

Inspection report for Lincoln Central Children's Centre

Local authority	Lincolnshire
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Linked school if applicable	Bishop King Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Surestart Lincoln Central Children's Centre EY337497

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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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff and managers from the centre. Inspectors also met with parents and representatives from Lincolnshire local authority, as well as a number of partners, including those from health and education. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Lincoln Central Children's Centre is a purpose-built phase one children's centre. It is on a site shared with Bishop King Primary School. The centre meets its core purpose and serves a community, which experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage, in a densely populated area in the city centre. The area has mostly older, rented terraced housing. The majority of local families are of White British heritage with an increasing number of transient minority ethnic families, particularly those from Eastern Europe, moving into the area. Unemployment is high and qualification levels are low. Many of those in employment are unskilled and low-waged. The proportion of children who live in households without paid employment or with low incomes is high, as is the number of families in receipt of benefits. Governance is through Lincolnshire County Council and an advisory board made up of professionals and parents. A range of partners including those from health, social care, adult education, voluntary and private organisations work with the centre to deliver services to users.

Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and abilities that are very below those typically found for their age.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Lincoln Central Children's Centre is at the heart of the community and is extremely successful, providing an outstanding quality of service for all of its families. This exceptionally well-led centre, together with its partners, provides excellent care, guidance and support for families. Safeguarding exemplifies high quality practice and staff give the highest priority to the safeguarding of all children. As a result, outcomes for children identified as in need or subject to a child protection plan, are outstanding. The majority of families, identified as in most need of intervention and support, show clear improvement in their parenting skills.

Families make an outstanding contribution to the centre, through volunteering and as advisory board or members of the parents' forum. These families provide excellent role models for the community. Responsibilities, distributed across the centre's team, ensure that each member of staff plays an important part in the children's centre and its delivery of a range of excellent services. The enthusiasm, professionalism, commitment and dedication to raising standards are exemplary.

Parents overwhelmingly praise the commitment made by the children's centre staff and their partners. During the inspection, families made exceedingly positive comments. Examples include: 'I wouldn't have my children with me today without the support from the centre. The staff are fantastic.' and, 'I have had so much support that I have become a better parent now.'

The inclusion of all families and children is outstanding and fully promoted in all aspects of the centre's provision. The diverse needs of families are particularly well-supported. For example, children with disabilities and those with special educational needs have carefully designed individual programmes to support their learning and transition to school. The centre has an excellent understanding of its key target groups. Year on year, outcomes for children are improving as evidenced in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile which demonstrates a clear narrowing of the gap between the highest and lowest achieving children.

Excellent, on-site crèche facilities ensure equality of access to learning and

encourage parents to learn while their children are safe. The majority of families that access the wide range of courses available, including first aid, parenting programmes and literacy and numeracy are from workless households. Case studies demonstrate that families engaging with the centre improve their economic well-being. The centre recognises that although some adults' progress to volunteering, training or employment, unemployment and low qualifications levels remain key local issues. One parent told the inspectors, 'The staff encouraged me to learn and go on courses. I'm a different person now.'

The centre successfully engages with the majority of its key target groups, particularly workless families, and attendance at sessions is high. A bilingual worker successfully supports the integration and engagement of the high number of Eastern European families in the area. However, the centre recognises that although, the engagement of teenage parents and fathers is increasing, their overall engagement with the centre remains low.

The centre demonstrates an excellent capacity for sustained improvement. It is achieving outstanding outcomes because leaders, staff and families constantly monitor the impact of services and strive to improve them. Robust self-assessment is based firmly on the analysis of outcomes and leads to the centre setting challenging targets. The 'can do' attitude of leaders drives forward the continuous and rapid improvement. The centre actively seeks and welcomes the views of families and the wider community and uses them effectively to improve services. Excellent parent representation means that the advisory board provides outstanding support and robust challenge to the centre through the evaluation of its services. Outstanding leadership and management, excellent quality of provision and outstanding outcomes mean that the centre provides excellent value for money.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop strategies to increase the engagement of fathers, teenage parents and the number of adults gaining qualifications and employment in order to improve their well-being.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Family support workers provide excellent support to families and as a result, children's and parents' safety is outstanding. An integrated approach and excellent knowledge of the Common Assessment Framework ensure that support is exceptionally well-targeted. Strong partnerships and integrated working have a very positive impact on the safeguarding of children and, as a result, their progress and safety is excellent. Safety awareness is very well-promoted, with families developing an excellent understanding of how to keep their children safe.

The innovative use of the reception area increases the available space and provides a valued opportunity for volunteers and staff to meet families informally. One parent said: 'You can just come up to the centre when you want to. There is always someone here to talk to or to ask for advice. My baby loves coming to play here.' The enjoyment of children is evident from their laughter and eagerness to enter the building. Adults and children thoroughly enjoy the high-quality learning and development sessions, such as 'Stay and Play' and, as a result, their personal development is outstanding.

Through an outstanding range of supported play and development opportunities, parents are learning how to support their children's learning. Outcomes for children from identified key target groups are excellent. Children make excellent progress from their very low starting points in developing the skills that will help them in the future. Their behaviour is excellent. There are no reported incidences of bullying and parents and children treat each other with respect. There is clear evidence that adult learning is improving outcomes for families and is leading to positive progressions in further education, employment or self-employment. One parent said: 'I never got any qualifications when I went to school. I have gained confidence and I go on as many courses as I can.' However, the centre recognises that unemployment in the area remains high and it provides some outreach provision to encourage more adults to access training and improve their economic well-being, although this is limited.

Families play a key role in the decision-making of the centre. They make a very strong contribution through volunteering and governance to both the life and direction of the centre. The centre routinely listens and uses their extensive feedback to shape and develop its services. One parent told the inspectors: 'Most houses around here don't have gardens for children to play in. We asked if we could convert the waste land next to the centre into a community garden. It is fantastic now.'

Effective partnerships with health services are improving health outcomes for families. The level of attendance at child health clinics is good and immunisation and smoking cessation rates are increasing. Midwives provide excellent one-to-one support to help the most vulnerable parents improve their parenting skills and knowledge. Data indicate that the number of babies that are breastfed at six-to-eight weeks is increasing and is around the average for Lincoln but remains below the national average. Participation in healthy living courses, targeted at particular families in need, builds parents' knowledge. As a result, obesity rates for children in Reception Year at 7.25% are below the national and local averages.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from 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 from 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 from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

1

The centre's good knowledge and understanding of the community it serves leads to the delivery of high-quality, integrated provision. Staff demonstrate an outstanding commitment to improving the life chances of children and parents. Multi-agency support for families in their own homes is highly effective. The centre uses assessment well to identify the needs of the children and adults in the reach area. The centre has increased registrations and attendance, which includes the majority of children living in workless households and those from minority ethnic groups. Outreach provision in partner venues meets the needs of the community well. As recognised in the centre's development plan, the centre is targeting its work to increase the number of fathers and teenage parents engaging with them.

Staff use information about children's starting points to plan their learning effectively and measure their progress. This is having an excellent impact on improving educational outcomes and narrowing the gap between those who achieve and those who do not. Parents are encouraged to support their children through such activities as 'Messy Play.' The centre provides services to those who are in most need of intervention and support, such as those families where the parents speak little or no English. One parent said, 'The centre was a lifeline for my wife when we had our first child. The breastfeeding support really helped her with breastfeeding our first baby and reduced her isolation.' The centre provides effective, targeted support for parents and children with disabilities through personalised learning programmes and close partnerships with parents. High-quality support ensures that children's transition into school is a smooth process.

The outstanding effectiveness of the centre's approach to care, guidance and support is clearly demonstrated in families' high take-up of its services. Parents comment that the centre has made a big difference to their lives. Typical comments are, 'The centre has changed my life', 'Staff have helped me find solutions to my problems' and, 'The centre has helped me to be a good parent and to keep my two children.' The highly dedicated family support workers are extremely successful in working with families through home visits. Their vigilance, professionalism and diligence in providing support for families and safeguarding for children is exemplary. The centre has an empowering approach to information, advice and guidance which is highly successful. Staff identify families needs appropriately, provide on-going support and refer them to other services. Strong relationships enable families to approach the

centre with confidence, particularly during times of crisis.

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	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The centre demonstrates a strong vision of inclusion and an excellent understanding of, and commitment to, the success of the children’s centre. This leads to excellent outcomes for families. Governance, leadership and management are outstanding. Teamwork is highly effective and accountability arrangements are clear and understood. High expectations and ambitions are communicated to staff, who are inspired to drive forward and improve services. For example, because of the high priority given to the safeguarding and the protection of children there has been a reduction in the escalation of issues and the number of children subject to a child protection plan. The centre uses data well to plan and evaluate the delivery and impact of its services and to set measurable targets for improvement. The centre and its partners make excellent use of their critical reflection and evaluation skills in order to target the provision and narrow the gap for the most disadvantaged families. For example, excellent support for families where English is an additional language and extensive speech and language support has resulted in the continually improving results for communication, language and literacy.

Partnership with parents is highly effective and is at the heart of the centre’s philosophy. The centre seeks and welcomes the views of all families. Parents’ views play a vital part in developing the provision, particularly through their role on the advisory board, which oversees the work of the centre rigorously.

The inclusion of all families and children is outstanding and fully promoted in all aspects of the centre’s provision to ensure that their diverse needs are supported and barriers to access are removed. Diversity is celebrated exceptionally well and the centre makes an excellent contribution to community cohesion. The centre is highly effective in engaging with its key target groups. The inclusion of children and adults with learning difficulties or disabilities is highly successful. One parent said: ‘The staff have given us so much help it’s unbelievable. They helped with getting some food vouchers while they got our benefits sorted out.’

Senior leaders are highly effective in ensuring children and families are safe through rigorous attention to child protection and vetting and recruitment procedures for staff. Safeguarding arrangements are exemplary. Resources are used and managed

efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families and the wider community. Families using the centre state that provision and support are highly effective and make a significant contribution to their improved outcomes. As a result, services of the centre are used very well and engage the large majority of families in target groups. The centre therefore provides excellent value for money.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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	1
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

Findings from the centre's designated on-site early years and childcare provision Sure Start Lincoln Central Children's Centre were used in this inspection. The provider was last inspected in May 2011 and judged to be good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Lincoln Central Children's Centre on 23–24 February 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Thank you very much for talking to us and welcoming us into your sessions. The information given and the stories you shared helped us to make our judgements. You told us how the children's centre has supported you to improve your lives and how you now have more confidence. It is clear that you are very proud of your achievements. Many of you talked about your involvement with the centre and how it has helped you and your children. You told us how it has become easier to ask for help and support because of the friendly welcome and good-quality relationships that you develop.

It is clear that you feel welcome at the children's centre because so many of you were in and out of the building with your new babies and toddlers when we were there. Many of you who start by making contact with the centre become more involved than you expect to. The centre works with adult education providers to give you access to courses to help improve your own education and future employment opportunities. We found out that many of you have learned new things and developed new skills, and increasing numbers gain qualifications, go on to further training, volunteering or find work. However, the centre recognises that low qualifications and high unemployment are still key issues for families in the area. We have asked them to try to increase the numbers gaining qualifications and getting into work.

Many of you said how the involvement with the centre is improving your lives and the lives of your children. You told us that you appreciate the support and encouragement staff give you. The centre is very successful at engaging with the majority of local families that really need some support but we have asked them to find ways of engaging with more teenage parents and fathers who do not yet access it.

We found that staff have an excellent understanding of child protection procedures and that they are well-trained. You said that you feel your children are safe at the centre and that advice from the centre helps you stay safe. You enjoy the sessions such as 'Stay and Play' with your children. Parents with children in the crèche really value the care their children receive. We found that children benefit from accessing services at the centre and make outstanding progress from their starting points.

Your children behave well and you learn about how to stay healthy. The centre's staff listen to you and ask you what you think of the services and activities they offer. They change how and when they do some things because of what you say. Some of you are highly involved in making decisions about your centre through being on the advisory board and are involved in strategic decisions.

We found that the leaders and staff are exceptionally keen to promote equality and diversity. Many of the families with the greatest needs enjoy sessions to help them and their children. The centre works well for everyone in the community, irrespective of their background or disability and, in doing so, it contributes strongly to community harmony and cohesion. Families treat each other with respect. The

number of local fathers and teenagers coming into the centre is increasing but we have asked the centre to further increase numbers.

We recognise the outstanding leadership, enthusiastic staff and excellent partnerships with local agencies make the centre so successful. The staff are very committed to the work of the centre and are supported by the strong leadership of the centre leader. They provide you with an good range of high-quality services that are tailored to meet your individual needs. They use their partnerships with professionals from health, education, voluntary organisations and social care to make sure you get the best service. The advisory board and local authority check rigorously how well the centre is working, and supports and challenges them to improve.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with the inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking to you, hearing your stories and meeting your babies and children. We wish you every success in the future.

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