

# Buckingham Children's Centre

Chandos Road, Buckingham, MK18 1AP

**Inspection dates** 7–8 July 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>Previous inspection:</b>	Not previously inspected	
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 centre requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Too few children and families from some of the centre's identified priority groups make regular use of the services. The centre has not analysed fully the best way to meet the specific needs of some families who need support the most.
- Opportunities for parents and carers to improve their learning, skills and employability, especially for those who need most support, are limited. Information sharing between some partners is not well enough established to assist the centre in tracking the long-term impact of its work on improving the economic well-being of parents.
- Case files are not always completed fully to show a clear timeline of events, especially in relation to when young children were last seen.
- Leaders and managers at all levels are not sufficiently focused on monitoring and improving the sustained engagement of some of the children and families who need support the most. This limits the centre's capacity to move forward at a good pace.
- Parents are not well represented on the advisory board although the meetings are well attended by a wide range of other partners and community groups.

### This centre has the following strengths:

- Good links with health partners mean that families with young children have easy access to early health services, including for those expecting babies. The centre is given regular information about new births in the area. This has helped to improve registrations so that most young children are known to the centre.
- At well over 90%, the take-up of free early education by two-, three- and four-year olds is high.
- The small staff team are well trained and carry out their various roles with enthusiasm. They have developed the trust and respect of parents who have positive views of the centre, especially in relation to improving their children's confidence for moving on to school.
- The centre has a strong focus on ensuring parents are helped to keep their children safe and to lead healthy lives. The proportion of babies still being breastfed at around two months is far higher than that seen nationally.

### What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the sustained contact of children and families in the centre's identified priority groups, particularly those in households where families are workless and where lone parents are isolated. Ensure that appropriate services are developed so that the large majority engage regularly until their needs are met. Tighten up recording of contact with families who access partner services to provide a reliable picture of engagement.
- Provide more opportunities for adults, especially those in priority groups, to extend their skills, learning and employability. Develop an effective method to systematically track the longer-term impact of the centre's and its partners' work on improving the economic well-being of those who access services or who are signposted elsewhere.
- Ensure that case files are of a consistently high standard and clearly show a timeline of events as well as noting when the young child or children were last seen by staff or their partners.
- Sharpen the use of data relating to the engagement of priority children and families to ensure that where the proportion is low, effective action is taken to address the reasons why.
- Increase the number of parents who attend advisory board meetings to ensure there is a formal means to feed parents' views onto the board and to enable them to be more involved in developing centre services.

### 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 two Additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, several representatives from the local authority and members of the advisory board. They met with a wide range of partners including those from health services, social care and wider family learning. They took into account the views of parents through discussions during the inspection and also from surveys and evaluations.

The inspectors visited activities taking place in the centre such as the 'Blue Bears Stay and Play' and a post-natal group. A joint observation of the off-site session held at Stowe National Trust property was undertaken with the centre coordinator.

A wide range of documentation was examined, including the centre's action plan and local authority reviews. Safeguarding policies, procedures and practices as well as samples of case files for families receiving support were examined in depth.

The centre coordinator and representatives from the local authority attended all inspection team meetings.

### Inspection team

Joan Lindsay, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Buckingham Children's Centre is a standalone centre that opened in 2007. It is located in the grounds of George Grenville Academy but is directly managed by the local authority. The centre coordinator also manages Steeple Claydon Children's Centre and the centres share a joint advisory board. Neither the school nor Steeple Claydon Children's Centre were part of this inspection. Their reports can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

The centre provides early years experiences, family support, adult learning and health services through partnership work. Some of the services are delivered from community buildings in surrounding villages and local venues in Stowe and Buckingham.

There are 973 children aged under five in the area served by the centre. This covers the wards of Buckingham North and South, Luffield Abbey and Tingewick, an area of 45 square miles. The area is relatively affluent although there are some pockets where families are less advantaged and some rural areas where families can suffer isolation. Approximately 6% of children under five live in households where no one is in employment, which is well below the national average. However, there are some pockets of the local area where unemployment levels are higher. Most children come from a White British background. Children generally enter the early years with skills and knowledge typical for their age.

The centre has identified priority groups needing most support as: children eligible for two-year old funding for early education; families under social care supervision or who have been referred to the family resilience service; young children living in workless households in areas where there are the highest unemployment levels; and lone parents at risk of isolation.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

### Requires improvement

- Access to services requires improvement because too few children and families from some of the centre's identified target groups sustain their contact with services.
- Information shows that only about 30% of children in specific areas where unemployment is highest used the services three times or more in the last year. Approximately 40% of lone parents at risk of isolation did so, even though all of them are registered. However, not all contacts are recorded, for example families who attend the Job Club or children who are attending settings supported by the centre are not included and so the data are unreliable.
- The centre has not yet analysed what specific services would best meet the needs of the groups it has identified as requiring support the most. Some sessions are held in the local community, for example the monthly 'Toddler Tuesdays' run jointly with the National Trust at Stowe. However, not enough analysis of who attends and whether priority groups sustain their engagement has been undertaken.
- There are strong links with health partners and an effective system to ensure that mothers who are expecting babies are made aware of the centre. Post-natal groups are held at the centre. Staff attend child health clinics that are well advertised in the centre's programme. This ensures that parents have good access to early health services and are made aware of what the centre offers.
- There is a high take-up of early free early education by two-, three- and four-year olds. This helps them get off to the best start which is reflected in the good outcomes for young children at the end of the early years.
- Families who are receiving one-to-one support from the centre because they are under social care or the family resilience team's supervision engage well with centre. Over 60% have had five or more contacts over the last year. They speak highly of the support they receive and the impact this has had on improving their families' lives.

**The quality of practice and services****Requires improvement**

- The quality of practice and services requires improvement because the opportunities for parents to improve their learning and skills and employability are too narrow. Of those who have attended courses, including parenting programmes, fewer than half are from priority groups.
- Partners who work with the centre to provide employment advice or run courses are not routinely sharing information about who attends or the outcome and progress families make. The centre has not established an effective method to track the longer-term benefits of the support it provides to enable it to show the impact of its work. Nevertheless there are some notable successes of individuals, including young parents, improving their circumstances through contact with the centre.
- The consistency of case file recording requires improvement. The centre has recently moved to a new electronic system and staff are still getting to grips with some of the workings. At the moment, there is not always a clear chronology of events or an easy method to check the frequency children were actually seen by centre staff or their partners.
- The centre has a good focus on children's early development, supported by input from the early years consultant and specialist services such as speech and language therapy. Outcomes for children at the end of Reception are improving and at 69.5% are well above the national outcome. The gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers is narrowing and the proportion of children who are eligible for free school meals who achieve a good level of development is higher than that seen nationally.
- Staff are good role models in the popular sessions such as the 'Blue Bears Stay and Play'. There is also effective support provided for parents to continue their child's learning through play at home. As a result, parents interact well with their children and say that their children's confidence has grown through attending the centre. Even young children have learned to stay focused on the well-chosen, age-appropriate activities.
- Children who are tracked through detailed and informative 'learning journeys' are seen to make good progress. However, only a small number of children have those at present and systems to track children when they move on to school are only just being developed by the local authority.
- Health outcomes are difficult to quantify because not all data provided are recent or for this centre's specific area, for example for childhood obesity and immunisation levels. However, breastfeeding rates for babies aged six-to-eight weeks are recent and localised. They show that at 61%, a far higher than average proportion are still being breastfed. The centre is proactive in promoting healthy lifestyles through holding a weekly breastfeeding clinic and promoting fitness groups for adults.
- Parents have positive views of the centre. They are able to voice their opinions through 'question of the month' and regular evaluations of services although there is no formal parents' forum. At present there are two volunteers who provide valuable support to the small staff team at busy open-access play sessions.

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

- The local authority conducts regular quarterly and annual reviews. Although the last quarterly review picked up low levels of engagement from some of the centre's priority families, this was not given enough prominence in the annual review. As a result, the centre has an overly positive view of the impact it has on priority children and families and this hinders its capacity to improve and reduce inequalities in the local area.
- Advisory board members are very knowledgeable about the local community and are vocal in challenging the centre on specific topics. However, their focus has been on increasing registrations and access rather than on the sustained engagement by identified priority children and families and what services would best meet their needs.
- Too few parents and carers attend the advisory board although it is otherwise well attended by a wide range of enthusiastic partners. The independent chair and other members are not only highly supportive but they also ensure they see the work of the centre at first hand.

- The centre's action plan is a clear working document that has some specific, time-measurable targets. However, those targets are not focused effectively enough on increasing the engagement of families in the areas where unemployment is highest or of lone parents who are in isolated areas.
- Safeguarding is given high status in the centre's work. Staff are well trained in this regard and policies and procedures are based on current guidelines. Links with other services to protect children are still developing, for example the centre has only recently been informed about which local young children are subject to child protection or are children in need. However, where those families are referred to the centre, the support they receive is effective. Staff play a full role working with other agencies to help families get their lives back on track.
- The centre coordinator balances her role managing two centres well. The small staff team is effectively managed; they feel well supported through regular staff supervision and performance development meetings.
- The centre is well resourced. Although the main room is small, as is the outdoor area, the use of the school hall for some of the larger groups such as 'Blue Bears' ensures that families do not need to be turned away.
- Parents have regular opportunities to make comments and suggestions which are valued by staff. Notices show how they have been responded to positively, such as by providing sessions on e-safety and first aid after parents suggested this. All parents spoken to during the inspection were very positive about the centre and the staff, saying typically that they are 'really approachable and helpful'.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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 well-being 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 details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	20485
<b>Local authority</b>	Buckinghamshire County Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	464560
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	973
<b>Centre co-ordinator</b>	Liz Martin
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01280 821467
<b>Email address</b>	buckchildrenscentre@buckscc.gov.uk

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