

Biggleswade Children's Centre

The Lawns Early Excellence Centre, The Baulk, Biggleswade, SG18 0PT

Inspection date 26–27 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
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 centre knows the families living in its area well and has a good understanding of their needs.
- A large majority of the families, including those who have the highest levels of need, engage in the wide range of services which are offered.
- Excellent liaison with midwives and health visitors, very good partnerships with other organisations and the supportive home visits made by the centre's outreach workers ensure that families receive joined-up services which meet their needs well.
- The services offered by the centre are of high quality and have a significant impact on developing parenting skills, contributing to children's development and improving the lives of families.
- Parents like the centre's welcoming environment and really appreciate the excellent care and support which they receive from the staff at the centre.
- The centre collaborates extremely well with other organisations to ensure that the needs of children living in vulnerable circumstances are identified early and appropriate support is provided.
- The centre leader's strong and insightful leadership has created a united and dedicated team of workers who are strongly committed to meeting the needs of families in Biggleswade. As a result, the centre continues to improve.
- The exceptionally attractive outdoor environment is used extremely well to broaden children's education and to help adults, particularly fathers, develop their understanding of how to engage with their children.
- The local authority, the governing body and the advisory board provide good support and advice to the children's centre staff.

It is not outstanding because:

- The centre does not use the information it has to evaluate the effectiveness of its work sufficiently thoroughly to ensure that it is having the maximum possible impact on all of its target groups.
- The centre's leaders and those responsible for governing the centre do not set clear targets for improvement, based on careful analysis of data. As a result, the centre's development plan and ideas for future improvement lack precision.

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: the leader and staff of the children's centre; representatives from the local authority, the governing body and the advisory board; parents and users of the centre; and representatives of organisations who work in partnership with the centre.

The inspectors visited: activities taking place at the centre; a review meeting held at a local school; a support session held at the home of a parent; and a session of the 'Freedom Project' and crèche held in a nearby church hall.

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

Inspection team

Graham Sims, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Godfrey Bancroft	Additional inspector
Robert Miller	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Biggleswade Children's Centre, one of nine children's centres which serve Central Bedfordshire, opened in October 2006. Together with The Lawns Nursery School (URN: 109414), it forms The Lawns Nursery School and Children's Centre and is situated on its own site. The nursery school was inspected in May 2013 and the report can be found on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The local authority has delegated responsibility for governance of the centre to the governing body of The Lawns Nursery School and Children's Centre. The centre also receives advice and guidance from an advisory board. The centre leader is responsible for leading and managing the nursery school and the children's centre. The centre has the equivalent of four full-time outreach workers, a finance officer and administrative staff.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by running a range of services for families, by commissioning services from a range of partners and by working in partnership with health visitors and midwives. The centre provides crèche facilities when needed to enable parents to attend activities.

The centre's reach area covers the whole of Biggleswade. There are pockets of deprivation, particularly near the centre, where the proportion of children living in income-deprived homes is above average. In other parts of the reach area, levels of unemployment and the proportion of families on benefits are just below the national average.

Most of the families in the area are White British; there is a small but growing community of Eastern European immigrants. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are in line with those expected nationally for their age.

The centre's key target groups are families living in the most disadvantaged areas around the centre, teenage parents, women who have been subject to domestic abuse, vulnerable children and all families where the centre's workers or outside organisations have identified particular needs.

What does the centre/group need to do to improve further?

- Analyse more carefully and rigorously the extensive range of information and data which the centre already holds on families living in the area so that:
 - the centre can monitor its own performance more effectively and ensure it is having the maximum possible impact in meeting the needs of all of its target groups
 - leaders and those responsible for governance of the centre can draw up more precise plans for development which include clear targets through which the centre can be held accountable for its performance.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Very effective liaison with health visitors and midwives ensures that the centre is not only informed of all new births within the area, but also gains a thorough understanding of the needs of individual families. A very large majority of families, including those from target groups, are registered with the centre, and a large majority access services at the centre.
- Very good relationships with other partner organisations, especially schools, help the centre to keep abreast of families' needs as their children grow older. The centre then works well with all concerned to provide activities and support which meet these needs.
- Through their home visits, the centre's outreach workers are pivotal in helping families to access the services which best meet their needs. They keep careful records which are reviewed regularly to ensure that priority is given to helping families with the greatest needs.
- The centre staff have an excellent knowledge of the local area and of the services available to families. They are skilful in signposting families to other organisations if the centre is unable to meet their needs.
- Staff have been highly successful in encouraging parents to take advantage of available funding for nursery places for two-year-old children. The centre's high-quality provision for two-year-olds is full, but staff refer families to other good-quality provision within the town when places are not available.
- The centre provides a good range of drop-in sessions for families who do not have specific needs or concerns. These families benefit from the social interaction with other parents and children and the good-quality advice provided by the centre staff.
- Although the centre has a large amount of useful information about the great majority of families living in the area, it has not yet developed systems which are smart enough to enable them to analyse this information in detail. While figures show high levels of engagement, the centre is unable to determine precisely if any families are falling through the net or exactly how effective it is in reaching all families, particularly the most vulnerable within the area.
- The centre has identified a small but growing number of families from Eastern Europe moving into the area. It is looking at ways to engage these families, but has yet to make inroads into determining and meeting their needs.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The centre provides a wide range of services. There is a good balance of services which can be accessed by all families and bespoke services which are tailored to meet the needs of families who require more specific support.
- Parents are highly appreciative of the excellent care and support they receive at the centre. Typical of the many comments received from parents are: 'The staff have been brilliant.' 'I was really struggling; I came along and they were fantastic.' 'Recognition of needs and empathy have been excellent.' Inspectors observed a highly professional, well-trained team of staff who know the families in the area very well and provide a very high level of care for them.
- Health visitors and midwives hold weekly clinics at the centre. As a result, the centre becomes a focal point for families with very young children. Parents value the arrangements which allow them

to meet their children's health needs within a friendly environment while at the same time keeping them informed of other services which the centre may have to offer.

- The quality of activities for young children is excellent. Many children attend the centre's own nursery which was judged to be outstanding at its inspection in May 2013. Separate nursery provision for two-year-old children and crèche facilities for parents attending other activities are of similar quality. Children make significant progress in their personal and physical development.
- Parents speak highly of courses, such as 'Parent Puzzle', which help them to develop their parenting skills. One parent, for example, said that it had been excellent and had made a massive difference in helping deal with their child's behaviour. Parents who have been identified to receive individual support in the home are equally enthusiastic and make very good progress in developing their parenting skills.
- The centre has a major impact on improving the lives and circumstances of many families from its target groups. Excellent collaboration with a wide range of other agencies results in thorough assessments using the Common Assessment Framework or Team Around the Child processes. Improvements in families' circumstances come through careful identification of needs, referral to supportive services and sensitive follow-up from the centre's outreach workers.
- The centre has been instrumental in working with schools and other organisations to stem the rise in teenage pregnancies. This has resulted in a coordinated approach, with all schools adopting an agreed policy and working together to raise sexual awareness among children and teenagers. The centre has also provided good support for teenage mothers which has helped them to continue with their education.
- The centre has a big impact on the lives of many other families. It works in close collaboration with a nearby refuge to support women who have been subject to domestic abuse. Sessions for fathers within the Forest School have helped them to learn how to interact with their children. Lone parents are provided with caring, sensitive support. A good working relationship and weekly clinics with staff from Jobcentre Plus have been instrumental in helping individuals back into employment.
- Although the quality of much of the centre's work is excellent, the overall impact of the centre is not yet outstanding. The centre is not yet evaluating the effectiveness and impact of its work sufficiently thoroughly to identify where it might bring further improvement. It has yet to harness the power of volunteers to extend its services, although some volunteers have recently started training. While many lone parents and fathers have benefited from the centre's services, the proportion of users from these groups is lower than other groups.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre leader provides strong, insightful, reflective and caring leadership which brings out the best in her team of dedicated co-workers. An excellent knowledge of the local area and the families who live there, gleaned through many years of service to the nursery school, a passionate belief in providing rich learning opportunities for young children and her compassion and care for individuals form the bedrock of the centre's services.
- The centre leader has been conspicuously successful in establishing a wide range of excellent collaborative partnerships which complement the work of the centre and enhance the lives of many families living in the area. Relationships with health visitors and midwives and all of the local schools are particularly strong. The partnerships with Jobcentre Plus, the women's refuge and social services all have a positive impact on people's lives.

- Strong leadership has created a united team which works together well to provide an attractive and welcoming environment for parents and children. The outdoor facilities and environment are exceptional and are used extremely well to promote children's development and to help parents appreciate how to use the outdoor environment to provide purposeful and engaging activities for their children.
- The centre has thorough policies and practices to safeguard children and families. Staff are vetted to ensure they are suitable to work with children. Visitors to the centre are made aware of safeguarding procedures. The centre gives high priority to families where children are subject to a child protection plan or children are identified as in need. Needs are discussed thoroughly, often in collaboration with other agencies, and every possible effort is made to meet these needs.
- The centre is creative in identifying ways in which its own resources and services and those of other organisations can be used to meet the needs of those living in the area who are most vulnerable. Staff work hard to overcome barriers and to win the confidence of families. The welcome every visitor to the centre receives is instrumental in this, as is the patient and caring work of the centre's outreach workers.
- The local authority, the governing body and the advisory board provide good support and helpful advice for the centre. The local authority provides helpful background information and data about the local area. The presence of parents on the governing body and a wide range of professional partners on the advisory board contributes additional viewpoints and expertise which are helpful when making decisions about future services.
- The centre does not always fully use its extensive information about families and the local area to monitor the effectiveness of its performance and to determine future priorities. Although the centre's services are continually evolving and responding to the needs of families within the area, and the centre's development plan contains a wide range of actions to bring further improvement, the development priorities lack precision. As a result, the centre's leaders and those responsible for the governance of the centre do not have clear enough targets for improvement through which the centre can be held accountable for its performance.

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	23204
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	423060
Managed by	The governing body of The Lawns Early Excellence Centre on behalf of the local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1105
Centre leader	Valerie Ellar
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01767 312312
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