use the centre's services.
- Leaders do not always make the best use of information to assess needs, including adult learning, and ensure that some priority groups access services until their needs are met.
- Less than half of the two year-old children who are eligible for free early education take up their entitlement. Only a third is taking up places in one of the most deprived areas in Highwood.
- Processes to track the progress that children from priority groups make when they access centre activities are not well developed. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not achieve well at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and they are falling further behind their peers.
- Development planning is in place but is not tightly focussed on improving access to, or the impact of, services for priority groups. Actions are not always sufficiently targeted.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Family support work is very effective and staff receive regular good quality supervision to support their work with children and families from priority groups.
- Sessions which are open to all families are often very well attended. Staff take services out into the community, including to the rural villages, to the north of Colchester.
- Staff are well trained, experienced and committed to delivering good quality services.
- Volunteers make a significant contribution to the running of the centre. Six volunteers have progressed into employment or education during the last twelve months.
- The local authority and district board are taking effective action to improve the access to services and have recently begun to offer increased levels of appropriate challenge and support.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that at least the large majority of children from priority groups are engaged in appropriate centre services by:
 - ensuring almost all new births are registered with the centre
 - analysing information more closely to identify exactly which children require support
 - establishing how many children from these groups are living in the area and implement focussed plans to improve their engagement with services
 - analysing attendance more thoroughly by using information which is captured effectively on the management information system to target services where they are needed
 - working with partners to ensure most two year-old children take up their free entitlement to early education
 - re-shaping the programme of services and activities to better meet children's needs.
- Assess the needs of all parents from priority groups to identify any further learning or skills training required and work with partners to increase parents' engagement in services that will improve their economic well-being.
- Work closely with the local authority and partners to ensure that services are more focussed on improving children's school readiness, particularly for those who are less likely to achieve well and so that any gaps in achievement close quickly by:
 - using achievement information more robustly to focus services towards children and families from priority groups
 - implementing rigorous systems and processes to track the progress that children make when they access services and focus in more detail on the needs of priority children.
- The lead agency and local authority should strengthen leadership, management and governance so that the pace of improvement increases by:
 - working in a co-ordinated way to develop an improvement plan with specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited targets
 - ensuring that the centre has regular and timely access to the all of the data it needs on children's achievement and adult learning
 - monitoring improvements on a regular basis and making robust checks on the centre's performance.

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, parents and a wide range of partners including health and education.

The inspectors visited the adoption group, child-minders' drop in, 'Baby Peep', 'Rhythm and Rhyme' and 'Baby Beginnings'. They visited services delivered at the Beehive Children's Centre, Highwoods and Boxted. The centre manager jointly observed a centre activity. The children's services manager, centre manager and new centre manager (maternity cover) were involved in all centre meetings.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation and electronic case files and quality assurance records.

Inspection team

Lead inspector, Michael Blakey	Additional inspector
Ann Taylor	Additional inspector
Stephen Nelson	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Beehive Children's Centre opened in 2011 as a stand-alone centre that shares a site with Queen Boudica Primary School which is inspected under separate arrangements. Its report can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>. The centre delivers a range of services including health, early learning activities, family support and some adult learning. Services are delivered from the children's centre, located in Highwoods and from venues across the predominantly rural area to the North of Colchester. Barnardo's, a national children's charity manages the centre on behalf of Essex County Council. An advisory board, known as the district board is established and is chaired by the headteacher of a local primary school.

Over the past twelve months there have been significant changes to leadership and management. At the time of the inspection, the centre manager, who came into post in summer 2014 was due to go on maternity leave. The maternity cover centre manager was involved in a handover of responsibility. The children's services manager, responsible for Barnardo's children's centre services across Colchester, is relatively new in post.

Most of the area is relatively affluent with pockets of deprivation, particularly Chinook, close to Highwoods, and some of the new social housing near to Beehive Children's Centre. Unemployment rates are above those seen nationally but improving. The large majority of families are from White British backgrounds. Overall, children living in the area served by the centre enter early years provision with skills and experiences that are typical for their age. However, in the co-located Queen Boudica School, only 30% of children start at the expected level of development.

The centre has identified the following priority groups: lone parents; children living in workless households; minority ethnic families and teenage parents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Access to services requires improvement because the centre does not have access to reliable information about the number of lone parents or children living in workless households. This makes it challenging for leaders to fully assess the needs of these priority groups or to accurately know what proportion is registered and using the centre regularly. In addition, the centre has yet to ensure that most new births are followed up quickly, and that parents register their child.
- At 48%, the proportion of two-year-old children taking up their free entitlement to early education is low. Places in good quality settings are available but the centre has only recently been provided with information about the children who are eligible and so has not had the time to effectively target families to promote this important offer.
- Overall, the large majority of children living in the area served by the centre are registered as a result of the effective day-to-day partnership work with health services. Partnership work is also helping centre staff to know which children require additional support. Families expecting children have improving access to services, information, advice and guidance. The analysis of data undertaken by the centre during the inspection shows that children and families that are accessing centre services, such as teenage parents, keep in regular contact.

- The majority of children under three years of age have accessed services across the area and Colchester town over the last twelve months. Likewise, the majority of children from minority ethnic backgrounds and those living in Chinook, the most deprived area, accessed services at least once during the same period. The proportion of children and families accessing from these two priority groups is increasing and demonstrates that the centre has secure capacity to improve its reach.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The quality of practice and services requires improvement because not enough children and families from some priority groups access the generally good quality services on offer, including 'Baby Beginnings' and 'Baby Peep'. This limits the centre's ability to make a positive difference to the lives of some of the most vulnerable families. Services are increasingly being taken out into the community, including to the rural villages and to the north of Colchester. Sessions which are open to all families are often very well attended.
- Although centre staff spend large amounts of time evaluating sessions and producing case studies to demonstrate the impact of services they do not yet use their time effectively to track the progress of children. As a result leaders are not able to evaluate effectively whether services help priority children to make good progress and be ready for school, or identify which aspects of their work require further improvement.
- The proportion of children eligible for free school meals who achieved a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2014 was much lower than seen nationally and this group of children are falling further behind their peers. The centre has not, until recently, had access to data on achievement and so has not focussed sufficiently well on providing services that will contribute to narrowing inequalities. However, services are generally focussed well on promoting early learning and in particular children's communication skills.
- Family support work is effective and case files demonstrate the positive impact of one-to-one work. The lead agency rightly focuses on ensuring that cases are open only as long as they need to be and the centre manager provides good quality supervision to staff. However, audits of case files are not sufficiently robust and this aspect of the centre's work requires improvement.
- Volunteers are safely recruited, well trained and appropriately supported. They make a positive contribution to the day-to-day running of the centre and many go on to further education or employment.
- Programmes to help adults to develop their parenting skills are effective and the centre helps parents to keep children safe through first aid courses and good quality advice about e-safety. However, work remains to assess the full needs of parents from priority groups, particularly those who are workless, to identify any further learning or skills training required.
- Partnership working with the Pre-School Learning Alliance is strength of the centre. Every month, local child-minders attend a session at the centre and access good quality information, advice and guidance. This work is helping to drive up the quality of practice in child-minding across the reach area, particularly for those who require more intense support.
- The centre rightly provides space and staff to other services supporting families. For example, during the inspection a parent and her child in care had the opportunity to spend time together in a supervised contact session with a wide range of toys. Likewise, families who have adopted children attend a specialist 'adoption group' at the centre.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**Requires improvement**

- The recently appointed children's services manager has taken a fresh look at the performance of the centre and broadly identified what the centre needs to do to improve. However, the current improvement plan is not sufficiently detailed, and lacks challenging targets and clear performance measures and this requires improvement.
- The local authority undertook an annual review of the centre's performance in January 2015 and rightly identified that the centre needed additional support and challenge to improve more quickly. Until recently, those responsible for leadership and governance had not been using the readily available data frequently enough to drive sustained improvement. However, the local authority is now taking decisive action to ensure that information is available to challenge the provider to improve priority group's access to appropriate services at a faster rate.
- Governance arrangements are generally effective. The district board, chaired by a well-informed headteacher with recent inspection experience, has strengthened the way in which it works so that it is better placed to drive improvements. Minutes of meetings clearly show improved challenge to the centre, the local authority and Barnardo's.
- Supervision processes are effective as staff receive one-to-one supervision on a regular and timely basis. Staff say they value this support. All staff are safely recruited well trained to undertake their roles, including in e-safety.
- Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Children who are subject to child protection plans, children in need and those who are looked after are supported well by the centre. The local authority has made recent improvements to information sharing and the centre expects to have information on all vulnerable children in the coming weeks.
- Resources are used efficiently to engage families in general and staff work hard to maintain a comprehensive range of activities and services across the wider area. Leaders rightly identify that the centre needs to target these resources more sharply and that some activities will need to change and be focussed more on outcomes for priority families so that inequalities reduce further.

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

Unique reference number	20789
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	454030
Managed by	Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2,908
Centre leader	Amy Clayton
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01206 854920
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