

Beaconsfield Children's Centre

Beacon Close, Off Holtspur Way, Holtspur, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, HP9 1RJ

Inspection dates	14–16 July 2015
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		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:

- Not enough children and families from all the centre's priority groups make regular use of its services. Information provided by the local authority and Barnardo's about those groups does not always match up. This makes it difficult to have a clear view of the centre's effectiveness.
- The planning of activities that promote priority children's learning and development and the methods to monitor the progress they make during their time at the centre and beyond are at an early stage of development.
- The take-up of courses provided to support parents in improving their learning and skills is too low. Information sharing between some of the centre's partners is not well enough developed to ensure there is a consistent way to track the longer-term benefits to families.
- There is a relatively narrow range of partners who regularly attend the advisory board meetings. Too few parents are involved in the work of the advisory board and, consequently, in supporting strategic decision-making.

This centre has the following strengths:

- The centre provides good support for children and families with the greatest need. This includes those supervised under Early Help assessments. Staff work effectively to reduce the risk of harm to children. They are well trained and alert to any safeguarding concerns.
- Parents are very positive about the benefits to their families from coming to the centre. They say 'Everyone is happy and bubbly there' and that their children grow in confidence because the staff have such a positive attitude.
- Healthy lifestyles are promoted well, as shown by the much lower than average percentage of young children who are very overweight. The twice-weekly breastfeeding clinics held at the centre have been a strong contributor to the good breastfeeding rates locally.
- The new coordinator has quickly come to grips with the issues affecting the centre. She has managed staff changes sensitively and effectively so that despite a long period of uncertainty, staff morale is high.
- Governance is supportive and challenging and plays an important role in helping the centre move forward.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase and sustain the engagement of children and families in the centre's identified priority groups so that the large majority access appropriate services until their needs are met. Ensure that information about those groups and their levels of engagement provided by the local authority and Barnardo's aligns and reliably informs their checks on the centre's performance.
- Sharpen the planning of centre activities to promote the specific learning and development needs of priority children. Extend the systems for tracking their progress. Work with the local authority and partners to develop an effective and consistent method to see the impact of the centre and how well these children progress over time.
- Increase parents' take-up of opportunities so that the large majority of those most in need enhance their education, skills and economic well-being. Work with partners to improve information exchange to enable the longer-term impact on those families to be measured.
- Widen membership of the advisory board so that there are more parents and a broader range of partners represented on it.

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. It was carried out at the same time as Denham and Gerrards Cross Children's Centre and Amersham Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre area manager, staff, Barnardo's senior managers, local authority officers, partners, volunteers, and members of the advisory board. They took into account the parents' views as expressed to them during the inspection and also through recorded evaluations of the centre's work. The children's centre coordinator who took up post six months ago, and oversees all three centres in the collaboration, was on leave until the last day of the inspection.

The inspectors visited a number of activities held at the centre, including the breastfeeding clinic and a Messy Play session. They also visited a Bounce and Rhyme session held at Beaconsfield library. Safeguarding policies, procedures and practice were examined in-depth. Inspectors also looked at a wide range of other relevant documentation.

The children's centre area manager, a colleague area manager and a coordinator from another cluster supported the inspection in the absence of the centre coordinator. They attended all lead and team inspectors' meetings.

Inspection team

Joan Lindsay, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Peter Towner

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Beaconsfield Children's Centre opened in 2009. Barnardo's manages the centre on behalf of the local authority along with 15 others in the county. The management team consists of the assistant director, the area manager and the local services coordinator who is responsible for overseeing the team of staff who works across the areas served by a collaboration of three children's centres – Beaconsfield; Denham and Gerrards Cross and Amersham. Each centre has its own advisory board to assist governance. Amersham Children's Centre and Denham and Gerrards Cross Children's Centre were inspected at the same time as Beaconsfield. Their reports can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

Services provided by the centre and in partnership with other centres include activities to promote early learning, family support, child and family health, careers, adult learning and volunteering.

There are 881 children under the age of five years living in the area served by the centre, which is mainly affluent but with pockets of disadvantage. The area served by the centre includes the wards of Beaconsfield North, Beaconsfield South and Beaconsfield West. Some 6% of children in the area are living in homes where no one is in paid work. Almost three quarters of families are White British, with a range of other ethnic groups making up the other quarter. Children enter early education provision with levels typical for their age.

Target groups identified by the centre are: two-year-old children eligible for free education; children receiving 'Early Help' support, children of young parents aged 25 and under, and new mothers.

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 priority groups sustain their engagement. In addition, there are some anomalies between the data provided by the local authority and Barnardo's to enable an accurate assessment of how many families are in some of those groups.
- Just over half of eligible two-year-olds take up their entitlement to free early education and about a third used the centre six times or more in the last 12 months. The centre has recently established a Messy Play session for those children to support them to access services but the numbers attending are relatively low.
- Data provided by Barnardo's vary significantly from that of the local authority in relation to children receiving 'Early Help' support and their engagement. However, families who receive one-to-one support from the centre generally engage well with staff because of the trusting relationships that develop.
- There is no longer a specific young parents' group held at Beaconsfield Children's Centre, due to low attendance. However, the centre supports the relatively small number of families to access the group at Amersham Children's Centre if they wish. Young parents also attend some of the open sessions at the centre so that the majority sustain their engagement.
- Information about how many new births there are locally is not complete because the centre is not consistently advised about live births. However, of those the centre is aware of who are registered, their engagement levels are good. You and Baby ante- and post-natal groups run by the centre, baby massage and twice-weekly midwife-led breastfeeding clinics all encourage new mothers and those expecting babies to access early health services. For example, 130 new parents have come along to the post-natal sessions in the last year.
- Most three- and four-year olds in the area served by the centre take up their free early education places, mainly in good or better settings. The centre has links with some of those settings but not yet at a level at which children's progress can be tracked when they move on.

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

- The quality of practice and services requires improvement because not enough priority children and families use the centre regularly. In addition, the take-up of courses by adults is too low.
- Some of the courses run to support parenting are well attended. For example, 67 families have had first aid training. However, there are fewer opportunities to extend learning and skills and the take-up is low, especially amongst priority families. In addition, although there have been some individual successes, there is no consistent method to receive information from partners such as adult learning providers to enable the centre to track longer-term outcomes for families.
- At 68.9%, the proportion of Reception-age children who achieved a good level of development in 2014 is above the local authority and national averages. Sessions are planned around the key aspects of early learning, such as communication and language, and are supported by specialist input from the speech and language therapist. However, the centre has not focused enough on the achievement of priority children in planning for sessions.
- Systems to track children when they are at the centre and when they move are at a very early stage. Learning journeys have recently been started for some children but too few are being tracked this way; there is not enough emphasis on what the child is learning and what the next steps are.
- Staff are good role-models and provide useful support for families to continue to help their children learn at home. The Messy Play session specifically for two-year olds eligible for free nursery education has been particularly effective in helping children gain in confidence with their social skills and speech.
- The centre makes an effective contribution to the good health outcomes seen locally. At 62%, the proportion of babies still being breastfed at around two months is much higher than the national figure. Active sessions such as Busy Bees raise awareness of keeping fit, and attractive displays around the centre promote other aspects of healthy lifestyles. At 5%, the rate of childhood obesity is much lower than national figures.
- Care, guidance and support for families are good. This is especially so where families have one-to-one support for often a range of complex needs. Case files reflect the centre's effective work with other partners such as the Family Resilience team and health services to help families get their lives back on track. Families are very appreciative of this work, typically stating 'I got an incredible level of support.'
- Volunteers, currently numbering six, make a good contribution to the centre and also benefit from raising their own confidence and self-esteem. They talk glowingly about the levels of training and support they have received.

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

- The centre has experienced major changes in staffing, with the small staff team not fully in place until May this year, following the appointment of a new play leader. Currently, staff are coming to terms with the outcome of Buckinghamshire's re-commissioning of its children's centres. The centre coordinator, in post since January 2015, has been effective in driving improvements in registrations, re-establishing some partnerships and ensuring good quality sessions are run by staff who have remained enthusiastic. She has not yet been as effective in ensuring services meet the needs of all groups of priority children and families so that they engage well, or in establishing systems to track some aspects of the centre's work. These are aspects that require improvement.
- The newly established staff team work well together. They are very focused on doing their best to support families and ensure they have a warm welcome at the centre. Regular supervision, including looking at case studies of families receiving tailored support, and good levels of appropriate staff training ensure individual staff needs are addressed. Leaders carry out regular 'touch base' visits and feedback to staff to help maintain high quality sessions.
- The local authority generally provides effective support and challenge. Quarterly performance checks and an annual review are undertaken. However, there is a mismatch between some of the

data provided by the local authority and Barnardo's, which makes it difficult to measure the centre's impact accurately, especially in relation to the sustained engagement of priority children and families. This hinders the centre's capacity to improve.

- Members of the advisory board, including the independent chair, are knowledgeable about the centre. Minutes from meetings show that they are challenging and will question the merit of putting on certain sessions, for example. However, the membership is relatively narrow in relation to some partners, such as from adult learning or employment services, and there are few regular attendances from parents.
- Safeguarding children and families is a high priority throughout the centre. Policies and procedures meet current requirements. All staff are trained in aspects of child protection. The centre is beginning to receive more detailed information about young children in the area who are subject to a child protection plan, who are looked after or who are children in need. This means that the centre's involvement with social care is becoming better established, enabling families to receive the right level of support.
- The centre is well resourced with a wide range of good quality toys and books. The small staff team, although stretched, work well together to use their expertise effectively to support families.
- Although there is no formal parents' forum, parents' views are sought regularly. For example, the themes in the Super Sensory Stars sessions are decided by parents and resulted in a physiotherapist visiting the group. However, without a wider representation from parents on the advisory board, their role in the strategic development of the centre is limited.

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 details

Unique reference number	20226
Local authority	Buckinghamshire County Council
Inspection number	455080
Managed by	Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	881
Centre Co-ordinator	Sarah Dunmur
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01494 678244
Email address	beaconsfieldcc@barnardos.org.uk

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