

Inspection report for Belton Lane Community & Children's Centre

Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	366418
Inspection dates	23–24 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Rajinder Harrison

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Lisa Collins
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Belton Lane Community Primary
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Belton Lane 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 primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's principal practitioner, representatives from the local authority, members of the Partnership Advisory Board, and a range of providers, centre users and centre staff. Inspectors observed the centre's work including provision at the centre and provision commissioned through other providers. They looked at relevant documentation including the centre's operational plans, self-evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Belton Lane Community and Children's Centre is one of the two centres that serves Grantham. It was designated a phase one centre in 2006. The reach area is made up largely of council housing, with some privately-owned houses close by. The vast majority of families are of White British heritage. A very small proportion represents a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, particularly of Eastern European origin. The proportion of families claiming benefits is broadly average. Although the incidence of worklessness, at around six percent, is lower than the national average many families are in low income work. A high proportion of children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are well below those expected for their age.

Within the area the centre serves, there are significant issues surrounding extreme poverty, alcohol and substance misuse, increasing levels of domestic violence and petty crimes, poor health and low levels of literacy and numeracy.

The local authority governs the centre. Many of the activities and services are led by centre staff and some have been commissioned through inter-agency partnerships. Representatives from these partner providers oversee the projects for which they are responsible. The day-to-day running of the centre is managed by the principal practitioner who also manages three other centres in the area. The centre offers a range of health, social care, and education and family support services.

Childcare for children aged from birth to five years is provided through the independent nursery within the same premises. Education for children aged five plus is provided through Belton Lane Primary School on the same site as the centre.

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

Belton Lane Community and Children’s Centre provides a very friendly, calm and attractive environment for all its users. Parents and children enjoy being at the centre and are overwhelmingly positive about all that the centre does to support them and the positive impact this has on their lives. A typical view expressed by a user is: ‘I could not have managed my family’s problems without the help from the centre. Staff treated me with respect. They do not judge you here so it is safe to talk’.

Outstanding assessment procedures ensure that children have the right support and guidance to achieve exceptionally well. As a result, children feel safe and happy and make outstanding progress in their learning and personal development. Children who need additional help to make the same level of progress are identified very early and receive excellent support. While the centre is very successful in supporting the confidence and self-esteem of adult users, opportunities to extend their education and training and thus improve their employability further are not developed as effectively. Through an extensive and effective programme of home visits, the centre supports individual families well, particularly in helping them access service

providers, for example, health, welfare benefits, housing agencies and counselling support for those facing particularly challenging difficulties in their lives.

In the last year, the centre has increased the number of users it reaches, especially families with young children and those facing particular hardship. This has been through a concerted effort to promote the centre's work and so benefit local families by ensuring that referrals from all agencies are followed up promptly. An increasing number of children under five use the centre regularly. This has led to waiting lists to ensure everyone has an equal chance to benefit. The centre is rightly regarded by many parents as, 'a very valuable place to go for support and advice because staff listen, help sort out problems and give your children a good start in life'. Users' views are heard through regular feedback following events and activities; parents are playing an increasingly active role in representing the community on the advisory board and through the 'buddies' and '4Dads' committee. Although there is no formal parents' forum, parents are involved well in decision making, influencing the centre's work, promoting self-help within the community and taking greater responsibility to improve their life chances.

Outcomes for users are good because provision is good overall. Provision for children is outstanding. As a result, they gain confidence and independence quickly through the excellent activities the centre offers. Occasionally, children's free access to the outside area is restricted by the pathway to the on-site nursery. Parents and carers who use the centre regularly gain confidence and thus become more independent and self-reliant. This is particularly evident; for example, in the '4Dads' and the young parents' groups and among the many volunteers who support the centre's work. The centre is very effective in developing the social and personal skills that adults need to support their families. Information from course evaluations is used effectively to modify provision and, where data is available, it is used well to identify users' needs and the centre's priorities. Information from most providers, notably social care and health, is readily forthcoming because partnership working is well embedded. In liaison with health visitors and midwives, the centre successfully promotes the benefits of breastfeeding, childhood obesity immunisation and smoking cessation. Partnership with education and training providers is not developed as effectively. The centre does not always monitor the quality of provision available or ascertain how successful users are in gaining the skills they need to improve their economic well-being further.

With a high level of support and commitment from the local authority, the centre has established much good practice, particularly in ensuring the welfare and well-being of all groups in the community. Procedures for safeguarding and the promotion of equality are good. Leaders model good practice and set high standards for others to follow. Strengths include the principal practitioner's good leadership, effective support from the governing body and positive relationships with the many community groups the centre serves. The multi-agency partners lend their expertise and support well and have been particularly successful in establishing high quality

outcomes for children. The local authority provides good quality assurance. Action to improve provision and outcomes is effective. Leaders ensure that any areas identified as weaknesses are addressed promptly. They are accurate in their self-evaluation and have identified the roles of 'buddies' and volunteers as areas to improve further. This is a key factor in the centre's good capacity to further improve outcomes for parents and carers and their children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen the partnership with adult education providers so that centre staff have the information they need to promote adult learning more effectively.
- Widen the range of education and training opportunities adult users have to improve long-term benefits for their families.
- Improve the access children have to the outside area.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Children are very well prepared for school through high-quality learning experiences and interactions with staff, parents and carers that impact very positively on their learning and development. Children feel safe and well protected. Their well being is a priority and every effort is made to ensure that agencies work together to apply the Common Assessment Framework and child protection procedures to meet individual needs well. They settle well and learn to play together harmoniously, sharing toys and taking turns, for example when using paints. Children have fun making new friends and play confidently and explore independently all that is offered. They do not use the outside area freely because the path to the nursery occasionally restricts access. Children make good progress in their personal development, behave exceptionally well and learn good hygiene and eating habits. Those who need additional help benefit from individual support with parents and carers following the good practice from staff. Children's speaking and listening skills improve rapidly because parents and carers are shown how to talk and share books with them. Children who need extra support in their speaking benefit from early identification by speech and language therapists. Those who use the centre regularly settle into school quickly and make rapid progress.

Parents and carers report that they gain a good understanding of parenting skills through the many family learning activities. These include 'Creative mess', 'Cheeky Monkeys' and the many parenting courses that cover early years education and how parents can support their children's learning at home. Many parents enjoy contributing to the 'learning journey' books to log children's progress and achievements. Because attendance levels are high, parents accept they sometimes have to wait for spaces if they want high-quality outcomes for their children. Parents say that staff help with, for example, advice on health, managing money and

preparing healthy meals. The 'Dads' group has been particularly influential in developing the outdoor areas and physical exercise and its importance in promoting healthy lifestyles. High attendance at activities, particularly in cookery sessions that promote healthy eating, indicates their popularity and usefulness. The benefits of breastfeeding are promoted very effectively with breastfeeding peer supporters who encourage new mothers to persevere for as long as possible. Regular weaning guidance ensures that babies have a healthy start in life. Health workers are successful in raising awareness of the dangers of smoking; almost half of the expectant mums in the area last year ceased smoking.

The centre addresses parents' feelings of isolation and low self-esteem well. Parents trust staff and staff identify quickly and sensitively any safety concerns and intervene appropriately before a crisis occurs. Those experiencing particularly low points in their lives explain confidently, that without the prompt and sensitive support from centre staff they could not have coped with the difficulties they faced in their lives successfully. Typical comments are: 'I had severe depression and without help from the centre staff I am not sure if I could have got through it. The centre was my life line. Here I could get the help I needed to sort things out and help my family'. Good parenting courses, for example, understanding children's behaviour, have helped fathers to secure better relationships for their children and ease flashpoints if problems arise. Services at the centre ensure users are safe and resources such as free home-safety packs and home visits aid safety at home. Regular sessions on home and road safety remind parents of everyday hazards and, consequently, the centre sees fewer children needing emergency aid at hospitals.

Most parents and carers in the area are in employment and economic stability and independence levels are good. A small proportion of parents attend literacy and numeracy courses to extend their academic skills and successfully gain qualifications to help them access further education and training. A significant number of parents attend various accredited courses through the centre and other providers successfully, and this is particularly evident among the teenage parents. The overall attendance rates of the small minority not in employment remain low because the range of provision the centre offers to enhance their skills is limited.

Mutual respect between staff and users ensures open, honest relationships. Parents are encouraged to suggest ideas for future activities. Key users, including fathers, successfully organise adventurous activities and trips, including visits to the seaside, residential visits and abseiling. The newly-established 'buddies' group, made up of current centre users, has already been instrumental in bringing new users into the centre and is launching a healthy cafe at the centre to serve the local community.

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	2
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healthy lifestyles	
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

Activities provide high quality purposeful learning for children. Learning opportunities for parents are satisfactory. Children play and explore in a safe, nurturing environment; parents receive useful advice and support from many professionals. Parenting courses provide good opportunities for parents to enjoy quality time with their children and learn from the effective practice modelled by staff. The lounge area, sensory room and children’s library are attractive spaces where users can meet, share experiences and build friendships that extend beyond the centre. Many attend the various childcare courses and activities that help them support their children’s learning and development. For example, weaning and home-safety sessions advise parents on when to introduce babies to healthy food and how to ensure children are safe. Parents and carers appreciate the non-threatening nature of these information sessions and a small number progress to literacy and numeracy courses that help them support their children’s learning as well as equip them for work. The numbers moving into education and training to improve economic stability and independence in the wider community, particularly among young parents, are increasing.

The quality of care for parents and their children is good. Support for users’ well-being has a high priority and families report that their lives are better for having the specific help they needed, particularly at low points in their lives. Effective arrangements for outreach support ensure that individual children and their families are supported well. For example, health visitors register all new births with the centre and every family is introduced to what the centre has to offer. Target families identified by staff or other agencies are high priority. Centre staff have to respond swiftly on occasions but do so in a very professional and sensitive manner. This results in positive outcomes that support community cohesion effectively. Partnerships with social care and housing are good. As a consequence, family workers coordinate well with partner agencies to support families in crisis. This personalised support is a strength and users appreciate its value.

The centre signposts a range of childcare providers for children under five which

enables parents and carers to plan the support they need. Families receive additional support so that individual needs are identified early and met well, especially where disability limits users' capacity to access services. Young parents receive excellent support and guidance to help them adjust to family life, manage their finances and improve their life chances in education and training. Staff monitor the outcomes of support they provide very effectively, but occasionally when users are referred to other agencies such as education, staff do not always know if the adults receive the right help to progress.

The centre assesses and reviews users' needs well and consults with groups as to where to target further provision. Individuals requesting specific help or guidance receive this promptly, and this may include one-to-one support from family workers or other agencies. In the various activities for children, assessments focus on children's needs very effectively and ensure that activities are interesting and relevant to their lives. For example, every child has a personal 'learning journey' book that helps them see what they have accomplished. Parents and carers are shown how they can help record their children's successes effectively through notes and photographs. Procedures to assess the social and personal needs of adult users are very good; assessment procedures are not always as rigorous regarding their education and training needs.

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 principal practitioner has an accurate view of the quality of provision and where improvements need to be made. She manages the centre's work well and ensures effective teamwork among centre staff. Through effective supervision procedures and good professional development opportunities, staff have the necessary support to improve their practice and develop provision. Parents who use the centre are encouraged to express their views regarding provision and influence how the centre develops its services. They are involved in decision making: many volunteers and 'buddies' take a prominent role in developing new opportunities for the local area. These include setting up a cafe and working in partnership with the community police officers to improve the environment.

The very careful assessments regarding the progress of young children as they move through the Early Years Foundation Stage shows that children who take up the support the centre offers benefit immensely when they start school. Assessment procedures are not always as effective in tracking the progress of adult users, particularly when they are signposted to other providers. Governance is good because the local authority and partner organisations understand the local community well. They hold centre staff to account for delivering the services that children and their families need. They ensure that all staff are stringent in their checks to secure the safety of children and their families. Every precaution is taken where concerns arise, particularly regarding child protection. Leaders ensure that the centre’s development plan addresses the local and national priorities well and is based on analysis of data and information where it is available. They review the centre’s progress regularly with the local authority. However, without the necessary data to inform planning, the quality and range of education and training courses to improve the employment opportunities among adult users, lack challenge.

Equality and diversity are promoted well. Everyone who uses the centre is integrated effectively. Referrals are followed up promptly and every affordable support is given to those families in most need. Families experiencing exceptional hardship, for example, with respect to housing or budgeting, receive support to cope with legal issues and to plan spending more carefully.

The centre offers good value for money. The leaders have established outstanding practice to support young children and have increased the numbers of families that benefit from the services the centre provides. Leaders continually look for new ways to reach into the local community and to include all groups of users effectively. For example, fathers are encouraged to attend the centre to improve their relationships with their children and families. Home visits, leafleting and signposting through effective partnerships with numerous agencies help users to extend their opportunities. Leaders ensure users, including childminders and other groups in the community make good use of the facilities. There are suitable plans to raise the profile of adult education providers in the centre and to encourage more self-help groups to use the centre and so benefit adults and children.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	
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

Belton Lane Nursery, which is on the same site as the children's centre, was last inspected in 2007. Belton Lane Primary School was inspected on 22 - 23 March 2011. The report has not yet been published.

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 Belton Lane Community & Children's Centre on 23–24 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall because it provides good support to you and your families. Thank you to everyone who took the time to speak with us for which we are very grateful.

Provision for children is outstanding and they make an excellent start to their education. You explained how you are made to feel welcome and that you feel that staff listen to you. It was good to hear that you regard the centre as a safe and welcoming place and that you make good friends there. It is not surprising that more and more families are using the centre regularly. The centre provides a good range

of services that are helping you to improve your lives. You told us that you appreciate the way staff at the centre help you and your families, especially when difficulties arise and you need help quickly. The centre works well with many service providers to make it easier for you to receive the support and guidance you need when problems arise.

The centre provides excellent support for your children, so that they have a very good start in life. 'Cheeky Monkeys', 'Baby Massage', and 'Creative mess' are clearly very popular as are the many early education sessions and various cookery classes the centre offers. The centre provides excellent opportunities for parents, carers and children to play and learn together. Many of you benefit from various parenting sessions that help you raise your children successfully and manage any difficult behaviour they present confidently. As a result, your families have fun and many of you gain a better understanding of how to stay safe, fit and healthy.

The centre leader and all staff work hard to support you and your families. The governors and other providers have a good overview of the centre's work. The staff are supported well by leaders to ensure the best outcomes for you all.

We have asked the centre to do three things to help improve provision for you. The centre should strengthen the partnership with adult education providers so that centre staff have the information they need to promote adult learning more effectively. It should widen the range of opportunities adult users have to improve long term benefits for their families. It should improve the access children have to the outside area

We wish you every success for the future.

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