

Inspection report for Barley Lea Children's Centre

Local authority	Coventry
Inspection number	383625
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Reporting inspector	Michelle Parker HMI

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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Aldermoor Farm Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Bright Eyes EY 222046

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior leaders, front-line staff and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were also held with members of the advisory board, a wide range of partners, parents and carers, and service users. Inspectors observed the centre's work, visited the outreach sites and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The children's centre is a former Sure Start phase one centre. It is located in Stoke Aldermoor and covers two wards of the southern part of the city. Because of the compact nature of the children's centre, it delivers many of its services as outreach as it is unable to accommodate more than six children at a time. Outreach services have also been affected by the closure of St Catharine's Church. To overcome this, the centre runs holiday activities for families in the nearby school hall.

The local community was primarily White British but it is now a culturally diverse area with 42 different languages spoken. Half the users of the children's centre are Black African and there are increasing numbers of asylum seekers and other White European groups, such as Polish and Lithuanian.

The area is one of the most deprived in Coventry with high levels of unemployment and social deprivation. There is a high proportion of children affected by workless households. The proportion of children attending school in the area who are known to be eligible for free school meals is above average, as is the proportion of children identified with disabilities and special educational needs. Most children enter childcare and early education with skills, knowledge and abilities that are well below those expected for their age. There is a high proportion of young parents in the area. In addition to the childcare provision at Aldermoor Farm Primary School, the

children's centre provides a 24-place day-care setting which is separately registered with Ofsted. The centre provides a range of education, health and social services on its main site as well as in four additional satellite venues. The centre also provides home visiting and outreach services through its family support and partner support workers. The centre manager also manages two other centres. Governance arrangements are through a partnership advisory board reporting to the local authority.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

2

Main findings

This is a good children's centre with many outstanding features. It is very responsive in meeting the needs of families and children. The outstanding and determined leadership of the centre manager has ensured that there is a strong cohesive staff team whose members share her vision and work unstintingly to provide a good service to parents and carers. Families are justly proud of their centre and confident in the staff who work there. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are enthusiastic about the centre and the positive difference it makes to their lives. These views are strongly endorsed by the wide range of partners who work with the centre to support and help families.

Since 2009, when the current manager took over responsibility, the centre has completely re-shaped the way it works. Originally, it met the needs of a minority of the local community. Now, it is proactive in effectively meeting the needs of a very changed community. When the centre first opened, 98% of local people were from a White British background, now it serves a very ethnically diverse area. The centre has radically changed its working practises and systems in order to effectively meet the demands made on it and outcomes for families are improving. The enjoyment and achievement of children and their families is outstanding. The majority of the children's centre's work is outreach. The centre is aware that many parents are in education and training and the daytime use of the centre has changed so that in the summer, it provides evening and weekend activities as well as a range of holiday activities which support family life.

Effective working with a range of partners enables the centre to signpost parents and carers to their services and for support in helping their children to succeed and live healthier lives. However, strategies to improve the dental health of children are not sufficiently developed. Strong working with the local primary schools has ensured that gaps in achievement are narrowing. Because of the outstanding care, guidance and support, children are well prepared to start school. Timely and effective training for children's centre staff has ensured that staff can confidently assess a range of complex children's needs, such as speech and language difficulties, which ensure specialist interventions from partners can take place.

Safeguarding is outstanding and all staff understand the comprehensive systems and procedures which ensure the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable adults at all times. The centre is keenly aware of the rich cultural diversity represented in its locality and uses this to enhance its work. The centre continually seeks ways to increase its engagement with families who are new to the area or with children who do not speak English as their first language. The centre effectively tracks and monitors its work to maximise impact. Information from partners is not as robust and it is difficult to evidence the impact of this aspect of its work. The centre's existing data, combined with accurate self-evaluation, underpins its good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure parents have a better understanding of the importance of dental hygiene and care routines for healthy gums and teeth.
- Ensure that partner agencies provide a range of reliable and current data so that the centre can confidently use this evidence in support of the work it does with children and vulnerable adults.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre knows its target groups of families well and uses this information to help all families improve their health and economic outcomes. For example, young parents and families from minority ethnic backgrounds are given support to meet their individual needs. Success is achieved because the centre helps them to identify potential barriers and supports them in achieving their personal goals. The centre has been awarded a Coventry Healthy Early Years Settings Award in recognition of its work. The centre works proactively to engage families and vulnerable adults with a wide range of health issues through: Coventry's condom distribution and chlamydia screening; breast feeding support, which has the highest take-up in the city; ensuring homes are fitted with smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and stair gates; and supporting parents new to Britain with help in purchasing and using appropriate car seats. As a result, health outcomes for children and families are improving.

Parents and carers understand how to prepare and cook a wide range of fresh ingredients to make inexpensive and healthy meals through the centre's cookery course 'Cooking Conversation'. One parent explained how the 'Cooking Conversation' course helped her understand what portion size is suitable for her children and she no longer feeds them snacks between meals. She explained how much she enjoys cooking with her children and how much they like her homemade bread, which she had learnt to make on the course. The healthy eating work has tackled the problem of children's sweet eating and general oral health, but the centre has not extended this to teeth brushing and visits to the dentist to ensure tooth decay is reduced.

The vast majority of families who are using the centre say they feel safe and confidently share concerns with staff. There is significant and sustained evidence of improved outcomes for most children on child protection plans. The centre is extremely vigilant in ensuring families are safe, for example, family support staff ensure stair gates are fitted and all homes have smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

The centre has significantly narrowed the gap for children starting school so that those who have accessed services are in the top 10% in terms of achievement. This is because of a wide range of strategies consistently employed by the centre. Both children and parents are confident about the transition to school. Parents are confident in talking to school staff and all parents and children from the nursery visit their future school and meet with teachers. Each child's school is contacted and information regarding the child's learning and well-being is shared. This promotes a good start to school. Every adult who comes to the centre has a learning journal which documents the course they have attended and the impact this has had, as well as the impact it has had on their child's well-being and health. There is a significant improvement in parents' literacy and numeracy levels and in their take-up of courses at level one.

Children's relationships and behaviour in the outreach groups, such as the multicultural lunch attended by over 20 families with children of different ages, are good. Children play and share well, with minimal support from staff. Parents state that the children's centre is at the heart of community life. The centre has strong links with the local schools, churches and the 'Aldermoor Inspires' community group. Holiday activities are very well supported as many parents, especially those who are asylum seekers, are involved in education and training during term time. Crèches are provided at training venues and the centre staff work closely with them to develop and share the centre's good practice. Parents stated that they are encouraged to get involved and their suggestions about activities are taken account of by the staff through the parents' forum. Parents and carers are not as keen to become more formally involved through the partnership advisory board.

Coventry has identified that the children's' centre area has the highest levels of parents in training in the city. This is because of the carefully tailored individual programmes for families. For example, there is 100% take-up of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses. Through this, many parents go on to further

training and employment, including university courses. Crèches are provided to enable parents to attend 'drop-in' sessions for Jobcentre Plus and parents are helped to attend support for 'workless' families and advice on budgeting and family tax credits.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those form target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those form target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those form target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those form target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre has robust procedures and good multi-agency working which enable staff to quickly identify children and adults at risk and put in place early intervention to ensure children and vulnerable adults are kept safe. The careful integration of services is seen in the regular meetings for all agencies involved in the children's and families' welfare, referred to as the Raise, Share, Review process. This process of sharing information across agencies is used highly effectively across the area and work with partner agencies ensures that the centre is proactive in keeping children and vulnerable adults safe. Effective communication reduces the opportunity for vulnerable families and children who are 'at risk' to remain unidentified. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process is used effectively to identify the correct level of support and intervention. For example, the centre effectively uses parenting strategies to help parents manage challenging behaviours. Swift identification is made of families on arrival at the centre and their needs assessed, a careful note is made where there are causes for concern and these are assiduously followed up. Good baseline assessments ensure the centre can evidence the impact of its work. However, data from partner agencies is minimal.

Parents and carers benefit from support from specialist agencies who work with the family. For example, staff understand how to correctly identify children who have special educational needs and quickly refer them. Universal services are tailored to meet their needs. All teenage mothers are contacted and supported, as the centre recognised that this group of parents rarely come to activities arranged for all

parents. In addition, the centre is developing a range of outreach strategies to increase their involvement.

All staff are well qualified and trained to deliver a range of high quality programmes in line with the city's strategic priorities. This ensures the highest quality of care, support and guidance is provided to families, especially target groups, and permeates all aspects of the centre's work and practice. Parents learn about behaviour and the impact of their actions on their children's lives. One parent expressed a view shared by many, saying that the centre helped her to be a 'better parent'. Strong links with adult education and family learning provide support for parents to develop personal skills and confidence. This was particularly commented upon by the nearby school, where staff had noted how well parents whose children had been at the centre confidently engage and talk with the school about their child.

Feedback from parents and carers is overwhelmingly positive about the support they receive and the quick response in times of crisis. Food vouchers are available to families in crisis and the centre effectively identifies the differing needs of families who have just arrived in Britain and may not understand British law. For example, many families from other countries are unaware of the need to use car seats for young children and the centre helps them to ensure the correct ones are fitted in their cars.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership is provided by the centre manager who is ably supported by her leadership team. They complement each other's leadership roles effectively so that if a member of staff is absent, there is minimal impact on the service provided. Tight line management systems ensure the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures; all staff including any volunteers understand the safeguarding arrangements and adhere carefully to the policies. Consequently, safeguarding checks carried out by the partnership advisory board members have been introduced as a model of best practice for the city. Staff regularly review and monitor children and vulnerable adults identified as being at risk so that they can maintain high quality inter-agency support and timely interventions. Detailed files are maintained on all families so that managers can closely supervise and ensure the effectiveness of the centre's work. Robust systems ensure self-evaluation is effective and understood and the centre

achieves good value for money. Families using the centre spoke confidently about how well the centre meets their needs. Resource planning is effective and takes good account of the need to develop sustainable services. Training ensures staff are well positioned to maintain a high quality service and support to families is effective despite a reduction in budgets. All staff understand the strengths and areas for development and thus they work together to achieve challenging targets.

The partnership advisory board is well led. The centre has identified, rightly, that it needs to encourage greater representation of minority ethnic families. Governance is good because the board understands the centre's strengths and areas for development and uses this information to hold the centre to account. The parents' forum is carefully listened to so that the centre can develop and respond to parental needs. Good communication has helped the centre to improve its provision at a time of reducing budget.

Equality and diversity are celebrated by the centre at every opportunity, both in marking festivals from a wide range of cultures and through activities in the community, such as the holiday play opportunities. The centre is sensitive to any conflicts or discrimination in the local area and works well with other agencies to tackle this. This is reflected in the rare occurrences of reported racist incidents and the centre's concerted action to close any gaps between outcomes for different groups.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The findings of the Ofsted inspection of Bright Eyes in September 2009 contributed to the inspection team's findings with regard to educational provision and outcomes for nursery-aged children.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Barley Lea Children's Centre on 15 and 16 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We spoke to many of you about the centre's work. We were impressed by how well you and your children are catered for by the centre and were interested in hearing your views. This information was very helpful.

The centre is led well by an effective team, which supports and encourages all staff to do their best. Ensuring the safety and well-being of children and families is a high priority for the centre and the vouchers for families are a key part in this. Thorough checks are made on all staff and volunteers to ensure their suitability to work with children and young people.

A majority of the families living in the area are registered at the centre and attend sessions. This is because this is a very welcoming place where staff work effectively to put parents and carers and children at their ease. The centre works well to remove barriers for all its children and families through its determination to reduce conflicts and discrimination, thus narrowing the achievement gaps for different groups of families.

The safeguarding of children and families is outstanding. The centre uses its robust systems to ensure both children and vulnerable adults are safe. The care, guidance and support given to families are also outstanding. These ensure high quality personalised support is available and it improves outcomes for children and families.

We were impressed by how well the centre seeks your views and takes account of them when developing activities and courses for you. The one-to-one support has clearly helped many of you at times of great personal need. You told us how the staff respect you and listen to your opinions. You are encouraged and well supported when you undertake training or educational courses. We have asked the centre to help you to improve the dental health of your children to reduce tooth decay and gum disease. Children who attend the centre are effectively supported in being ready to start school and they are encouraged to become independent. Children learn well and make good progress in developing a wide range of skills through carefully

planned activities. This is helping to narrow the achievement gap. We have asked partner agencies to provide the centre with a range of reliable and current data so that it can use this as evidence of its work.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.