

Inspection report for Boscombe Children's Centre

Local authority	Bournemouth Borough Council
Inspection number	367754
Inspection dates	27–28 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Denise Blackwell HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Justine Greenfield
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Sequal Childcare Neighbourhood Nursery EY382788

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.

Report published: August 2011



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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 early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents, members of the advisory board, partners from health services, the senior leadership team, frontline staff, childminders, youth integration team, service providers and the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Boscombe Children's Centre is a phase one centre, which was established in 2005 and has been delivering the full core offer in July 2007. Early years provision is provided onsite by Sequal Neighbourhood Nursery, and also by local private and voluntary early years settings and childminders in the local area. Children's levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are below those expected for their age. The centre is located at the end of a cul-de-sac in an area where 80% of the housing is made up of flats and bedsits. There are drug and alcohol addiction and recovery support centres within the centre's reach area. Families come for treatment at the recovery centres from all over England.

The centre uses Springbourne Family Centre to deliver some of its activities and will also have use of training rooms in Kings Park Primary School when building work there is complete. The centre is governed by the local authority with an advisory board that has professional and parent representation. There are approximately 1,500 children under five years of age living in the area. Boscombe Children's Centre is located in one of the most deprived areas of England. The centre's reach area encompasses the Boscombe West and East Cliff and Springbourne Wards. Approximately 70% of the reach population live within the top 10% of most deprived areas in England with one Super Output Area ranking within the top 1% of the most deprived areas nationally. There are high levels of workless households and a significant proportion of the reach area is in receipt of disability living allowance.

The majority of the population are of White British heritage. There is a large transient population in the local area, with a high number of families immigrating from Eastern Europe, Spain, Portugal and Romania. Boscombe is an area of high crime rates and contains the greatest density of drug users and dealers, the greatest number of drug related arrests/incidents and the highest level of drug-related activity in Bournemouth. Violent crime in the area tends to relate to domestic violence.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

The ethos of this outstanding centre is apparent from the welcoming smiles as you enter the centre to the individualised supported for families, where the needs of families, particularly those of the most vulnerable, are exceptionally well met. Leadership is extremely strong and constantly trying to improve services. Everyone involved is passionate about children and families and determined to make a difference.

Exemplary partnership working is a key factor in the success of Boscombe Children’s Centre. Everyone working there is determined to provide the best services they can for families and work across professional boundaries to ensure this happens. A multi-agency approach was seen in all aspects of the centre’s work and, taken together with the excellent leadership and ongoing robust evaluation of services, gives the centre an outstanding capacity to improve.

The centre has only recently started to receive data specifically about its reach area and this is used extremely well to support identified priorities and to ensure all priority groups access services. All activities and services have to show who they are targeting and identify how far they have succeeded. This has had a very good impact on the range of services offered in the centre, which are regularly reviewed and refreshed. All activities whether targeted or universal are purposeful, with increasing clarity about their purpose and expected outcomes. Their commitment to reaching the most excluded is supported by high levels of flexibility and by rigorous cross-agency identification of those in the greatest need.

The children's centre community fully reflects the make up of the reach area, where every opportunity is taken to increase understanding of different cultures and backgrounds, and to celebrate diversity. Safeguarding is at the heart of everything the centre does. Systems are exemplary and policies and procedures are fully understood and implemented by everyone in the centre. The high level of detail in assessments and records ensures the best quality care and protection for everyone accessing centre services. Where vulnerable families are successful in gaining improved housing elsewhere in Bournemouth the centre liaises closely with the centre closest to the family ensuring handover procedures enable the highest levels of care to continue seamlessly. The partnership working and the referral systems in particular lead to a highly coordinated and seamless approach to service delivery.

The learning and progress of children who use centre activities is good. The centre manager and her staff team strongly feel that children in the reach area deserve the best start in life and the best quality early learning experiences. They assure this happens in the centre but the quality of the registered onsite provision has only been satisfactory. The new early years manager and centre staff are now working together to ensure that vulnerable families are supported and information shared so that the holistic needs of the family are assessed and met. Family support staff and the centre teacher review the progress of two-year-old funded children and work with the setting to ensure any issues are communicated. The local authority and the centre continue to work with the provider to improve the early years provision, but are clear about the need for a strict time limit for improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

The local authority should:

- set clear expectations with the onsite early years provider for the requirements for improved quality and a stimulating learning environment that includes use of both indoor and outdoor spaces, through an agreed improvement plan with specific and measurable targets
- review the contract with the onsite early years provider to ensure continuity of care for children who access the provision.
- consult with parents on any proposed changes to the early years provision at the centre and about the needs of families to determine the type of preferred provision
- review sufficiency in the reach area to determine whether onsite provision is the best option or whether existing local providers have sufficient early years provision to meet demand in the local area.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

A wide variety of services to improve the health of children and families is underpinned by excellent partnership working with health visitors and midwives. Beginning at the antenatal stage, there is a busy midwife service where many parents first become aware of the centre and what it has to offer. Families then move on to access a wide range of support around improving health and well-being. Breastfeeding is actively supported. 'Coming to this group has definitely helped me to continue breastfeeding,' is a recurring comment from parents who state that they would have given up if it had not been for the support received from professionals and peers. The number of babies still being breastfed after six weeks is improving, but is still low compared to local authority figures. Recent provision of health data in centre reach area shows that smoking is an issue in the area. However, the centre has been proactive, holding smoking cessation appointments in the centre leading to improving results for those who access the service.

The excellent partnerships between family support workers and health ensure parents who are experiencing difficulties have the support they need. The complex problems associated with the reach area mean that work with some vulnerable families continues long after their children are babies. The focus on the most vulnerable has resulted in changes to the centre layout in order to gain families' participation in centre services. For example, the 'Sunshine Group' is run by midwives and is targeted at very vulnerable families. Midwives noted that as the examination room was next to the front door, parents just left after their appointment. The centre immediately responded and the room was moved upstairs so that, while waiting in the café area, families became familiar with staff who introduced them to the centre services. This has resulted in greater engagement with families now accessing services. Because of the transient nature of the population, immunisation rates remain an issue. As a result, the leaders have introduced a question on immunisation in all their registration and assessment forms, giving them a clearer understanding of the issue and enabling them to target this work. Parents are gaining a good understanding of healthy eating from 'baby-led weaning' for the very young to 'healthy lunchboxes' for children starting school. The importance of exercise is highlighted through sessions provided by the centre, and parents are encouraged to use the local open spaces with sessions in local parks and on the beach supported by children's centre activity workers.

Parents and children are safe in the centre and they are learning how to keep their children safe at home through home-safety checks and the strong links between health and centre workers. A recurring theme was how parents felt happy to access training and groups in the centre because they knew their children were safe and happy in the crèche. A clear referral system, alongside well-embedded partnership practices, means support for vulnerable families is extremely good. The centre is clear about its role in supporting families where children are looked after or subject to a child protection plan. They meet regularly with social care colleagues but are clear that they want parents' first experience of the centre to be a positive one, not

one where they are forced to attend. As a result, additional support is individualised and no child slips through the net. Quality assurance of Common Assessment Framework procedures and forms by the centre ensures they are not being used to justify funding but are used exceptionally well to identify the holistic needs of the family so that appropriate services are put into place. Rigorous implementation and review procedures ensure that the needs of each individual child are, and continue to be, met.

Structured parenting programmes are raising self-esteem and improving parents' confidence in managing their child's behaviour appropriately. Drop ins for those experiencing domestic violence provide a safe and welcoming environment. Parents express relief at not feeling isolated and being able to discuss problems in a non-judgmental, friendly atmosphere. The 'Pattern Changing' course provides parents with tools that helps prevent them repeating another abusive relationship.

There are opportunities for parents and carers to be involved in the centre at all levels, including as members of the advisory board. For those who wish to do so there is encouragement and support to become volunteers in the centre. The volunteers spoken to were all passionate about the centre and what it does. The centre can clearly evidence where they have supported parents to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, gain qualifications and get back into work. The centre's creative approaches to ensuring families have the information they need to improve their economic and social well-being is having a notable impact. Even when families gain employment, they return when they can to the centre for activities or for family support. 'I really don't know what I would do without the help of the centre,' said one parent, 'I arrive tense, frustrated and on the verge of tears and within half an hour have calmed down, received emotional support and practical advice, had a cup of tea and a laugh, then leave with a smile.' Many parents say they have made friends by attending the centre, reducing their isolation.

Children make good progress in the centre activities. Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores are steadily improving and the gap is narrowing. Learning journals support children's development when they attend the crèche or centre-led activities. These are shared with parents who are also supported to understand the Early Years Foundation Stage and further support their children's learning at home. Family support workers and the centre teacher track the progress of funded two-year-olds regardless of where parents choose to place their children. Childminders provide good quality childcare places and are supported by the centre to improve their practice and join in with centre activities. This has led to strong partnerships with private and voluntary early years settings in the reach area. However, the centre is aware that the centre-based provision does not provide the same standard of, and opportunities for, learning and development as for children who attend centre activities.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have	1
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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	1
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	1
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.	1

How good is the provision?

1

The very strong centre team works closely with all their partners to ensure that everyone's needs are met. The centre staff and health partners in particular, understand the challenges facing the community and the need for services to continue to meet a range of needs for very vulnerable families. The assessment of the needs of adults and children is a strong feature of the centre's work and one of the reasons why its work in meeting the needs of individuals and the community is so effective. Family support workers create effective action plans for families which lead to positive outcomes. There is a range of targeted and universal services to meet different needs. 'Just because an activity is universal it doesn't mean it shouldn't be purposeful' is the mantra of the centre. As a result all activities have a clear purpose, with intended outcomes, that meet the varying needs of families in the reach area.

All groups within the reach community are reflected in the centre community. Dads have opportunities to meet as a group but also attend parenting courses, baby massage and universal services such as 'Let's Talk'. Parents with learning difficulties and disabilities are ably supported, raising their confidence in their parenting abilities. The sensory room is extremely well used by both groups and individuals to support children with special educational needs and disabilities. This room is to undergo refurbishment and families have been fully involved in its redesign and choosing of additional equipment.

Children make good progress from their starting points through attending centre activities. This is a significant achievement for the centre and clearly shows the impact on children who can be seen demonstrating an enthusiasm for learning, building up their social skills and preparing them for the future. The transition workshops for parents help them support their children to make a successful transition on to school. The centre works effectively with local settings to monitor the progress of funded two-year-old children with activities for children in the centre clearly linked to Early Years Foundation Stage and Every Child Matters outcomes. Children enjoy sessions and achievement of both children and adults is well

celebrated. A small number of funded two-year-olds attend the onsite provision, as this is down to parents' choice. This will be reviewed with the local authority as current guidance in Bournemouth states that only settings judged as good or outstanding can receive this funding. This is to ensure the most vulnerable children receive the best start they can in their learning.

The personal testimony of families who receive support from the centre demonstrates that when support and care is most needed, the response from the centre is outstanding. In times of diminishing budgets the centre uses its resources exceptionally well to respond to families in crisis. Multi-agency work is extremely effective in providing support for users at the time they most need it. Members of staff and partners demonstrate a strong empathy with users and are committed to helping them achieve positive outcomes. Guidance is also outstanding with a range of partners visiting the centre on a regular basis to offer guidance and advice. The centre works closely with the Alcohol and Drug Addiction and Recovery Centre to support parents in recovery. Parenting courses are provided and some of these vulnerable parents have gained qualifications and returned to work. Holding sessions in the centre gives parents in recovery opportunities to meet with other parents, use centre activities and step out of the rehabilitation community, providing opportunities to get past the segregation and isolation they feel.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
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	1
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?

1

At Boscombe Children's Centre, morale is exceptionally high. Everyone knows exactly what their role is and is committed to continuing to improve outcomes for the families with whom they work. The visionary and inspiring leadership of the centre manager and her leadership team is very well supported by effective structures, underpinned by very effective communication between staff within the centre and with professional partners. The centre manager is determined that nothing but exemplary services will be offered from the centre.

Centre leaders ensure highly effective monitoring and evaluation of the services provided. The centre has developed its own service planning and evaluation toolkit and is reviewing all services to ensure they have a clear purpose, measurable outcomes and meet the needs of users. The centre's improvement plan has clearly

identified priorities and actions. Data are provided by the local authority that in some cases are specific to the reach area. Centre leaders have already identified that they now need to incorporate the baseline data into the body of the improvement plan so that they can clearly see any progress or where new issues emerge. The local authority is instrumental in supervising the centre's operation, providing challenge through regular meetings and a formal annual conversation.

Staff are fully enabled to use their skills, and teamwork is exceptionally strong. Staff are encouraged to take up opportunities to gain experience and knowledge in their areas of work and some have gained degrees and Early Years Professional Status with support from the centre. Staff show a great deal of initiative and high levels of commitment in their work, resulting in an excellent quality of leadership in all areas of the centre's work and at many different levels. Regular stakeholder meetings ensure that all partners and staff are aware of what is happening in the area and prevent duplication.

The advisory board is well established and has three parents who are part of the membership. A lively parents' group feeds into this, plus informal feedback during activities and regular evaluations. The advisory board itself has an excellent understanding of its role, not only in supporting and challenging the centre leadership, but also in suggesting possible future initiatives and directions for development. All centre decisions are taken to the board first and any requests are run past the board for agreement. For example all groups and services must submit a proforma before running an activity or initiative, explaining the purpose, identifying the target group and showing how outcomes will be measured.

Resources, including staffing, are very well deployed to ensure that delivery of services is as effective as possible. The building is clean, bright and in good repair. Changes are made to the layout based on feedback from parents and professionals. For example, the sensory room was moved so that it was accessed through the activity room, making parents using the facility feel more involved in activities and not isolated in another area of the building. The budget is carefully deployed and focuses support where it is needed most, as a result the centre is giving outstanding value for money.

Safeguarding policies and practices ensure excellent systems for, and awareness of, safeguarding throughout the centre. Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out for all who work or volunteer there. Recruitment procedures are rigorous. Training needs are identified for each post and show that the right level of training has been completed. Early intervention and a multi-agency approach are among the greatest strengths of a centre dedicated to meeting the needs of those within its reach. Risk assessments are rigorous and the lone working policy and procedures ensures staff are safe when visiting families on their own. Families are informed of the importance of safeguarding when they start at the centre and there are colourful notices around the centre to explain what they should do if they have any concerns.

The centre is very proactive throughout in promoting equality and diversity. Everyone

is equally welcome at the centre, where it delivers exceptional, cohesive and non-judgemental packages of support that meet individual needs. Families where the child has disabilities, or very young and vulnerable parents needing help to access services, all benefit enormously from this approach. More than one parent informed inspectors that they had been met at the door, or even at the end of the road, by family support workers to ensure they felt able to access the centre. Case studies, and personal testimony provide excellent evidence that the centre helps to keep families together.

Professional partnerships are a thread through everything that is done at Boscombe. They are a mixture of the formal and the informal, developed through commitment and a focus on the child as central to all their work. There are also very good links to a range of voluntary and statutory agencies that ensure all families who need support receive it as the links to channels of support are already there.

The centre constantly seeks the views of users to evaluate services or shape services for the future. Parents were able to show where they had influenced decisions made. The centre programme is regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to meet with needs and changing priorities. 'Its lovely to get a change rather than the same old thing over and over again' is the view of parents. Because they have been involved in shaping services parents feel listened to and this in turn raises their confidence in the work of the centre.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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	1

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

The findings from the inspection of Sequal Childcare Neighbourhood Nursery were considered in this report. The nursery was inspected in February 2011 and was judged as satisfactory overall.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Boscombe Children's Centre on 27 and 28 July 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Thank you to those of you who spoke to us to give us your views on this children's centre. Your views were very useful in helping us make our judgements. Like you, we found your children's centre to be very welcoming and friendly. It gives a high priority to your safety and welfare and that of your children. Professionals work extremely well together to make sure that they understand what you need and that you get the right support quickly. This is having a very positive impact on your lives and those of your children.

The strong partnership the centre has with health workers ensures you are developing healthier lifestyles and are learning about the importance of a healthy diet, starting with 'baby-led weaning' for the very young to 'healthy lunchboxes' for children starting school. Those of you who attend the breastfeeding group say it has definitely helped you to continue. You and your families are developing a very good understanding of how to keep yourselves and your community safe, through the advice and guidance provided by the centre. The centre wants you and your children's first experience of the centre to be a positive one and works with partners to ensure any additional support you need is individualised. This is one of the reasons why this centre is so successful in engaging families who are very vulnerable and in need of help and support.

The centre activities are good at helping your children to make progress in their learning and development, and you are learning how to support them through parenting courses and guidance. Some of you told us how the centre has helped you to develop personally and educationally. Those of you who volunteer get good support and gain valuable skills that will be useful to you in the future. Many of you are making use of opportunities to improve your education and skills so that your future prospects of employment are improved. Some of you have gained qualifications and gone on to gain employment.

Centre leaders provide many opportunities for you to tell them what you think about the services provided. They ask you to evaluate the activities you attend and use your feedback to plan what activities and services the centre needs to provide you with. Staff support many families who are very vulnerable and need help. The centre also works hard to reach out to families from a wide range of backgrounds to make sure they are included in the services and activities.

Many of you told us how well your centre has supported you in times of crisis. Those of you we spoke to thought very highly of the family support workers. More than one of you told us how family support workers had met you at the door when you first started to make sure you were supported to attend the centre. We agree that the quality of support provided by the centre is excellent. Centre staff and other professionals, with whom they work closely, care a great deal about you and are committed to improving your lives.

The centre is exceptionally well led and managed. An extremely effective leadership team is supported by dedicated and knowledgeable staff. All views, including those from a wide range of professionals, parents and carers, are carefully considered and contribute to the centre's excellent overall effectiveness. This arrangement reflects the outstanding ambitions and the high expectations that centre leaders have of themselves and the impact of the work of the centre on users' lives. Leaders are very ambitious and set clear targets that are challenging and are based on a good understanding of the needs of the reach area.

The centre wants the best for its families and is determined that nothing but exemplary services will be delivered by the centre. The staff work with local early years providers to ensure your children have the best start in life. The centre is aware that it is better for your children to attend provision that is good or better to ensure this happens. So, we have asked the local authority to make clear their expectations with the onsite early years provider for improved quality and a safe, stimulating learning environment that includes use of both indoor and outdoor spaces. We have suggested that it consults with you about what you really need and sets a clear date for review to make sure your children get the best start they can.

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