

Inspection report for Beacon Heath Children's Centre

Local authority	Devon County Council
Inspection number	362673
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Jane Burchall HMI

Centre governance	Devon County Council
Centre leader	Christine Cottle
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Beacon Heath Children's Centre

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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 additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's management team, a representative from Action for Children, the local authority, representatives from the partnership board, partnership agencies, members of staff and users of the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre.

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

Beacon Heath Children's Centre was designated in March 2007 and has developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. It is run by Action for Children on behalf of Devon County Council. It operates in a cluster model alongside other locally sited children's centres and serves the Beacon Heath, Pinhoe, Pennsylvania and Stoke Hill areas of Exeter. It is located in a densely populated urban area. When originally set up, the centre served an area which is one of the 20% most disadvantaged in the country. More recently its reach area has been extended and, as a result of the changing community, its reach area is less disadvantaged. Despite this, there remain pockets of significant deprivation where families are either dependant on workless benefits or low incomes. Children's attainment on entry to the Early Years

Foundation Stage has typically been low, particularly in regard to their communication and language development and their social development.

The local population is mostly White British with much smaller percentages of other minority ethnic groups. There is a rapidly increasing percentage of families in the centre's area who speak English as an additional language. The centre offers the full range of core offer services. Early years provision for children accessing two-year-old funding is offered on site; the centre is registered on the early years register to care for up to 25 children at any one time. The centre also provides crèche facilities for parents attending activities and training.

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

Beacon Heath Children's Centre makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for users through the good support it provides families. This is because both staff and managers show high levels of commitment to improving the lives of users. They work well as a team and with outside agencies in order to provide good-quality, cohesive services.

Users experience outstanding care, guidance and support. They confirm that a key strength of this children's centre is the significant amount of time staff spend listening to and supporting them, whenever needed. Users are confident that they can turn to staff in times of crisis; for example, those experiencing domestic violence are supported to find a place of safety. Staff are particularly effective at empowering users, the majority of whom report significantly increased levels of confidence due to their contact with the centre. The courses users attend have a considerable impact on improving their life chances. For example, they state that their attendance on the 'Speaking Up' programme has 'broadened their horizons' and has given them opportunities to 'refocus their life'.

Users make a strong contribution to improving the quality and suitability of the services they receive as they are fully involved in the management of the centre. They report their desire to 'give something back' to the community and are inspired to offer their services within the centre as a direct result of their positive experience as service users. A very well-coordinated volunteer programme ensures they are well trained to enable them to make a positive contribution.

Centre staff make good use of data that is available; they accurately identify users'

needs in order to develop relevant services to improve outcomes. Together with health partners, centre staff have had particular success in registering a very high percentage of families within the locality. They gather relevant information about families on registration, which means they have a good understanding of the needs of users and the local community. However, some of the data provided by the local authority was collated several years ago. While it proves useful to some extent, centre staff are not able to fully measure their success in all key performance areas.

The centre recognises that the changing demographics within their reach area includes a significant increase in the numbers of users who speak English as an additional language. They make good use of interpretation services in order to enhance verbal communication. However, they have yet to ensure that services are fully inclusive for this particular group of users, such as ensuring written communication is accessible.

The safeguarding of children and vulnerable users receives good attention. Staff and management are well trained and their work is underpinned by comprehensive and effective policies and procedures developed by the safeguarding lead and Action for Children.

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development through good self-evaluation and service monitoring. The proactive attitude of both staff and management results in a continuous strive to overcome barriers. As a result, the centre has good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop further services for users who speak English as an additional language to ensure they are more effectively engaged.
- Together with the local authority and partners improve the quality of data to enable accurate measurement of success.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Parents and children who attend the centre are well informed to make healthy choices about food based on positive and practical experiences. For example, they learn about where food comes from through visits to the local farm. Children in the '2gether' pilot explore food such as pumpkins, which they make into soup and eat. This makes transparent the journey from harvesting to eating. A grocery van visits economically challenged areas with competitively priced produce in order to encourage parents to adopt healthier cooking practices. The 'Skilled for Health' group encourages the whole family to adopt healthier lifestyles. However, despite these concerted efforts, obesity levels in young children in the locality remain high. Centre staff have rightly prioritised this issue and, alongside their health partners, are

developing suitable initiatives such as taking healthy lifestyle messages out into the community through visits to local toddler groups and pre-schools.

Mothers are well supported in breast-feeding their babies. Well-trained centre staff work closely with midwives in order that breast-feeding is encouraged. In addition, the centre has adopted an approach to fully promote breast-feeding over bottle-feeding; for example, it undertakes to ensure no literature within the centre depicts or advocates bottle-feeding. There has been an increase in the percentage of mothers who initiate and sustain breast-feeding; however, there remains an element of cultural resistance in the community.

The emotional development of young children is well promoted due to the good support staff give parents to enable them to understand and recognise the needs of their children. Clear explanations by staff mean that parents have a much improved understanding of how to provide for this particular aspect of their child's development. For example, staff reinforce with first-time parents in the 'New Baby Club' the importance of spending time bonding with their baby and they are assured that this will not 'spoil' their baby.

A greater number of children are being kept safer within their homes due to the implementation of a home safety scheme. Parents are supported to assess risks in their home and are provided with a range of suitable equipment to prevent accidents. Children are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe as they learn how to safely use equipment such as knives when preparing food and the large outside play apparatus. Staff are well trained to recognise and support those who are at risk of domestic violence. Users are given confidence to share their experiences with staff, who respond quickly and appropriately to ensure they remain safe.

Children and parents join together to enjoy playing and learning in a welcoming environment, for example in the 'Play and Stay' sessions and the 'Here's Looking At You Little One' sessions. Parents are supported to observe their children at play in order to understand both their child's learning journey and how to provide an effective home-learning environment. Children are well supported as they move from pre-school provision into school life. Good sharing of information through the transition document for individual children provides the school with comprehensive information regarding their learning journey. A coherent approach by early years staff, the qualified teacher and the local authority early years consultants has resulted in an increased percentage of children reaching good levels of attainment in the Foundation Stage. In particular, a focus on language and communication and social development has seen positive benefits and has resulted in children being better prepared for school life.

Parents' aspirations for themselves and their children have been significantly raised through their involvement in the children's centre. For example, some have aspirations for their children to attend university and recognise the good role modelling they are providing by attending courses; one user reported how proud her

daughter was that she now 'went to college' and how they help each other to do their 'homework'. Users engage well with opportunities for both family learning and personal development and many are successful in gaining recognised qualifications. Many users have successfully developed both economic stability and independence through the support, help and guidance they have received from the children's centre. This includes many who have travelled on a journey from service user, to volunteer, into employment in the centre. Users benefit greatly from the 'Plough and Share' service provided by the Credit Union. They take responsibility for saving and improving their economic well-being.

Users effectively influence change within the centre and in the community and beyond. For example, a complaint made by the parent forum to a local advertising company resulted in the removal of posters from bus stops nationally which contained images that frightened their children.

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, and 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 and employment.	2

How good is the provision?

2

Centre staff have a good understanding of the needs of their community. They make good use of externally produced data such as the Child Health Index and that provided by the local authority, despite the fact that the latter's data is now a few years old and so increasingly unreliable. Owing to good partnership working, staff have been very successful in reaching a significant proportion of families with young children in their reach area. They make good use of the information they gather at registration alongside their knowledge of the locality in order to ensure that services provided meet the needs of the majority of the community. Services for those who speak English as an additional language have yet to be fully developed.

Good assessment procedures for those who require targeted services means that staff have a clear understanding of the needs of children and their families. This includes very good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). As a result, well-coordinated services are provided. Staff often act as the lead practitioner when appropriate and coordinate 'team around the child' meetings to secure multi-agency

working to meet children's specific needs.

Users are encouraged to undertake both family learning and accredited training in order to improve their family experiences and their skills for employment. This includes courses regarding healthy lifestyles, groups to promote the home-learning environment and courses which provide users with nationally recognised qualifications. Staff recognise users' achievements and they regularly celebrate success. This includes both celebrations to issue certificates and reporting within the local press. Users are supported in celebrating their success further as they make presentations regarding their achievements at local and county-wide events.

Outreach services are very effective at engaging those users who are hard to reach; this ensures some of the most vulnerable families access relevant services. Users have easy access to a very good range of information, guidance and advice regarding topics which are relevant to them. Staff show users very high levels of respect. For example, they are extremely sensitive to the fact that users may wish to access information privately and they enable this to happen. They display information regarding personal issues such as domestic violence and sexually transmitted diseases within the toilet cubicles so users can access these without being observed by others. All staff are highly skilled at supporting users and regularly 'go the extra mile' to ensure users are able to make positive changes in their lives.

Staff regularly review their services in order to ensure they meet the users' needs. Parents are fully involved in this process and staff take good account of their feedback and act upon this. They tailor groups to meet the specific needs and preferences of users. For example, the teenage ante-natal group was developed following consultation with young mums-to-be.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Staff are very well led by a committed and passionate senior management team. It undertakes responsibilities which make best use of members' individual skills and areas of expertise; members of the team complement one another well. They inspire all they work with to improve outcomes, including staff, partners and users. Clear line management arrangements and effective supervision mean that staff are well supported. This includes clear governance arrangements provided by Action for

Children. Good levels of challenge from Action for Children, the local authority, the advisory board and the parents' forum ensure managers drive improvement in line with national, county and community needs and expectations. Good working relationships with key agencies means that all partners work towards common aims and are clear about the contribution they make. As a result, services are integrated and cohesive.

Leaders have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and the areas that require further improvement. Self-evaluation is accurate, although at times a little conservative. Staff work well with other agencies such as health in order to ascertain factors that have led to areas to improve and together develop realistic plans. For example, alongside health visitors, staff identified the need to take messages regarding healthy eating out into the community by working with local early years providers to improve the impact on childhood obesity rates. Staff collate some evidence of impact on service users and are improving their systems; for example, by tracking the outcomes for those children who access two-year-old funding once they have entered school. While users report strong levels of satisfaction regarding the services they receive, a lack of good-quality, up-to-date data means that the centre can not be fully assured of its success.

The environment is welcoming and safe and accommodation is well used to provide a good range of services. Managers target funding appropriately and have secured additional resources to fund programmes that support specific needs of users. For example, the centre funds a National Childbirth Trust worker to work alongside centre staff and midwives providing a comprehensive ante-natal programme. Staff have been successful in securing funding for two-year-olds to receive care and education. An excellent range of high-quality, easily accessible resources means that children are able to experience a good range of activities both indoors and outside.

Centre staff have begun to develop programmes that support fathers in becoming involved in the life of the centre. For example, they run a 'Play and Stay' session on a Saturday particularly aimed at fathers. Although staff provide parents with good support in order that they are able to bring their children up to be bilingual, the development of services for families who speak English as an additional language are in their infancy.

Staff are very well trained in safeguarding issues. Their work with the most vulnerable children has had a very positive impact upon ensuring they are safeguarded. Good parental support, including the provision of effective parenting classes, has resulted in some families no longer being subject to a child protection plan. Good understanding of how and when to implement the Common Assessment Framework process has resulted in appropriate early intervention for many children. In the most significant cases, this had led to appropriate support being given to families in order that children can remain living at home. Robust recruitment procedures ensure that those who work with children and their families are vetted.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
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	3
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	2
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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Beacon Heath Children's Centre on 3 and 4 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that the care, guidance and support that staff offer you is outstanding. We agree with you that staff go out of their way to help and support you. They are always ready to listen when you need to talk with someone and do their utmost to help you to make positive changes to your lives. Staff and managers show a very strong commitment to improving the lives of all of you and they work well together to do so. They have developed some very strong partnerships with other

professionals and organisations so that they can offer you the correct support, advice and guidance. Staff work hard to include all members of the family in the life of the centre and fathers are provided with their own 'Stay and Play' session on a Saturday.

We noticed that you make a very strong contribution to the running of the centre and the services it offers. You are given regular opportunities to present your views and thoughts and staff take account of these when they develop the services they provide to you. Many of you are willing to help out at the centre and volunteer your services. We agree with you that these opportunities, together with the courses you attend, help to develop your confidence and provide you with skills to help you to gain employment.

Centre staff do all they can to make sure you and your children remain safe. For example, they are well trained in how to safeguard children and management have taken the correct steps to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable. Staff work closely with you to help you ensure that your homes are safe places for your young children. Staff continue to work hard in supporting you and your families to improve your health and it is clear that many of you have taken positive steps; you are learning about healthy diets and how to cook nutritious meals.

Staff at the centre collect useful information from you in order that they can make sure that they provide suitable services. They know that the community they serve is changing and now has many more people who do not speak English as their first language. They are beginning to make relevant changes in order to support people who do not speak English, although they recognise that there is more to do. Leaders and managers of the centre have a good understanding of how they can improve their services even further and it is clear that they are determined to make your lives the best they can be. However, they are not currently provided with enough up-to-date information in order that they can check whether or not they have been successful.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your thoughts about the centre.

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