

Inspection report for Bentley Children's Centre

Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	367748
Inspection dates	18-19 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Marian Pearson HMI

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Annie Fletcher
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY298687 - Little Whispers 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 immediately prior to the inspection of the centre under Section 3 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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre manager, the area group manager from Action for Children, staff members, representatives of the advisory group, local authority staff linked to the centre, a range of partner agencies, parents, carers, volunteers and other users. Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at sessions in operation at the children's centre and in nearby locations. They also looked at a range of documentation, including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Bentley Children's Centre operates from a purpose-built centre sited in a former mining village three miles north of Doncaster. The centre's reach area includes an adjacent village, Toll Bar, which is also a former mining community, and Arksey. The centre, which was designated in 2005, evolved from a Sure Start local programme and prior to this was a family centre. The centre delivers the full core offer and provides a 'one-stop shop' for most services, including a range of health services, on site. Outreach sessions are delivered at local schools and community halls according to need.

A large majority of families are of White British heritage, although a growing number of people of eastern European origin now live in the area. The population is unsettled with a large number of the community moving home each year. Within the reach

area, there is also a sizeable community of Gypsy, Romany and Traveller families. Many of these families are transient but some have settled in houses or on one of the three local Travellers' sites.

The centre serves a community that continues to experience relatively high levels of social and economic disadvantage. Over a third of the children served by the centre live in areas ranked in the top 10% of the most deprived areas in the country and the vast majority of the reach area is ranked in the top 30% of deprived areas in the country. Unemployment is high with the number of adults claiming benefits almost double the national average. The percentage of lone parent benefit claimants is particularly high. Qualification levels are low and many of those in employment are unskilled and low-waged. Evidence shows that when children start school at the age of three years, their levels of skills and knowledge are generally below those typically found at that age. The birth rate is high and teenage pregnancies are above the national average.

Bentley is one of seven children's centres in the local area that Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council has commissioned Action for Children to govern on its behalf. Reporting to the Action for Children group manager for the area, the centre manager has been in post since September 2010 following a period of transitional leadership. The local authority conducts quality assessments annually and performance management reports are submitted for review quarterly.

The centre's full day-care provision, Little Whispers, is housed within the same building and is also managed by Action for Children. The nursery was inspected immediately prior to the children's centre inspection. The inspection report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

Bentley Children's Centre provides good quality services to children and families in the locality. It provides a friendly welcome in a well-organised, bright and cheerful environment. Users value the centre, which has established itself as a focal point in the community for families with young children. A typical view expressed in the recent user questionnaire is, 'I would be very lost and lonely without the centre and my son would not be as happy and sociable as he is.'

Outcomes for users are good overall. Play and learning opportunities for children and adults are of high quality and result in outstanding educational outcomes. Children's achievement scores in the Early Years Foundation Stage show an increasing number of children acquiring the level of skills and knowledge typical for their age by the time they are five years old. There has been year-on-year success in narrowing the gap between the attainment levels for the lowest performing 20% of children and the rest in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Through training and support from the centre, parents and carers report that they have gained a better understanding of how to play with their children and how to manage their behaviour positively. Development of parenting skills and confidence building have been the main focus of the adult learning programme but the centre is now starting to assess the need for courses to support economic well-being more effectively. There is currently a lack of case study evidence and statistical data to demonstrate the impact of the centre's varied activities and services designed to promote healthy lifestyles and improve health outcomes

The centre has successfully engaged with a large majority of the families in the reach area and a large proportion of these families use the centre's services. This is because the centre is good at assessing the needs of users and listens to their views, adapting services to ensure they remain relevant and appropriate. The centre is seen by many users as, 'a good place to go when you need help' because the staff are so 'helpful, approachable and knowledgeable and always make you feel welcome'.

Users say they feel very safe in the centre and most report that they feel safe at

home. The centre staff know very well the families whose circumstances make them vulnerable and liaise closely with other professionals to ensure that children considered 'at risk' are safeguarded well. Information is routinely shared with parents and carers and, as a result, there is a high level of co-operation from families.

Equality and diversity is promoted satisfactorily. The centre is working hard to break down barriers which might prevent some groups of users from accessing its services. It has been particularly successful in engaging with Gypsy, Romany and Traveller families and in encouraging them to access services. However, as a result of lack of available data, the engagement of other groups of users, such as teenage parents, is less evident.

User views are sought at the end of courses and after events to assess satisfaction levels. This helps to inform delivery of future services but evaluation is less effective in driving improvement because it is not yet based on sufficient evidence of impact. Systems to gather, analyse and share data about the use and impact of services are developing and some data gathering initiatives have been successfully led by staff locally, such as the tracking of individual children's Early Years Foundation Stage profiles. The local authority is keen to move forward with this work, and to encourage partner agencies to share data, as it is aware how the lack of statistical information prevents an accurate understanding of the impact of the centre's work and of the needs of the community when planning for the future.

The local authority, governing agency and advisory group understand well their complementary roles and responsibilities for the work of the centre. The advisory group members, whilst revising their terms of reference, have recognised the need to strengthen their role in scrutiny and challenge. Two parents on the advisory group provide a useful link with other users and communicate concerns raised effectively. Members acknowledge that additional input from a wider group of users in the advisory group's decision making would be beneficial.

A major strength of the centre is its staff. They are effective and resilient. After a difficult period of transitional leadership arrangements, the new leadership team is providing clarity of purpose and direction for the centre. The local authority reports that systems are in place, if required, to ensure a seamless transition of children centre provision and services for the Bentley community in the light of the imminent re-commissioning process. These factors, together with a renewed focus on obtaining accurate and up to date data from partner agencies, ensures the centre's capacity to improve is good.

Many users expressed to inspectors how effectively the centre works to improve their family lives and a typical view expressed by one parent is: 'The centre is a valuable resource for children and families in the local community. Without being able to go the children's centre I dread to think what life would be like right now.'

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the centre's self-evaluation by:
 - effectively working with the local authority, the health authority and other delivery partners to ensure that accurate, up-to-date data, specific to the reach area are available to the centre
 - increasing the use of these data to accurately monitor the impact of the centre's work for all groups of users and to more precisely inform future planning.

- Strengthen the role of the advisory group by:
 - extending the role of members as critical friends in setting well-focused, ambitious targets and holding the centre to account
 - ensuring wider involvement of users in directly shaping the centre's services and future direction.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre offers a variety of services to encourage families to adopt healthy lifestyles. An impressive array of attractive recipe and food information leaflets, produced by the Volunteer Food Educator, is available in the foyer. A small area of the grounds is cultivated as allotments, which has encouraged groups, such as the local childminders to grow different foods for the children they care for to try. The centre also provides fresh fruit for snack times as a means of widening children's dietary tastes. Users enjoy the dance-fitness classes, which they report makes them feel good as they exercise. However, it is unclear what difference the centre's services have made to users' healthy lifestyles as little evidence of impact has been gathered.

Midwives and health visitors deliver a range of well-integrated services from the centre, providing the opportunity for users to just 'pop into the centre' for advice in a less medically-oriented environment. The baby clinic and antenatal services are well-used. Parents and carers report that they and their babies enjoy the baby massage sessions, helping the bonding process and providing a means of soothing a distressed baby. Staff effectively signpost users from one health service to another as they run concurrently, for example, the sexual advice clinic is available alongside the postnatal clinic. The dental health practitioner is proactive in the centre, providing an interactive play area, informative display and advice at some sessions. Relationships between health professionals and centre staff are mutually respectful and complementary. However, there are little health data available to help the centre evaluate this work. It is reported that there is a low number of mothers breastfeeding and a high number of teenage parents. As a result of lack of clarity about such information relating to health outcomes, the centre finds it difficult to

fully target its services effectively.

The staff use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) effectively to identify swiftly the range of services for families in need, often acting as the lead professional in working with families. Good multi-agency working results in the families, whose circumstances make them most vulnerable, receiving appropriate integrated support to meet their needs. Centre staff work in partnership with other agencies to develop targeted plans and work with parents and carers to ensure that the goals are met. This has resulted in positive outcomes for the children and adults, for example in raising self-esteem and protecting children from domestic abuse. Partner agencies, such as social care, use the centre for access visits because they recognise that families feel secure in the safe environment.

Users report that they feel safe in the centre. Staff continually and effectively risk assess all activities such as 'Stay and Play' sessions to ensure children using services at the centre are safeguarded. The fire service provide home safety checks and talk to users about fire prevention and the centre is able to offer help in the purchase and loan of safety equipment for the home. This helps to develop parent and carers' understanding of how to keep their family safe. A parent of a child attending a support group for children on the autistic spectrum said 'You might walk in feeling negative but you walk out feeling positive. The centre is brilliant, everything provided is safe and age appropriate.'

Detailed tracking of the educational achievement of children who have accessed the services of the children's centre, indicates that they have made excellent progress compared to other children who have not been in receipt of centre services. Communication and language skills are improving as a result of sessions, such as Musical Minis which introduce action songs and new words in a fun way. Headteachers report a noticeable difference in the children starting school. They are now ready to learn, and therefore advance quickly with their education. Parents and carers' attitudes and dispositions towards their children's learning are also noted to have improved considerably.

Volunteers are seen as an integral part of the centre, promoting the work on healthy lifestyles, running the toy library and helping to interview for staff. They feel valued and confident in their roles as part of the wider team. 'This course changed my life I wanted to give something back,' was the motive for one parent volunteering to help facilitate other parenting courses.

The centre's training and development activities for adults are focused on effectively developing users' confidence to access courses and develop parenting and life skills. This has led to children being observed to be confident, sociable and independent learners in the Play and Learn sessions. Parents and carers are knowledgeable about their children's learning and development and help foster this in the sessions. One parent told inspectors: 'I attend all the courses and classes on offer because they help me to become a better parent.' Childminders have also benefited from the training at the centre, which has helped to improve outcomes for themselves and

their children. Several have now been judged to be good or outstanding in their practice.

Working in partnership with the local college, the centre has developed a suitable strategy to map provision and assess individual needs to improve key skills. Information relating to job vacancies, training and money management is available through the centre. Jobcentre Plus has contracted with an outside agency to provide support in developing employability skills and making job applications but the centre is currently unclear about engagement and success rates.

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 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	1
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	3

How good is the provision?

2

Staff have had significant success with identifying, assessing and providing for the needs of families facing very difficult circumstances. The centre's services are most used by parents and carers from the most disadvantaged areas, demonstrating the effectiveness with which the staff have identified and targeted those most in need. Partner agencies speak highly of the staff's expertise. One headteacher said: 'They have really opened my eyes to what services are available. They have helped the families I work with a great deal as I know I can contact them for guidance on how to access other services and they'll know who can help.'

Both the About Boys Course (ABC) and Headstart course provided by the centre, have been successfully developed as a result of an identified need in relation to the low academic and personal skills of children starting school. Parents' and carers' feedback indicates how valuable attendees have found both courses in effectively easing their children's transition into school.

Play and Learn sessions are effectively planned, based on the Early Years Foundation Stage principles. By modelling good practice and sharing ideas, staff effectively encourage parents and carers to provide varied activities at home and understand

better the importance of play in helping children to learn. Parents take great pride in putting together the scrapbooks which provide a valued memento of their children's early years enabling them to track their child's progress. Communication and language skills are fostered through re-living these shared experiences. A very large majority of parents and carers involved state that they now look more closely at their child's play and most have an increased awareness of their child's development. Parents, carers and childminders make good use of additional resources, such as story sacks and toy library loans, to extend their own at home. They particularly appreciate use of resources at the centre such as the sensory room which they could not afford to provide for their children. One user highlights that she finds the room useful for disabled children, providing an opportunity to relax together and take time out from busy and noisy activities.

Specific provision to meet the needs of local groups, delivered by the centre or in partnership with other agencies, is valued such as the Travellers' Support Group who work well with Traveller families to ensure they have access to appropriate services. 'Dads Matters' is well supported and photographic evidence shows dads and children enjoying outings together, developing good relationships and learning new skills such as den building in the local nature reserve.

A wide range of information leaflets, supplemented by attractive displays, ensures users have access to information covering health advice, debt management, Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes and how to keep children safe. Users regularly praise staff's helpful approach and find them very knowledgeable. A typical view expressed by a user is the centre, 'is a very good place to go when you need help.'

The coupon scheme for 'purchase' of free childcare places serves a dual purpose in enabling users to participate in courses whilst providing a taster session for those unfamiliar with using childcare. The childcare on site at its inspection is judged to good with some outstanding aspects. This provision offers a valuable service for working parents. Concerns were raised with inspectors about the uncertain future of this provision following a recent local authority commissioning process.

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

Governance and accountability are strong. Recent changes in the local authority and governing agency procedures have resulted in more robust performance management that more effectively holds leaders and managers to account. Day-to-day management of the centre is good, and the new leadership team has inspired not only the staff team but the advisory group and partner agencies, who unanimously praise the recent drive to provide a clearer focus for the direction of centre's work in improving outcomes.

The views of parents and other users are routinely gathered through evaluations of individual activities and events in order to check their quality and usefulness and to inform the future planning of these activities. A 'wish tree' in the foyer provides opportunity for parents and carers to share their views and make suggestions. Whenever possible, these are quickly acted upon resulting, for example, in the purchase of booster seats for use by toddlers sitting at tables in the foyer. However, a lack of data from the local authority and partner agencies hinders more effective evaluation of and planning for the centre's work.

The centre provides an inclusive approach for many users, providing transport for some families who are unable to get to the centre independently. Each user is treated as an individual and with respect. Centre staff are held in high regard for their resourcefulness in learning about the Gypsy, Romany and Travellers' cultures thus promoting better understanding of diversity and aiding the children's transition into the local schools. However, the design of some services and information does not aid accessibility for all. For example, the centre has not considered whether the high volume of written information around the foyer is off-putting for people who find reading difficult. Working parents and carers identified that more consideration given to timing and frequency of sessions would enable them to attend the activities they would like to.

The centre's premises are safe, well-maintained and secure. The required safeguarding checks are completed with all staff employed at the centre subject to an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. Confirmation is sought by the centre that partner agencies have conducted similar checks. Staff have been fully trained in child protection procedures appropriate to their level of responsibility and demonstrate good levels of awareness and understanding.

The centre demonstrates good value for money. Staff are increasingly well-deployed with clear responsibilities. Activities are popular and regularly reviewed, then adapted or discontinued according to need. The building is well-used with a high occupancy rate of user groups and partners. Parents and carers attending the sessions feel so comfortable in the centre that they often stay to socialise with friends and eat lunch there.

Partnership working is well-fostered by the centre. Childminders use the centre

weekly for networking sessions. They report that they feel valued and treated with respect as childcare professionals. Together with the centre, they have worked to overcome some of the community's negative perceptions of childcare by holding 'Meet the minder' sessions to explain more about the quality of services they offer. Agencies, such as the community safety committee and local women's centre, appreciate the opportunity to hold meetings and deliver services in the centre as this puts them right at the heart of the community.

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	3
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	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 Ofsted reports on the centre's daycare provision and local schools were scrutinised to provide contextual information about the area in which the centre is situated.

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 Bentley Children's Centre on 18 and 19 May 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for your help during the inspection. We spoke with a number of you about the centre's work and looked at the comments you made on feedback sheets and evaluations. We really enjoyed talking to you in your activities, around the centre and on a home visit. You expressed your opinions very clearly and they were very helpful to us. We were delighted to hear your positive views and how helpful and friendly you find the staff.

You told us that you feel safe at the centre and know how to share any concerns you have about risks to children. We saw how much you and your children enjoy everything the centre offers, especially the excellent opportunities to play, learn and have fun together. We enjoyed looking at the scrap books you have been making and heard how you were using the activities from the sessions at home with your children. This has led to an improvement in your children's scores for language and communication when they reach five years of age. It was good to hear how you feel your parenting skills have improved as a result of the courses you have attended and how this has helped you to manage your children's behaviour in a positive way. Some of you told us you feel you have gained so much that you wanted to give something back to the centre and now work as volunteers to help other parents and carers.

Families who find themselves in difficult circumstances are helped effectively by centre staff working with other agencies to make sure they get the help need. The staff are skilled and experienced in assessing the needs of families and other professionals also consult them when they want to know which services can help you most. They provide you with good advice and guidance to help you improve your lives and your children's.

The centre has been very successful in encouraging you all to use its services and the sessions it provides at schools and community centres. Staff have worked hard to make sure you all feel welcome. Childminders are also included in the life of the centre and hold sessions at the centre each week. You appreciate having lots of activities for you and your children and extra resources to use, particularly the sensory room and items you borrow from the toy library. However, sometimes the timing or frequency of the services and activity sessions could be improved for those of you who are working so that you can access sessions more easily with your children.

The centre encourages you to tell them what you think about the activities and events, what difference they have made to you and your children and how these events could be improved in the future. Two parents take part in making decisions about the centre's work by being members of the advisory group.

The advisory group agreed that it would be good to have more of you involved in the decision making and we have asked them to think about how best to do this. We have also asked them to look in more detail at the work of the centre and to assess more thoroughly how much difference the services are making to you.

Staff who provide health services work well together at the centre and there are lots of activities to help you to develop healthy lifestyles such as interesting recipes and opportunities to grow food on the allotments. However, we did not find much evidence to show that these activities and services were making a difference to your lifestyles.

The new manager and her deputy are clear about how they want the centre to develop but there is a lack of information to help them understand what is working well and making the most difference. We have asked the local authority and other agencies to make sure that this information is provided to the centre so that they can plan and evaluate their work more effectively.

We heard how much the centre has helped you and your families and how lost you would be without it now. One parent said what many of you told us: 'The centre is a valuable resource for children and families in the local community. Without being able to go the Children's Centre I dread to think what life would be like right now.'

We wish you and your families well for the future.

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