

Inspection report for Boston Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Lincolnshire |
| Inspection number | 366551 |
| Inspection dates | 13–14 January 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Lois Furness AI |

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| Centre governance | Lincolnshire County Council |
| Centre leader | Sophie Bell |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Centre address | Norfolk Lodge |
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| Linked school if applicable | Not applicable |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Little Acorns Day 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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the Principal Practitioner, the Children's Centre Practitioner, representatives of the local authority, the advisory board and health services, frontline workers, representatives from local schools and day-care providers and parents and carers. The inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's operational plans, case studies, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Boston Children's Centre serves a diverse community with four of its eight super output areas in the top 20% most deprived in the country. The vast majority of the reach population are White British, with an increasing number of Eastern European families settling in the area. There are 2333 children from birth to five years in the reach, of which 17% live in households dependent upon workless benefits. The centre has three sites, Norfolk Lodge, Fishtoft Road and St Christopher's Church, and some services are delivered at Carlton Road, a nearby Phase 3 children's centre. Evidence indicates that most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with attainment that is much lower than that expected for their age especially in their language development.

This Phase 1 centre provides the 'full core offer' which includes: child and family health services, Early Years Foundation Stage education, childcare, parenting and family support, home visiting and outreach work, support to help parents back into

training and work, links to Jobcentre Plus, support for childminders, support for children and parents with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and a wide range of drop-in sessions and activities. Governance is provided by the local authority, alongside the advisory board. The children's centre services are delivered as part of Boston Integrated Children's Services for children and young people 0-19 years and their families.

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 support and services provided for children and their families at Boston Children's Centre are good, and result in good and improving outcomes. Purposeful leadership by the centre leaders has developed a strong sense of teamwork amongst well qualified staff, who work hard successfully, to provide a welcoming and safe environment for all users. Parents and carers greatly appreciate the staff's work, and value the positive influence this has on their lives. A typical view expressed by one user is, 'I came to the centre very lonely and felt I just couldn't cope. The staff have been a great help, they always listen and give me good advice. I don't know how I would have managed without them.'

Outcomes are good in all areas. Children and adults demonstrate positive attitudes towards healthy eating and improving levels of safety awareness. There is secure evidence of the positive impact of services on users' ongoing learning and achievement. As a result of staff encouragement, vulnerable mothers are given the confidence to enrol on child-care courses, and children attending crèche sessions and the nursery are purposeful and confident in their play. Behaviour is good and children settle quickly to their choice of activity, expressing enjoyment in their learning. Adult users develop a range of skills through attendance at parenting sessions, academic and non-academic courses. Services are well integrated to provide a cohesive range of support. The good partnerships that exist with other agencies ensure effective working practices, such as information sharing and signposting to other services. Although the centre works well with vulnerable groups such as lone parents, black minority ethnic groups, those at the early stages of learning English and teenage mums, it is less effective in identifying families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Although once these

families and children are identified the support is good, at the present time too few of this vulnerable group are known to the centre.

Clear procedures for monitoring the welfare of children and the sharing of any concerns are in place. Equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination are central to the centre's work, and parents, carers and children get along well together demonstrating respect and understanding of everyone's different circumstances. The procedures for safeguarding and risk assessment are robust. However, although policies are of good quality, they are local authority policies and are not specific to this centre. For example, the person cited as having responsibility for safeguarding is the Director of Children's Services, rather than the centre manager. Also, important safeguarding policies such as those for child protection are not easily accessible to parents and carers.

The advisory board, for the five children's centres in the Boston area, fully support the centre's work and meet regularly to monitor what is being provided. The board includes an extensive range of partners, as well as parents and carers. Parents' and carers' views are carefully considered, and directly influence the provision available. However, they are less involved in evaluation, and the systems for evaluation are satisfactory rather than good. The information provided by the local authority through its 'annual conversation' is not helpful enough in identifying targets for further development. An impressive amount of data is now available, but this is not used rigorously enough to inform the leadership of the impact of its work, and show where more work is needed. Nonetheless, the centre's development plan has successfully driven developments to date. Steadily improving outcomes and the marked rise in the number of families engaging with the centre as a result of strong partnership working and good leadership, indicate good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen self-evaluation by identifying measurable targets for improvement during the 'annual conversation' and making more effective use of available data.
- Personalise all policies and procedures to reflect the work of this centre and ensure that policies, especially those to do with safeguarding and child protection, are easily accessible to parents and carers.
- Improve the strategies for the early identification of families with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, in order to ensure their needs are appropriately met.

How good are outcomes for users?

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Case studies and discussion with key staff and parents indicate the positive impact of the multi-agency approach to children's and families' health including emotional well-being and physical health. Well-attended sessions, such as 'baby PEEP', health clinics, baby massage and parenting classes, create a lively atmosphere where adults

and children feel safe and comfortable. The 'Mini Kickers' club provides useful activity sessions while 'Waddle Toddle' enables users to meet each other on themed walks around the town. Weekly breastfeeding clinics are proving successful and the proportion of mothers initiating breast-feeding is showing an upward trend. The promotion of healthy snacks is good; one parent commented, 'My child now eats fruit and vegetables, which he never would eat before attending the centre.'

High regard is given to promoting safety and parents and carers say they feel safe, trusting staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties. Staff undertake annual risk assessments, and implement daily safety checks of the environment and resources prior to users attending. Partnership working with health visitors, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the local fire service is helping to successfully raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities. The centre effectively addresses many of its users' feelings of isolation and low self-esteem as well as their needs as new parents. One parent said, 'I really appreciate the 'MeTime' sessions where I have learnt to manage my child's behaviour better', and described how sessions have 'taught me how to speak properly to my children'.

The extent to which users enjoy and achieve is good. There are many opportunities provided for parents and carers and children to play and learn together. For example, 'Yogabugs', 'Music Tots', 'Dancercise' and 'Home Start' family group drop-in sessions. Centre data confirms children's attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is rising. As a result, of effective specialist speech and language support through projects such as 'Talk Time', children's speaking and listening skills are improving and the gap between the lowest 20% of children and those achieving expected levels is beginning to narrow. The 'Action for Children' sessions effectively support children with additional needs, giving families time to learn together, as well as providing valuable respite time for parents and carers. However, as yet, too few families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities have been identified within the reach. Leaders recognise staff need training to help them in the early identification of this vulnerable group of potential users.

The centre has successfully helped parents and carers into learning, training and employment. Suitably accredited educational courses such as English for Speakers of Other Languages are available for parents who speak little or no English, and several parents spoken too, felt their economic stability and independence had improved as a result of the opportunities the centre has provided. They say the Citizens Advice Bureau offers useful advice on how to access benefits, tax credits and manage debt, and the links with Jobcentre Plus are improving.

Relationships are good and staff model positive behaviour very well to all users. The parent and carers' forum or 'One Voice' sessions and representation on the advisory board are providing good opportunities for increased participation in decision-making and governance. Parents and carers feel their opinions are respected. For example, they say it is at their request there is health clinic held at Carlton Road. Children and families treat each other with respect and agreed 'group rules' effectively ensure all

recognise the importance of listening to others' views and opinions. However, systematic methods for gathering views from all groups of users to evaluate the quality of provision are at an early stage of development.

Effective partnerships and secure systems ensure staff in different services identify and refer families who may be at risk of harm or in crisis. Some of the groups whose circumstances have made them hard to reach, such as the growing Eastern European community and lone and teenage parents, are engaging well with the centre. Centre staff build good relationships with families so they feel able to engage with professionals to access help. As one vulnerable mother said, 'The staff are always there for me'. There is evidence that the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and 'Team Around the Child' referrals are improving outcomes for users, as the number of children on care plans are reducing and the proportion of looked-after children remains low.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

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| The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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 | 2 |
| 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

All staff who work with the centre are passionate about their roles and have a good level of expertise to successfully help families improve their health, well-being and achievement. Good multi-agency partnerships, such as those between health visitors, preventative workers and the police, increasingly make sure families at risk are signposted to the centre where interventions and support can be targeted appropriately. The assessment of individual cases is robust, and the CAF process is successfully ensuring that teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families identified as in need. Where a child protection plan is in place, the centre works effectively with social services and the child protection team. Outreach work is good and parents and carers report that the quality of individual support is good and available for as long as needed.

The majority of families engage well with the centre. This is because the courses and group sessions are valued, and provide good quality learning and development in basic skills and childcare. For example, the centre and its partner agencies offer

courses on confidence building, improving spoken English, child development, first aid, working with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and healthy cooking on a budget. As a result of such courses and positive parenting programmes, parents and carers are gaining a better understanding of education through play and are in a position to model good learning habits to their children. This means the personal development of children is improving, as they learn to share and take turns during activities. Participation rates are increasing and over the last two years there has been a 20% increase in the number of users engaging with the centre. Strong partnership working with colleagues from 'Birth to 5' provides access to Early Years Foundation Stage data which supports the transition into school. Many parents and carers have progressed from entry level courses offered at the centre and its partner agencies, to a range of courses at the local college and work-based learning providers. Volunteering opportunities provide parents and carers with the chances to develop personally and to progress on to future volunteering or employment, for example working in local schools.

Care, guidance and support are good. Sensitive individualised and tailored support is provided to all families and children who access the centre. There is evidence of much good multi-agency working which ensures that families can access the right kind of support, be it from the family preventative worker, the women's aid worker or support and advice on breastfeeding or behaviour management. However the families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are less well served, as the strategies for identification and resulting referrals are not tight enough.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| 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 is well managed; communication is good. Staff from this centre, the other four children's centres, and representatives of the local authority, regularly meet to share information, to review performance and to strategically manage reducing resources. Through effective performance management, staff have a good understanding of how they contribute to the overarching local authority strategy to provide support and early intervention to the families living in the Boston area. The advisory board, with good representation from parents and carers and partner agencies, contributes well to decision-making about provision.

The local authority is effective in ensuring the efficient distribution of available resources, and in providing quality data to measure performance. However, as yet the centre leadership does not use this data well enough to shape its services, to measure the impact of actions on users' outcomes, and gauge improvement over time. Evaluation of the impact of work with individual families takes place within team and multi-agency meetings, case studies and through regular supervision of staff. However, this information is not collated well enough to evaluate impact at a more strategic level. The 'annual conversation' provides insufficient information to guide the advisory board in holding the leadership to account for the centre's work.

Despite this, leaders have a good understanding of the priorities and needs of the centre and the community it serves. For example, the increasing number of non-English speaking families has resulted in the appointment of a designated champion, to support families in accessing health services, housing, schooling, and in improving spoken English. A fathers' engagement worker is specifically working on a project to involve more dads and the Saturday morning 'dads club' is well attended. 'This gives me valuable uninterrupted contact time with my daughter,' said one father. The centre's leaders recognise the relatively low proportion of families and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities accessing services at the centre, and have identified the need to develop strategies to ensure the earlier identification of this vulnerable group of potential users.

Arrangements to share safeguarding concerns and record information are well developed. All agencies rigorously use agreed procedures to monitor children's welfare and provide appropriate support where necessary. Policies are robust and there are good systems in place to maintain and update these. All checks on the suitability of staff directly employed by the centre are handled by the local authority, and the centre maintains a central register which records these checks. Regular risk assessments ensure the safety of users. All staff have up-to-date training in safeguarding, child protection and first aid. Policies, although of a good quality, are not specific to this centre. Parents and carers do not readily have access to these policies, so they know who to approach specifically if they have a safeguarding concern.

Good quality resources are used well to provide welcoming safe environments at all three venues. Robust financial management systems monitor day-to-day spending and the delegation of resources, to ensure timely and effective packages of support for families. Equality and diversity are promoted successfully. Centre staff are effective in ensuring that all users regardless of difference, achieve and have the same access to a range of experiences. Diversity is celebrated through resources depicting different faiths, cultures, and backgrounds. Careful consideration is given to ensure all users can gain full access to the three sites and value for money is good.

These are the grades for leadership and management<

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| The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and | 2 |
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| understood | |
| 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

The day nursery 'Little Acorns' was inspected during the week of this inspection. Information from this was taken into account when writing about the outcomes for children. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

We inspected the Boston Children's Centre on 13–14 January 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you and the professionals who work with

you. Many of you told us how much you enjoy the activities provided particularly 'MeTime' which you said you found really helpful. You told us that staff always listen to you and make sure that you get the right advice and support. You said you appreciate the work the centre does in helping you to lead a healthy lifestyle and in how to play purposefully with your children. Our observation of 'Music Tots' confirmed how well staff helped you to introduce music, musical instruments and nursery rhymes to your children.

We found the centre is working well with a range of partners and providers such as social care, health, the Citizens Advice Bureau, family action and education. This means the centre can provide a wide range of support whenever necessary. Some of you said how well your children mix with others, happily playing and sharing resources whereas, prior to attending the centre, your child was very 'clingy.' This improvement means they are well prepared to start at nursery and at school. Adults are guided well so they can realise their potential. Some adults now work as volunteers and attendance at courses has resulted in many receiving formal qualifications and places at college and university. The English courses are effectively helping those of you from different countries to learn to speak English confidently.

The people in charge of running the centre are doing a good job. They work hard to make sure that everyone who works with Boston Children's Centre share the same commitment to help and support you. We heard lots of examples from you about how they are making a noticeable difference to your lives. We found that the centre provides a welcoming environment for families to seek and receive good quality care, guidance and support. Many staff are skilled at recognising when a family is in need of help and they quickly meet with each other to plan and provide individual programmes of support to help those families through their difficulties. This work is making a positive difference to the families who receive it. Some families and groups from the community, such as those at the early stages of learning English, teenage parents and dads are starting to use the centre more and this is good news. However, families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities do not use the centre as often as other families. This means that they do not benefit from the good advice and support that is available to them, or from the opportunities to get to know different groups of people and how they live. We have asked the children's centre to look at ways that they can help this group of the community to visit and use the good services on offer.

You told us that you feel safe at the centre. This reflects the good work done by staff to promote safety, welfare and good safeguarding arrangements. Children are well behaved and confidently explore the learning environment. You play an important role too. We were impressed by the positive and supportive relationships many of you have with one another and with your children. However, although safeguarding arrangements are good, the policies are too general and should relate more to the work of this centre. You should have access to these policies so if you have a concern about safeguarding you know exactly who to speak to.

Finally, it is good to know that the centre leaders regularly ask you your opinions and that your thoughts are acted upon. The 'One Voice' meetings seem to be a good way of finding out your views. Also those of you on the advisory board do a good job in helping to govern the centre. However, the annual discussion that the centre staff have with the local authority does not provide sufficient information to help the centre to plan developments. Also, although the local authority provides the centre with much useful statistical information, as yet this is not used effectively enough to find out how well services help children and families.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us. We are very grateful and we wish you every success in the future.

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