

Aylesbury (Quarrendon) Children's Centre

John Fitzjohn Avenue, Berryfields, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP18 0FG

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| Inspection dates | 29–30 April 2015 |
| Previous inspection date | 9–10 July 2014 |

| Overall effectiveness | This inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|---|
| | Previous inspection: | Inadequate | 4 |
| 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:

- The progress made by families, adult learners and children is not always recorded well enough or tracked effectively to show how the centre is making a difference to families. The centre has been slow to take up the common model of assessment used in the county.
- The centre's focus on reaching out to families has been effective in making the centre's services known in the area, although attendance levels for some activities are still too low.
- Information sharing and joint work with children's social care and health partners require improvement. Too few vulnerable families and expectant parents in need of support are registered and accessing the centre's services.
- Too few adults access learning opportunities that enable them to develop their employability skills and gain employment.
- The contribution that parents make to shaping services and the future of the centre is minimal. The parents' forum is not thriving.

It has the following strengths:

- The local authority has monitored the centre's work closely to bring significant improvements, such as establishing an enthusiastic permanent staff team and a steady rise in registrations.
- Leadership and governance of the centre have improved strongly. An advisory board has been formed and this provides the necessary support and challenge.
- Most vulnerable two-year-olds are now able to find and take up funded early education places.
- Most families attend for their child health checks and immunisation rates are high.
- Families feel welcome, safe and included. Families attending regularly make positive improvements in their confidence and range of skills.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority and partners to ensure that the large majority of all priority groups, including families which have adults who are out of work:
 - are identified
 - have access to services.
- Develop strategic information sharing procedures:
 - with health services, to ensure the centre receives information regarding all expectant mothers in the area
 - with children's social care services to ensure the centre receives information regarding all families in need of family support
 - with relevant agencies and services designed to improve adults' employability skills or prepare them for return to work.
- Increase the attendance of families to good levels for all courses and activities, especially for the most vulnerable groups, by improving planning and support.
- Continue to develop ways in which the centre can effectively demonstrate the impact of services by:
 - managing staff performance rigorously to ensure that records are high quality
 - tracking of families', adult learners' and children's progress systematically
 - organising the information held on individual children, adult learners and families systematically
 - implementing the use of the common model of assessment used by other family support and early help partners in the county (this is currently the Family Outcomes Star).
- Enhance parents' contribution to the evaluation and development of services by:
 - building an effective parents' forum
 - developing methods which will tell parents about action that the centre takes on their ideas
 - ensuring parents receive the support, training and information they need to participate in
 - challenging the group's performance 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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's leaders and managers, representatives of the governing body and advisory board, partner organisations and the local authority. Inspectors talked to staff, parents and children and talked by telephone to representatives of partner organisations.

The inspectors visited the outreach venue at Haydon Abbey Preschool and Griffin Place.

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

Inspection team

Christine Davies, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Barbara Saltmarsh

Additional inspector

Maggie Fobister

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Aylesbury (Quarrendon) Children's Centre was designated in April 2008. It delivers services including health clinics, stay and play groups, family support, and adult learning from two main sites and at outreach venues. In April 2015, the centre moved its main venue to a site in the grounds of Berryfields Church of England Primary School, which is part of Aylesbury Vale Academy. A satellite centre is established in the centre's former main administrative site, co-located with The Jonathan Page Play Centre. The play centre and the academy are subject to separate inspection arrangements.

The centre is currently managed directly by the local authority. A tendering process is in place for the provision to move to a new provider from September 2015. An advisory board comprised of key partners and a parents' forum are in place. The present coordinator was appointed in October 2014 and is assisted by three family support workers and a part-time administrator.

The area that the centre serves comprises two distinct communities in the North of Aylesbury. The established housing areas of Quarrendon and Gatehouse are densely populated, with 30% of accommodation being social housing. Berryfields is a new housing area, isolated from the main amenities of the town centre. A quarter of families in the area served by the centre live in workless households, which is double the rate for Buckinghamshire as a whole. Those who are employed are mostly in lower paid work. The majority of families are of White British heritage. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups is around the national average, with the largest group being of Pakistani heritage. Children's skills and abilities on entry to early education are below the levels expected for their age.

The centre has identified four main priority groups, as follows: two-year-olds eligible for funded early education; children in need of early intervention or receiving support from children's social care services; families living in Berryfields; families in temporary housing provision at Griffin Place.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre's focus in the last year on building links in communities where the centre's services were less well known has brought a steady rise in registrations and the engagement of families from most target groups. However, information is not shared well enough with all partners to reach all those in need of family support, and attendance at some groups is low.
- A major part in making services more accessible has been the move of the main hub from Quarrendon to Berryfields. The number of families registered has risen from 64% at the last inspection to the current figure of 86%, which is most families in the area. This is ahead of the time in which the centre expected to reach this target.
- A new database enables the centre to measure with greater accuracy how many families come to the centre and take part in activities. The centre now has reliable information that shows that the large majority of families registered use services well enough to make a difference in their lives. Levels of regular use have doubled since last year.
- The centre and partners have redefined their priority groups and set realistic expectations for good levels of engagement in each of those groups. The centre has been successful in engaging families new to the area in Berryfields and in the temporary accommodation at Griffin Place. The centre is not given enough good information that will help it reach expectant mothers and families with children in need of intervention or support. Only the minority are currently known and registered at the centre.
- All families with two-year-olds eligible for funded early education have been identified by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) and followed up by the centre. The take-up rate among

these families has risen to 83%, which is a good increase from 66% last year.

- Partnership with health visitors were strongly established at the last inspection. This has improved further as the centre has been able to offer a better timetable for health clinics at Berryfields. Health visitors report excellent take-up of two-year-old development checks and good attendance at the regular health visitor clinics. Families have prompt access to diagnosis and early help for children's development and health difficulties.
- Speech and language drop-in groups are frequent and well attended. The Centre offers a welcoming venue for specialist services to children with Down's Syndrome and their families through the well-attended 'Sparkles' service. Attendance at the targeted post-natal and baby massage group is variable and the service is reaching only a minority of parents regularly.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The programme of activities since January 2015 had achieved a consistent balance of stay-and-play activities open to all and specialist services offered for target groups of families. However, there are gaps in the programme, particularly to improve life chances and reduce inequalities for parents who are out of work. Low numbers of adults attend courses or take up volunteering to improve their working skills.
- The needs of the families of adults who are out of work are not identified precisely enough by the centre. Too few adults attend courses or access services which are designed to improve their employability skills or prepare them for return to work. The centre and partners place insufficient focus on the development of English and mathematics skills and systems to monitor long-term progress are not well developed.
- Staff, who are recently appointed, have quickly built a good rapport with parents using the centre so that they get to know the needs of individuals well. Health partners and specialists, for example those working with families on 'Making money matters', find the inclusive approach and high expectations expressed by staff are an invaluable role model for families.
- Family well-being, especially for new parents and those new to the area, is a shared focus with health partners. Parents take responsibility for their children's safety and health are keen to learn how to manage children's behaviour well and keep them healthy. Although planned for later in 2015, there is not yet any local midwife support at the centres. Support for breastfeeding is not readily accessible so that only a small minority sustain breastfeeding for any length of time.
- The number of referrals for family support at the centre is growing slowly as new staff develop into their roles. Individual family files show improvement in take-up of services for the small number of parents receiving intensive support, including those with children who have child protection plans. Reporting on case files is not always good quality or timely and is an area for further improvement. Staff have been trained but are not yet using the common early help assessment framework used by other early help partners in the county frequently enough.
- Stay-and-play activities are well planned to the interests of children and families attending. Evaluations take account of children's learning and development in the sessions, although tracking the progress of groups and individuals is not well developed. Staff have begun to keep informative learning journal records for children. However, very few are in place currently, which means that only a few parents are engaged in helping to assess their children's learning and receive valuable feedback. More are planned.
- Outcomes for children by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are, on average, lower than those found for children elsewhere in the county or nationally. Through effective partnership with the local authority early years development team, the centre is beginning to receive timely information about gaps for specific groups of children. This enables the team to plan activities accordingly and the programme is developing.
- Effective parenting skills courses have been held, with improvement evident for the small number of parents attending. Good partnership work with the family learning team ensures that staff are able to promote family learning courses such as 'Keep up with the children'. Course evaluations are shared with the centre at the time. Although there is tracking of families' onward progression to

other courses, it is underdeveloped and depends on families keeping in touch.

- Family support workers are building up their knowledge of the area so that they can signpost parents to a range of family resources in the area. Good partnership work takes place with the schools most closely linked to the centre at Berryfields and Haydon Abbey. Regular communication provides good support to children in transition to school and to two-year-olds taking up early education provision.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have built an effective action plan to tackle the areas for development identified at the last inspection. Progress has been good. The local authority held a programme of regular support and challenge which has given the centre good guidance and strong direction for improvement.
- The local authority improved the staff resource available to the centre and has overseen a move from temporary to permanent, well-experienced staff. The local authority has provided and monitored training, including training for skills to implement the county's preferred common assessment framework tool and new database. It is early days for staff implementing these systems and remains an area for development.
- Governance arrangements have improved with strong leadership of an independent chair of the advisory board and most partners attend well. Partnerships developed effectively in the last year. This means that the role of the centre is better understood and members ask searching and challenging questions. The board values the views of parents and has a representative member. However, it has not yet established a regular two-way flow of information with, for example, a parents' forum.
- The centre, the local authority and partners agreed four new priority groups for the centre and set clear descriptors for success in working with the groups. The centre effectively safeguards the small number of children in need, or subject to a child protection or care plan. Links with partners have improved; however, more can be done to further improve the exchange of information and so help more vulnerable families access the centre's services.
- The local authority provides a clear set of data on priority groups. This, together with the information gathered by the centre, can be accessed by the centre leaders and managers so that they can check whether they have a clear picture of the impact of services. Tracking outcomes for adults and children as they move on from the centre services is an area for further development.
- Information sharing with the DWP has improved in the last year, with good impact for families with two-year-olds. Other information sharing to help identify parents in need of support that will increase their chances of employment is very limited. The local authority has identified other gaps in information sharing, for example with children's social care services, and has firm plans to improve matters by June 2015.
- The manager is implementing regular supervision and appraisal systems that are moving smoothly from induction monitoring to routine performance management. Supervision is effective in overseeing an acceptable level of family support in individual cases and ensures safeguarding procedures are implemented well. The quality of case recording and collation of information for effective tracking of outcomes are ongoing areas for improvement.
- The staff group has been recruited within safeguarding guidelines. Parents and partners value the safe, secure and welcoming environment maintained by staff at all the current venues.

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

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|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Unique reference number | 20152 |
| Local authority | Buckinghamshire County Council |
| Inspection number | 455014 |
| Managed by | Directly by the local authority |

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Approximate number of children under five in the reach area | 1221 |
| Centre leader | Lewellyn Headley |
| Telephone number | 01296 382730 |
| Email address | lheadley@buckscc.gov.uk |

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