

Inspection report for Bell Green Children's Centre

Local authority	Coventry
Inspection number	364538
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Anthony O'Malley HMI

Centre governance	Coventry local authority
Centre leader	Anne Balder
Date of previous inspection	n/a
Centre address	Roseberry Avenue
	Bell Green, Coventry
	CV2 1NE
Telephone number	02476 786868
Fax number	02476 638965
Email address	anne.balder@coventry.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	n/a
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Orchard Nursery

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.

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 one additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the senior leadership team, staff, representatives from partner agencies and services, a local headteacher, local authority representatives, parents and other users of the programme.

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

Information about the centre

Bell Green Children's Centre opened in 2006. It is a phase 1 children's centre providing nursery, health and outreach support, and vulnerable children's services to families and children in the Bell Green and Longford areas of North East Coventry. Bell Green Priority Neighbourhood is one of the most deprived communities in the country, with average household incomes 10% lower than the average for the city. Longford is in the heart of Coventry and Nuneaton Regeneration zone and is one of the largest priority neighbourhoods. Both areas have a high proportion of lone parents, including teenage parents.

The census of 2001 showed that 78% of the centre reach was of White British origin. While the ethnic composition of Bell Green and Longford remains predominantly White British, the proportion of residents from minority ethnic groups has increased. The largest of these groups are of Asian and Asian British heritage. The number of refugees and economic migrants, particularly from Africa and Eastern Europe, living in the centre reach, has also increased.

Almost 25% of the working population claim out of work benefits and 10% of households comprise lone parents with dependent children.

Within the centre, The Orchard Nursery provides for up to 42 children. On entry to the nursery, children typically have skills and knowledge much lower than those expected for children of their ages. In July 2009, Ofsted judged the nursery to be 'outstanding'. The report for this provider can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre is a local authority managed provision which is supported by a partnership advisory body comprising parent, statutory and voluntary representatives.

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 users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The children's centre provides an effective range of services that secure good outcomes for its users. Throughout the inspection, users were keen to share their experiences of how the provision has benefited their children and themselves. 'I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for the centre... it showed me I could be something else as well as being a mum', commented one user, and another added, 'It's fantastic; you can come here and find out about anything to do with family life'. This is because of strong centre leadership that has ensured that families, particularly those that are vulnerable, benefit from a range of good quality services that meet their particular needs. Working closely with most of its partners, the centre is able to offer good quality services to the whole community. It helps many children, especially those who may be disadvantaged in some way, get a good start in life. However, a relative weakness is the centre's partnership with health services. Local issues concerning the sharing of information limit the centre's ability to demonstrate its impact on health outcomes for the whole centre reach. Data that are available, indicate that a recent weakening in the links between the centre and the midwifery service has had a negative impact on the proportions of women who sustain breastfeeding and cease smoking.

The centre building is a bright and welcoming environment. There is a good mix of consultation and meeting rooms. Staff work together extremely well to make sure services and activities are organised properly and run efficiently. Safeguarding is good and rigorous procedures are in place to ensure users' safety. The centre's

partnership with social services to protect children is particularly strong. There is a very good understanding of how the Common Assessment Framework helps ensure that those most at risk receive well-targeted support at an early stage. The centre's commitment to promoting equality and diversity is similarly clear, and the proportion of users from the full range of minority ethnic groups has increased in line with the changing nature of the local population.

The senior leadership team demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement through its accurate view of the centre's effectiveness and the positive record of improving provision and outcomes. However, leaders do not maintain formal records of quality assurance activities or consistently use available data, about the outcomes of the centre's work, to set precise and measurable targets for improvement. The lack of precise targets for improvement makes it difficult for the partnership advisory board to hold leaders to account for the centre's performance. The board is ambitious and keen to drive further improvement of the centre. However, its understanding of its strategic responsibilities, so that it is more effective in holding the centre to account for its work, is at an early stage of development.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- **With the support of the local authority, the children's centre should improve its partnership with the local health services to ensure:**

- that the centre receives sufficient information to be able to demonstrate its impact on health outcomes for the whole centre reach
- that the percentages of women sustaining breastfeeding and ceasing smoking increase.

- **Improve monitoring and evaluation procedures by:**

- formally recording strengths and areas for development when quality assuring practice
- making more effective use of information available so that the centre can identify precise and measurable targets in improvement planning.

- **Strengthen the partnership advisory board's understanding of its strategic responsibilities so that it is more effective in holding the centre to account for its outcomes.**

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Users respond satisfactorily to the centre's promotion of healthy lifestyles. Recent outcomes regarding breastfeeding and smoking cessation have been disappointing. However, following other regular health campaigns such as 'One Body One Life' and 'Smile Week', parents say that they develop the skills and knowledge necessary to

promote good dietary habits. The various 'Stay and Play' sessions make a strong contribution to both the physical and emotional health of parents and children. Particular strengths are the Portage service provided for children with complex additional needs and the 'Together Like Me' group, which supports the well-being of families with children with special needs. Case studies and evaluations demonstrate that these activities are highly valued and have a positive impact on the children's development.

There is good evidence of improved outcomes for children subject to the Common Assessment Framework process. The centre keeps up-to-date records on vulnerable children, including looked after children, and detailed minutes of its 'Raise, Share and Review' meetings. These demonstrate how, through strong partnership work, interventions have led to reduced levels of concern about children's well-being and in some cases successfully resolved the issues.

Children make good progress in their personal and social skills, and their communication, language and literacy skills. These gains are the result of well-planned and enjoyable learning in the nursery. Where appropriate, high quality input from members of the centre's speech and language therapy team is helping children improve their communication skills so that they are ready for school. Parents and carers who engage in centre activities also enjoy and achieve well. The 'Parent Volunteering' programme has been successful in helping parents' access training and employment. Information and advice provided through partnership with the Connexions Young Parents' Advisor has had similar success helping young mothers improve their employability skills. Advice from the centre has led to many parents improving their employment opportunities by gaining qualifications through adult education courses. A board in the centre displays employment opportunities and the 'Jobs' Bus' timetable. The centre is aware, however, of the need to strengthen its partnership with Jobcentre Plus and has recently reviewed the role of the link worker.

In all of the activities observed, children's behaviour was good and relationships between families and staff were warm and respectful. The centre successfully contributes to community cohesion in both the area reach and the wider community through its key role in the Extended Schools Cluster. A local headteacher spoke passionately about the high quality of the staff at the centre, emphasising that they are helping the school meet the needs of vulnerable children more effectively. Parents are involved in running groups, and four are members of the partnership advisory board. However, at present there is no formal parents' forum to enable more users to participate in decision making.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare	2

concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

Strong links with most of its partners, the main exception being the partnership with the health services at a strategic level, enable the centre to understand its users' needs well. The centre successfully uses strategies such as nursery open evenings, family fun and learning days, and parent consultation to listen to users and assess how best to tailor its provision to meet group and individual requirements. The centre gives high priority to the needs of the most vulnerable and has well-established systems that ensure that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive prompt specialist support. The most vulnerable families receive individual care packages. Case studies of families benefiting from Portage, Early Support and Family Support demonstrate the success of these outreach services. The universal services are popular and high proportions of users registering on courses complete the programmes. They attract a diverse range of families, including families from minority ethnic backgrounds. Evaluations, in consultation with users, help improve and develop provision. For example, the establishment of a 'Good Father Committee' followed discussions with fathers.

The nursery provides an inclusive service for all children. The nursery has a high proportion of children from families with lone parents, teenage parents and from workless households. Following consultation with parents, the nursery remains open outside the core hours to meet family circumstances. The nursery has many children with special needs, including complex health needs. Staff demonstrate commitment and flexibility to ensure that wherever possible families receive positive solutions to circumstances that challenge them.

The 'Wild Green Garden' project is a good example of how the centre matches services to need and promotes purposeful learning. 'There was nothing like this for my other children', commented one father. He was keen to share how working at the allotment, and a camping break outside the locality, have allowed fathers and children to work together and learn new skills. As well as developing parenting skills, the project has helped families discover healthy eating, through growing and cooking their own fruit and vegetables, and explore the outdoor environment.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre leader has developed an enthusiastic and talented team that has benefited from a thoughtful investment in staff training and opportunities for sharing expertise. The team delivers high quality services and takes great satisfaction from its work. Leaders at all levels know the strengths and weaknesses of their services and have sensible plans to secure further improvements. Partners from the wide range of agencies speak positively about the centre's leaders. They confirm that the centre successfully promotes integrated support for families, and that outcomes are generally good, and sometimes outstanding. The priority leaders give to working in partnership with social care to provide support when there are concerns about the well-being and safety of children and adults is a strength of the centre. The centre offers good value for money because it takes great care to tailor its services around its users' needs. As a result, for the large majority of users, contact with the centre is improving their life chances.

The centre's leadership team share plans, progress and financial information with the partnership advisory board at quarterly meetings. These meetings provide helpful updates on centre activity and opportunities for key partners to discuss current issues and plan future developments. However, while the board carries out its duties satisfactorily there is a lack of rigour in the use it, and the local authority, make of available data to hold leaders to account for the centre's performance. Similarly, the centre's self-evaluation processes rely too much on qualitative evidence, for example feedback from users, and only rarely analyses data that are available to review the impact of its work.

The centre successfully promotes equality and diversity. The inclusion of all children and families is at the heart of its vision. Positive images and resources, reflecting all members of the community, highlight the centre's determination to reach out to groups who may be subject to discrimination. The centre pioneered the very effective 'Together Like Me' group, which provides a safe and inclusive play environment for families with children who have disabilities or additional needs.

Child protection arrangements are good. There is appropriate induction and training on safeguarding matters for all staff. Consequently, new, as well as experienced

members of staff, understand and follow the centre's child protection policy. Effective recruitment and vetting checks are undertaken and suitable arrangements are in place for those staff not directly employed by the centre. The single central record complies with requirements.

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	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community 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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

I would like to thank all the people that spoke to me and my colleague when we inspected the Bell Green Children's Centre on 29–30 September 2010. Many of you told us what you thought about the centre and its activities. Your views were very helpful. We judged the centre as good overall.

The children's centre provides a good range of services that are helping children and their families in Bell Green and Longford. Throughout the inspection, parents were keen to tell us how they had benefited from support provided by the centre. We were also impressed by the very positive comments users made about the services on offer and the case studies that show how lives have been transformed through links with the centre.

The centre works very well with most of its partners, for example, schools and social care. This joint working ensures the delivery of good quality services to the whole community. It helps many children, especially those who may be disadvantaged in some way, get a good start in life. There are also many examples of the centre winning the confidence of adults so that many move on from occasional contact and become regular users of the centre. Parents and local residents from minority ethnic groups make good use of services provided. A parent volunteering scheme is well-established and has resulted in parents developing and running some groups, for example, 'Shake, Rattle and Roll' and 'Stay and Play'. Families and individuals also value the support offered through home visits and other outreach work.

The centre works closely with social services to ensure the safety of children. It has a good record of improving the safety of children subject to a child protection plan. The centre's commitment to promoting equality and diversity is similarly clear. Children, including those with disabilities, gain much from the imaginative range of activities on offer. They make good progress when attending the nursery or classes such as 'The Nappi Group', 'Tuning into Twos' and 'Together Like Me'. In particular, the centre can show how it is improving both parenting skills and children's development through activities where children and their parents learn new skills together. When children leave the nursery, more of them have the skills expected by the time they start school than was the case in the past. In this way, the centre is helping to give them a good start to their lives.

The centre does not have a parents' forum but there are some examples of how the parents' views have helped leaders make decisions. For example, parents were involved in the planning of the new play area next to the centre. Parents are well represented on the partnership advisory board which is responsible for the work of the centre leaders. The centre's leaders know what needs to be done to make the centre even more effective and have the skills and qualities necessary to bring about these improvements.

The inspectors have made these recommendations to help improve the centre.

- **The children's centre should improve its partnership with the local health services to ensure:**
 - that it is able to show clearly how it is improving the health of its users
 - that more women sustain breastfeeding and stop smoking.
- **The centre leaders and the partnership advisory board should improve the ways they check how well the centre is meeting the needs of children and their families.**

Thank you again to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us. It is clear from these conversations, and your written comments about services, that users have very positive views about the children's centre. We wish you every success for the future.

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