

# Inspection report for Bolsover Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	383877
Inspection dates	24–25 August 2011
Reporting inspector	Joanne Smith HMI

Centre governance	Derbyshire County Council
Centre leader	Gwenda Culkin
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY415752 Stepping Stones 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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, parents and carers and representatives from the local authority, local school and partner agencies.

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

## Information about the centre

Bolsover Children's Centre is located in a converted building in the former mining town of Bolsover. It is approximately one mile from the M1 motorway and the nearest large town is Chesterfield. The centre shares a site with its linked day-care provider. The centre is a phase two children's centre that provides the full core offer. The local authority is responsible for governance of the centre. The centre coordinator is responsible for service delivery across the reach area for this centre; she also has responsibility for one other children's centre in the locality. The centre serves an area in the top 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. Services delivered from the centre by the children's centre team and partners include health services, family support, employment and training support and signposting, targeted support for vulnerable families, and family learning.

The centre serves a wide geographical area which has densely populated areas and widespread rural communities. The area served by the centre has a range of housing stock including local authority properties, private rental accommodation and private housing. There are large pockets of social disadvantage. The vast majority of the population in the reach area is White British, and there is a small Traveller community. Within the community served by the children's centre, levels of worklessness are high. Most children aged under five years are living in families dependent on workless benefits. Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage

provision across the area with skills and abilities that are lower than those typically found nationally.

## 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

Bolsover Children's Centre is well known in the local area as a place where good-quality help and support can be found. 'This centre is really needed. There was nothing before this. It's made a big difference,' is how one parent summed up what many others feel about the centre. The centre's success owes much to the children's centre staff who work extremely hard, taking services out to community venues on a regular basis. As a result, the centre's engagement with the wider community is strong. Staff skilfully use activities in community venues as opportunities to promote the centre's services and engage with families who may be reluctant to access services on a regular basis. The centre's commitment to providing for and enabling access to services for all families across the reach area is effective because the centre staff work hard to take services out to the communities where they are most needed. Successful work to narrow the achievement gap between children who find it more difficult to learn and their peers, demonstrates that the centre targets its work to where it is most needed. The centre successfully promotes the cultural and racial diversity seen in Britain and uses resources well to take positive images and messages out into the community. They effectively reflect the growing diversity in the reach area, and displays in the centre incorporate items such as Traveller traditions and the Polish language.

A significant characteristic of the centre is the strength of the relationships it has with its statutory and voluntary partners at a local level. These partners also have the well-being of local families at their heart. This leads to well coordinated work when a family is in need of support, either at a low level or when much more intensive interventions are needed. The well-coordinated work is reflected in the quality of assessment at the centre. The assessment of individual need is thorough and is reviewed soon after an initial action plan has been made for a family, to ensure that all the support that is needed is identified. The assessment of need across the reach is also strong and is based on good local knowledge available to the

centre coordinator. The Derbyshire Community Health Service (DCHS) has however, stopped providing data to the Children's Centre on the number of children nought - five years living in the reach area. The centre coordinator has taken steps to gather this information at a local level, however, this is a time consuming activity. In addition, this information is not as accurate as it could be and it hinders the centre slightly in terms of its knowledge of how successful it is in registering and making contact with families in the reach area. The centre has a wealth of other data available to it. Some elements of the data are used well to target service delivery, for example, much work has been done to improve adults' knowledge of healthy diets to begin to reduce the levels of obesity. In addition, the centre is aware of where the areas of highest deprivation are in the reach and service delivery is targeted to these areas. This gives the centre a broad overview of the work that needs prioritising in the reach area and this is used well in the self-evaluation cycle to review services. However, the centre is not yet interrogating the data in enough detail to gain an in-depth view of where it is having the most impact on outcomes for families. As a phase two children's centre, the work done to prioritise service delivery to local issues and to the most disadvantaged areas demonstrates the centre's good capacity to improve further.

The safeguarding practice in the centre on a practical level is sound. The centre's work with families whose circumstances have made them vulnerable is good. Staff at all levels are knowledgeable and skilled in their work with these families. The benefit of this is seen, for example, in families who have had intensive support to help them through domestic violence. When the families who have had intensive support continue to engage with universal services delivered by the centre, they are less likely to return to the high levels of support they have previously needed. There is, however, a weakness in how the local authority monitors that the person designated to take a lead on matters relating to safeguarding practice and procedures accesses relevant, refresher training within the required timescales. This means that, overall, the judgement for safeguarding is satisfactory.

Outcomes for families who use the centre are good overall and some, such as the reduction in the number of children in Reception Year who are obese, are improving well, although levels are still above national expectations. Learning outcomes for children and adults are good. The coordinator is aware of which outcomes need to improve and these are clearly identified in the centre's business plan, for example, increasing the number of mothers who sustain breastfeeding beyond six to eight weeks after the birth of their babies and continuing to reduce levels of obesity in children at the end of Reception Year. Many of the targets set for improvement in the business plan, however, are long term. Targets are reviewed with the coordinator at her monthly supervision sessions to check the work being done towards them. Currently, however, this is not systematic enough to determine the speed of progress towards the targets. In addition, there is no clear system to allow for an increase in challenge in the targets when it is needed, for example, if progress towards the 2% increase in the number of mothers breastfeeding their children at six to eight weeks after the birth is rapid and appears that it will be achieved ahead of the 12 month timescale. In addition, the range of evaluation methods used by the

centre to capture information from users is variable in quality and it is not yet used to monitor the impact the centre has had on users' lives in the longer term.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve evaluation systems to ensure service delivery is having sustained impact on outcomes for families.
- Develop performance monitoring systems to ensure that the targets set to meet priorities and improve outcomes are reviewed regularly and adapted to introduce more challenge when necessary.
- Work in partnership with the Derbyshire Community Health Service (DCHS) to obtain regular, up to date new birth information for children aged under five living within the centre reach area.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2
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Outcomes for users of the centre are good. Case studies and discussions with users show that families' understanding of healthy lifestyles is improving. One parent said, 'I now eat healthy breakfasts.' The impact of this is being felt when children start in Nursery in the local schools, as one headteacher reported that children are arriving having had breakfast more often than children did prior to the establishment of the children's centre and children are alert to their learning environment. The centre has a very strong focus on improving health outcomes for families, based on the data profile for the area and local knowledge. As a result, obesity levels in children at the end of Reception Year are decreasing rapidly, although they are still above the national average. Much work is being done to promote breastfeeding. One of the young mothers who has sustained breastfeeding is an excellent example of how this work is beginning to have an impact, as her peers are keen to follow her example in the future. Many families are keen to sign up to the smoke-free homes programme which the centre is working hard to promote. The centre is also striving for smoke-free cars. However, the number of pregnant women who still smoke after the birth of their babies is static.

Users say they feel safe in the centre and in the community venues used by the centre. The take-up of immunisations against harmful childhood illnesses is above average and this is a clear indication that parents are improving their skills in how to keep their children safe in the long term as well as the short term. Targeted families who register with the centre receive a free safety equipment pack, and child safety is a feature of many activities run by the centre. Nevertheless, hospital admissions caused by injuries to children are increasing in the district. The centre works very well with partners when families are subject to the Common Assessment Framework. Families are key partners in this process and this has made a significant difference in some users' lives. Work to help families with routines, budgeting and parenting skills has meant for some that children can continue to live with their parents in the family

home rather than being made subject of a care order.

The outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are improving well. This can be seen in the improvement in their personal, social and emotional development and their communication skills. The 'Pathway to Nursery' project has been particularly successful in preparing children for Nursery in one school. An additional benefit has been the school's ability to develop relationships with parents before children start school. This is helping to improve families' attitudes towards learning and development. There is a very strong focus on adult learning and development in the centre. This is noticeable in the number of adults who volunteer and take up learning opportunities. The majority of the volunteers are working towards returning to employment, and some are ready to do this as soon as their children reach the right point in their education. Users are also heavily involved in shaping service delivery through a well-established and well-supported parents' forum and representation on the advisory group.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

Staff overcome the restrictions imposed by the centre's limited accommodation by being very creative in the way they use their resources. As a result, the centre's services are delivered in the communities where they are most needed. Staff are very well organised, and they are supported in the delivery of services by an enthusiastic, dedicated and well-trained team of volunteers. Assessment of community needs is based on local knowledge and analysis of some of the wealth of information available to the centre. This means that the centre is successful in taking services out to the areas where they are needed. This is not necessarily based on the levels of deprivation; some, such as one of the 'Weigh and Play' sessions, are delivered because of different local issues, for example, a lack of transport for families to other venues.

The data used to assess whether the centre is working with the families who most need support shows that the large majority of families using the centre live in the three most deprived areas within the centre's reach area. The data available to the centre is not yet used well enough to evaluate its impact on families.

The individual support provided by the children's centre workers to the families known to them is very well matched to the needs of the families and individuals in receipt of support. This is the result of very effective assessment of their needs that takes into account all aspects of their lives, not simply the aspect for which they have been referred to the centre for support. Support is reviewed regularly either through the Common Assessment Framework process or through the centre's review processes. As a result, support packages are adapted appropriately. In some cases, for example, more intensive support, such as referral to social care, is introduced; in other cases, less intensive support, such as attendance at one of the centre's group activities, may be recommended. Families in need and in crisis are supported well because projects, such as the 'Baby Boutique', which is a valued source of free children's clothing run by the centre's volunteers, and food packages provided by the local church, are available to them through the centre.

Learning and development are strong features of the centre. Learning and development are visible in all the activities offered, and the areas most in need of development, such as children's emotional and communication skills are prioritised. One parent commented, 'There is always learning through play, simple play.' Children and families are well prepared for children's entry to Nursery, not only through the 'Pathways to Nursery' programme, but also through supportive delivery of activities that promote parenting skills. The centre takes a creative approach to delivering adult learning. It negotiates with adult learning providers so that they adapt their courses, so that they are relevant to the needs of the users. For example, a course on budgeting has been adapted to introduce budgeting theory through practical activities such as planning and preparing low-cost family meals and finding out about low- or no-cost play ideas for parents to use with their children. Volunteers and staff are well prepared for their roles, and there is a strong focus on users' personal development and preparing them to move to the next step in their learning. Take-up and retention rates for users who access adult learning opportunities are very good. This is evident in the good number of adults who progress from basic skills courses onto higher-level courses and vocational training such as horticulture and childcare training.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective are the leadership and management?

2
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Leadership and management at the centre are effective, and high expectations mean that everyone works hard to ensure that service delivery meets the needs of users and the wider community. There is a strong desire to ensure that all members of the communities served by the centre can access services. This is demonstrated well through the work done with families who have parents and/or children with disabilities, to enable them to access services in the community. The centre's comprehensive range of policies and procedures is embedded well and applied routinely in practice. The centre promotes diversity which is celebrated through resources and information which reflect different faiths, cultures, and backgrounds. The Sure Start librarian has supported the centre in its work with the growing Polish community by providing dual-language books for families to use together.

A multi-agency team management structure recently introduced by the local authority has clear and well-understood performance management structures that are developing well. Staff are very effective in promoting positive relationships with statutory and voluntary partners. This is beneficial to centre users who are receiving an increasingly smooth service since the introduction of the new structure. The multi-agency team structure has created greater opportunities for a wider range of agencies who work with different members of families to work together. This has had the effect of reducing the duplication of work by different agencies involved with individual families. This means the centre is providing good value for money.

Procedures for checking that staff and volunteers are suitable to work at the centre are robust. Records, including those kept about safeguarding training requirements, are well organised and clear. Training for the person with designated responsibility for safeguarding at the centre is up to date. However, this was not effectively monitored by the local authority to ensure it was in line with the latest guidance, for this reason the judgement for safeguarding overall at the centre is satisfactory. Staff are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about indicators of concern linked to children's welfare and apply this knowledge well in their work with users. They are highly aware of their role in safeguarding children and do not hesitate to contact partner agencies, such as social care, if they see a change in behaviour or circumstances that might have a detrimental effect on a family. There are high levels of domestic violence in the reach area, and the centre's staff support and help families to reduce the impact of this on children. They work alongside the domestic violence team to support families who have been subject to domestic violence to live independently or to remain as a family unit with an increased awareness of the emotional impact domestic violence has on children.

The parents' forum and the advisory group are effective in providing support and challenge to the centre. This is achieved through a well-planned meeting cycle that provides good opportunities for centre users and partners to share information as

well as giving them the opportunity to ask searching questions of the centre coordinator. The business plan and targets for the centre take into account local and district priorities. Partner agencies are also involved in setting targets, for example, the target to increase the number of mothers who are still breastfeeding at six to eight weeks after the birth of their babies. Many of the priorities set have at least a six-month, but most have a twelve-month target. However, the centre does not monitor its progress towards these targets systematically enough to check how well it is doing, to evaluate whether or not the strategies are proving effective or to introduce renewed challenge.

The centre's self-evaluation is based on sound knowledge of local needs and results in well-targeted delivery. However, evaluation of the centre's impact following delivery of a course or series of activities is not always as effective as it could be. That is, the centre does not always ask users what difference there has been to them or their families immediately after attending a course. In addition, they do not evaluate longer-term impact, for example three to six months after the end of a course or activity, to find out if users are still benefiting from their learning. The number of families registered with the centre is high and this is testament to the partnership the centre has with health visitors and other partners such as health trainers and Jobcentre Plus. There is one issue relating to data that is beyond the centre's control. The information it has about the number of children aged under five years who live in the area is not up to date. The Derbyshire Community Health Service (DCHS) last provided this in summer 2010 and this is not frequent enough for the centre to have an accurate overview of its success in reaching families. Users' views are sought in a good range of ways either at community events, through questionnaires or through one-to-one discussions. These findings are collated and used to shape service delivery at the centre. The vast majority of users are satisfied with the centre and what it provides for them; they appreciate the 'You said, we did' approach to consultation with them.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>and activities</b>	
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

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

The findings linked to outcomes for children and the progress they make in their learning and development from the inspection of the linked day-care provider EY415752 Stepping Stones Day Nursery conducted on 7 July 2011 have been used to contribute to judgements made at this inspection. Children in the linked day-care provision are making good progress in their learning and development and outcomes for children are good in all respects.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Bolsover Children's Centre on 24 and 25 August 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you to those of you who took the time to come and speak with us during the inspection. We found our discussions with you very useful. We also spent some time reading the comments you make when you have used services at the centre. We know that you really appreciate the work that the staff at the children's centre do with you and your families. We found that staff are working well with other agencies in the area to deliver well-targeted support for you and your families. This is having a positive impact on improving all of the outcomes for you. We have asked the centre to use the information it gathers from you in better ways to make sure it knows how well you are doing after you have finished attending a course or your support package has ended. The centre plans what it is going to deliver based on the information it has about the area. We know this is well matched to the needs of the area. However, we have asked the centre to review how it checks its progress towards the targets it has set, such as reducing obesity in children in Reception Year, increasing the number of mothers who sustain breastfeeding and reducing the number of children admitted to hospital because they have been injured.

The centre does very well at making sure activities and services are delivered in different venues across the area. It also makes sure that these activities are relevant to the needs of families in each area. The centre uses the information it has about the area well, and the number of families who use the centre is high. We have asked the centre to review how it uses the information it has about you and your families to ensure it is having a good impact. We have also asked the Primary Care Trust to regularly provide the centre with information about the number of children aged under five years who live in the area so that the centre can get better at making sure it is working with as many of them, who need support, as possible.

We found that the centre is keen to support your learning and development. We know that when you attend courses and learning opportunities you enjoy them and some of you go on to access further learning and development opportunities. We were pleased to speak to some of the people who provide volunteer support at the centre. You are a very valuable part of the life and service delivery of the centre. Ventures, such as the 'Baby Boutique', which is run by volunteers, and work in groups such as 'Weigh and Play', mean that the centre can deliver more services across the area as a result of your help.

We know that when you feel the need for support you are comfortable to go to the centre and speak to staff. This has helped some of you through difficult times, and supported you to continue to live together as a family. We found that you are safe when you attend activities and services offered by the centre and staff are appropriately checked to make sure they are suitable to work with you and your families. We wish you well in the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).