

Inspection report for Abbey and Lady Bay Children's Centre

Local authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	367727
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Reporting inspector	Susan Crawford HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Fiona McManus
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Abbey Road Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Rushcliffe Pre-school EY425247 Abbey Road Kids Club URN 253373

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, users and representatives from the local authority, the local advisory board, and services that use the centre.

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

Information about the centre

This is a phase three children's centre providing the full core offer since January 2011 to a community ranked within the 70% most deprived in the country. The centre's reach area has pockets of deprivation. It has close links with West Bridgford and Ruddington, Edwalton and Gamston Children's Centres. Abbey and Lady Bay is part of a cluster of children's centres which work across the Rushcliffe area. The same small staff team operates across the whole of the cluster of children's centres. The centre has recently revised its governance arrangements and a newly formed local advisory board holds the centre to account through its improvement plan. There is also a district advisory board on which the local advisory board is represented.

The centre provides health and family support services, adult training, and early years advice and guidance. There is a low number of workless families dependant on state benefits, and unemployment in the area that the centre serves is relatively low. There is a small minority of families from minority ethnic backgrounds. The majority of children enter early years settings with skill development that meets national expectations. There is an onsite privately run pre-school and a before- and after-school club. Both have separate early years inspection arrangements.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

This satisfactory centre is making some positive strides to improve outcomes for users within the Abbey and Lady Bay areas. The centre users are unanimous in their appreciation and praise for the improvements to their lives. Those who take advantage of the services and activities provided report that the centre is making a positive difference to them and their families. However, the take-up of services remains quite low and the centre has not yet fully engaged with the wider community. The centre is well aware of this and is taking some positive steps to improve this situation, such as employing a community involvement assistant who is focusing on community engagement.

Satisfactory overall provision is underpinned by sound procedures to safeguard children and other users. Safeguarding is threaded through everything that the centre does. All the parents and carers who made their comments known said they were very happy and secure about the welcome and care that they receive in the centre. One particularly strong feature of the centre is the work of the family support workers. They provide invaluable support to the more vulnerable families. They are particularly effective in signposting parents and carers to additional services to promote the safety and well-being of users. There are appropriate procedures for assessing the needs of the users and matching these to the appropriate services.

Governance and leadership are satisfactory and improving. The local authority's procedures to hold the centre to account through its local priorities are strengthening through its annual conversation meetings. The centre's improvement plan demonstrates an understanding of the target groups within the reach area and what needs to be achieved. However, the use of data to assist them in planning for specific needs is at the early stages of development. A local advisory board has recently been established within the centre, replacing the previous steering group which was established in March 2008. Its membership includes representatives from partner agencies but some members do not fully understand the governance and accountability arrangements of the centre. There are limited opportunities for parents' and carers' views to be heard or to inform the shaping of the centre's services. Leaders and managers at all levels and all other staff demonstrate a passion and determination to improve the lives of users. Regular supervision of

centre workers, such as the family support workers, has resulted in improvements in the quality of services. There are appropriate and regular systems in place to evaluate users' satisfaction. However, the centre has fewer methods in place to evaluate the improvement the centre has made to their lives, or the success of the centre's services in meeting local priorities. Consequently, the centre demonstrates a satisfactory capacity for improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the membership of the centre by:
 - reaching out to and engaging with members of the community who are not accessing services, including lone-parents, parents who have a disability and ethnic minorities
 - taking steps to identify and meet their needs
- Work with the local authority to obtain accurate, relevant up-to-date data which is specific to the immediate reach area and which will help the centre to determine priorities for action within the reach area.
- Further develop the governance of the centre by:
 - clarifying and strengthening the role of the local advisory board to ensure they provide challenge
 - improving the extent to which parents and carers contribute to decision making
- Improve the evaluation of the effectiveness of the centre by:
 - working with partners to gather information about outcomes for children and users, and the impact of services provided
 - using this information to inform future planning.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The emotional well-being of users is improved by their engagement with the centre, particularly those who have suffered from postnatal depression. The centre is proactive in supporting new mothers, and targeted services such as baby massage are proving popular. One parent at risk of isolation reported 'the children's centre had been invaluable in offering advice and support.' There is an adequate range of healthy activities such 'Cook & Eat' sessions. Parents and carers who attend these sessions report that they have improved their understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet. Activities are generally well attended. Membership of the centre is gradually increasing although it is not fully reflective of the wider community. The centre hosts the 'Allsorts Group' which is very well attended and supports parents whose children have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Vulnerable children, particularly those with child protection plans, and their families

are supported effectively by the centre and through their partnerships with health, social services, housing and the police. Parents' and carers' written evaluations show that the lives of these families are improved through the effective implementation of the Common Assessment Framework procedures. For instance, one parent had benefited greatly from the one-to-one support of the centre and has improved how she deals with family matters and her relationships with her children.

Services and activities are provided by children's workers in a happy and secure environment. Those parents who made their comments known report that they and their children feel safe within the centre. Children are developing well in aspects of their personal, social and emotional development and are generally making good progress. Parents are growing in confidence in managing their children's behaviour. Good partnerships with the local schools and effective transition arrangements support children as they move on to the next stage in their education. There are effective partnerships with the private and voluntary sector, which are improving the quality of childcare provision within the area. The centre successfully encourages a steady stream of volunteers to support activities including within the childcare provision and the administration of the centre.

Parents and carers contribute their views through valuable feedback and evaluations of the services provided. However, there are limited opportunities for them to participate in decisions and the management of the centre. There is only one parent and carer representative on the centre's advisory board and the operational parents' forum is in the early stages of development.

Parents and carers report how much they enjoy the courses they have successfully completed and are very proud of their achievements. They benefit from an increasingly positive range of courses. For instance, positive parenting programmes help parents manage their children's behaviour, and members of the teenage parents group have gained valuable first-aid qualifications. Well-recorded case studies show how centre staff have assisted parents to maximise their incomes by ensuring they claim appropriate welfare entitlements. Many parents and carers have accessed the two-year-old nursery funding with the support of the centre.

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	3
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and	3

parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	
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How good is the provision?

3

Family support workers are using assessments increasingly skilfully to engage with families, particularly those who are made vulnerable by their circumstances. This is resulting in an improved understanding of the needs of parents and carers. Services on offer are having an improving impact on users' safety and well-being and are tailored to meet considered needs. The centre is also successful at assessing and meeting the needs of users who come to the centre looking for support and guidance to help them raise their children. The centre successfully nurtures and fosters confidence in parents and carers so that they are well prepared to develop their skills and learning. The centre is becoming increasingly instrumental in helping parents access further education and welfare benefits advice and support.

The centre, in partnership with other agencies, has accurately identified services which are targeted to parents and carers who are potentially at risk of social isolation and exclusion. Teenage parents and parents and carers who want to stop smoking are particularly well supported. However, services for these targeted groups are new developments within the centre and it is too early to gauge their impact on users. In addition, the centre's work to engage with the wider community and those families who are considered 'hard to reach' is at an early stage of development. The current centre membership is quite low and there are many families living in the community who are not accessing the centre's services. The centre's family support workers and the community involvement assistant are taking steps to connect with families who are not currently using the centre's services. Working in partnership with parents and carers, the community outreach team is seeking to assess the families' specific needs and to use this information to shape the centre's provision.

All staff provide a warm, welcoming and secure environment in the centre. Strong and trusting relationships are being developed between parents and carers and the centre staff. Several parents commented that the centre provides a hub of information, care, guidance and support and is where they come for help on a wide range of issues. As one parent reported, 'The centre staff are always there to support when needed. They are very knowledgeable about all aspects of family troubles with children.'

The range of activities and services meets the needs of most users appropriately. For instance, the newly formed 'Dads Group' is proving to be increasingly popular and is supporting the important role of fathers in the care of children; and the drop-in sessions for users experiencing domestic violence is a critical service for support and advice. The centre works effectively with the childminder coordinator who is supporting and encouraging the improved consistency of care and learning provided by local childminders who meet regularly at the centre to develop expertise and to share resources.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre's work in providing services is making a difference to the lives of those users who access the centre's services. In this respect, the centre provides satisfactory value for money. There are appropriate performance monitoring systems in place to assure the work of the centre staff. A particular strength of leaders and managers is in creating an environment in the centre that is productive for both service partners and users. The centre staff have a 'can do' attitude and are focused on improving outcomes for all children and families.

The arrangements for safeguarding children and users are appropriate. Staff are suitably trained to support their role in ensuring users' safety, including child protection and the use of the Common Assessment Framework. Staff are alert to the needs of individual families who are encountering challenges and difficulties, and respond promptly and sensitively when referrals are made. Families experiencing crises, including domestic violence, are particularly well supported within the centre. Staff ensure that families are provided with a place of safety and are instrumental in ensuring they access appropriate services swiftly.

The number of people using the centre has increased since January 2011 when the centre moved into its building. However, there is still a large proportion of the community who are not accessing services. Health visitors work effectively with families who encounter severe difficulties and deprivation and regularly share information with the centre to ensure targeted services are prioritised. The data provided by health partners are invaluable to the centre and have helped the centre to successfully identify families who are most in need.

The inclusion of children and families is helping the centre to begin to engage with those from the wider community, including teenage parents. Children's workers provide a range of activities to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those identified at risk of developmental delay receive appropriately targeted support in partnership with their parents. The centre's policies and procedures are used to promote the understanding of the importance of inclusion for staff, students and volunteers

The centre is not fully aware of the impact its services are making because of the lack of detailed and informative evaluation and local data other than that provided by health partners. This is hindering the leaders and managers from making the rapid progress possible to engage with the wider community. In addition, the members of the advisory board are not sufficiently informed to challenge the work of the centre and they do not currently play a major role in shaping and improving the centre overall. There are also some weaknesses in the centre's self-evaluation which goes some way to outline the provision organised by the centre. Staff and partner agencies, and parents and carers contribute to the evaluation process. However, evaluation of the centre lacks consistent evidence of the impact on outcomes for children and families. The improvement plan has clear links to the self-evaluation and it sets out targets and priorities but lacks clear success criteria.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
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	3
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	3
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	3

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Rushcliffe Pre-school is newly registered and has not had its first inspection. Abbey Road Out School Club was inspected on 9 December 2008 and was judged as good.

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 Abbey and Lady Bay Children's Centre on 29-30 June 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us. Your views were very helpful to the inspection team. We agree with you when you told us how welcoming and helpful the staff are at the centre. We think that the range of services and activities on offer is helping you to improve your parenting skills and enabling some of you to train and gain confidence. We think that those of you who are experiencing difficulty in your lives are well supported to make your families and children safe and healthy. We also know that the centre has helped some of you who have experienced real difficulties in the past to be much more confident and able to look forward to a brighter future.

We watched you thoroughly enjoying the activities, such as 'Rhyme, Rattle and Roll', where you talked to each other and played with your children. A few of you have volunteered to help in the centre, which has been invaluable in developing your self-esteem and skills. Those of you who made your comments known spoke of the centre and its staff with high regard. However, we think it is a pity that not enough people in the area are taking advantage of the activities on offer.

You told us that one reason why you like coming to the centre is because of the well-trained, helpful and friendly staff who work there. They try their best to help you to make improvements to your lives. For example, the family support workers are doing well. They expertly help you to decide on the services and activities that you need in order to make improvements to family life. They then work well with other agencies like the health service and social services to make sure that the help is just right for you and your families. Some of you were keen to tell us that, if you had not received help from the centre, you would not have been able to train. Some of you said how grateful you were that the staff had helped you to gain the benefits to which you are entitled. The centre is beginning to introduce a number of activities to improve your health, such as the antenatal workshops where you learn how to prepare for the birth of your baby. The local authority is improving the way it governs the children's

centre so that the local advisory board can provide more challenge to the centre and understand its role. We would like to see more of you on the advisory board so that you can influence how the centre is run.

The centre leaders have been successful in safeguarding the families who use the centre. They show that they know well the different groups in the community that could benefit from the centre's help. Leaders do not yet check well enough how the activities on offer are leading to improvements, both for you, your families and also for the community overall.

We have asked the centre to make some improvements. We have asked staff to make sure they are supporting the whole of the community and developing the membership of the centre. We would like more parents and carers to get involved in decision making and the management of the centre. We have asked the centre leaders to improve the range of information available to show how the centre is meeting the needs of children and their families, and to look at ways to improve their evaluation of the centre's work and the difference it is making to families in the community.

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