

The future of school run Children's Centres.

I have been on the governing body of Bowerdean Nursery School, High Wycombe since 2000 and in the role of chair since 2006. In July 2013, as an Outstanding Nursery, we were approached by Bucks County Council about opening a new nursery site and taking on the running of a children's centre. Following substantial refurbishment by the county council costing nearly £1 million, in April 2015, Mapledean Nursery School and Mapledean Children's Centre were born.

The previous children's centre had been under-performing. With a new and experienced co-ordinator, this has completely changed. We now have a team of four whose knowledge, experience and commitment has transformed the centre and the services it offers to the community. They work out in the community delivering targeted 1:1 support and yet are able to keep the centre open every day running vital group activities. We already facilitate numerous other services, such as Health, Speech and Language, midwives, Family Resilience, Freedom Programme, working from our premises, sharing information about families and making sure that help is delivered in a timely and appropriate manner. We have excellent facilities: good parking and accessibility, a training room, interview rooms, flexible spaces, kitchen, wifi etc. Our work has been focussed on the under-fives and their families, because that was the original brief, not because we choose to limit our contribution to the community. We are well on the way to delivering many of the features listed in the Early Help review document. We already operate on joined up thinking. We have the capacity to grow into an Early Help base.

However, my question to the committee isn't just about Mapledean Children's Centre but it serves as an example which is applicable to other centres.

We have to face the fact that you may choose to close the centre. Whilst I clearly think that this would be a huge loss to the community and a mistake in the long run, I should point out just how physically integrated the nursery and children's centre are.

We share the building. We each have an entrance, but internally there is a connecting door. The boiler for the whole building is situated in the children's centre. Security, communications, heating, electricity and maintenance are shared. Closure of one part will have a financial impact on the other part.

So my question is this:

What plans are there for protecting us, and others like us, who are schools that manage Children's Centres?

Karen Bates

Mapledean Children's Centre, Chair of Governors.