

Inspection report for Bells Farm Children's Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Bells Farm Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY351607 Bells Farm 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.

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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.

An inspection of the co-located partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the school headteacher, the centre manager, members of the children's centre sub-committee of the governing body, and centre users. They met with a representative of the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

This is a phase one children's centre which provides the full core offer. The centre opened in 2006 as a neighbourhood nursery, run by the tenants' management committee. As a result of funding problems and financial difficulties, the headteacher and the governors of Bells Farm Primary School governing body agreed to take control in 2008 to ensure that nursery provision remained on site. In the intervening years, much reorganisation and staffing restructuring has taken place at the direction of the headteacher. In 2009, a nursery teacher moved over from the school and, in September 2010, a deputy headteacher from the school took over the role of centre manager.

The area served by the children's centre is mixed. Part of the area comprises relatively affluent private housing, but many of the families come from other areas experiencing high levels of deprivation. The large majority of families are White British, but about a third come from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. A few speak English as an additional language. There is a high level of workless homes in the area and 42% of children come from families living on benefits. This figure is as high as 67% in parts of the reach area. Children join the nursery with skills, knowledge and understanding that are well below those typical of children of their age. There are specific weaknesses in communication, language and literacy, and in children's personal, social and emotional development.

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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Bells Farm is an effective children's centre which has improved in the past year and is meeting the needs of the community which it serves increasingly well. The quality of care, guidance and support offered by the centre is outstanding. The family support workers engage with families extremely well, and the support given to families is exceptionally well matched to individual need. They work effectively with other professionals to provide targeted support for families which have complex problems or which are in crisis. Their success rate is high, and the very large majority of cases, including cases of domestic violence and difficulties in managing children's behaviour, are resolved successfully.

Under new leadership, self-evaluation is very well focused and identifies community needs accurately. The headteacher and governing body is willing to tackle difficult issues and has played a critical role in successfully putting the children's centre firmly on the road to improvement. Initiatives have been prioritised and focus on providing quality provision through well-qualified and skilled staff. Areas for improvement identified in the early years' inspection, which took place in March 2011, have been successfully addressed. Plans for future development are well targeted and based on the centre's evaluation of community needs. These initiatives have led to major improvement in provision and outcomes and indicate outstanding capacity for further improvement.

The centre is reaching significantly more families in deprived areas than the affluent parts of the reach area. As a result of centre's efforts in outreach work, working with families at other venues across the area and contacting families through the health service provision in the centre and at health centres, the number of families from target groups is increasing rapidly, although it still remains one of the centre's main priorities to reach even more families from these groups.

Children make good progress in their learning and development. The availability of a crèche makes it possible for parents and carers to attend courses and learn new

skills. Learning opportunities, based on the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance, provide a good start to learning for children. Progress of children's development is closely monitored from the time they join the centre, through the nursery and beyond, thanks to the centre's strong links with the school and, in particular, its Reception class. Parents and carers have good opportunities to further their own skills through courses such as 'Positive Parenting', 'Managing Children's Behaviour', 'Healthy Eating', 'IT Skills' and hairdressing, as well as being signposted to further education opportunities. All participants complete evaluations so the centre has a good idea of each event's popularity. However, the centre management does not follow through how successful adults have been once they have been referred to other services and does not monitor closely enough the impact of its work in improving adults' lives.

Through their evaluations, parents and carers contribute to shaping future provision. Centre staff have strong relationships with parents and carers. 'The centre staff are very friendly and approachable.' 'We don't feel we are on our own. We get to meet and talk to others with similar problems.' These are just two of the views typical of those expressed in the comments folder. However, there is no organised procedure for parents and carers to play a greater part in shaping the centre's future, and there are few opportunities for parents and carers to learn new skills by acting as volunteers.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the numbers using the centre by engaging with more families in the wider community, particularly:
 - those in the areas experiencing the most deprivation
 - those who speak English as an additional language.
- Involve parents and carers more in the running and decision-making processes of the centre by:
 - establishing a parents' and carers' group to gather parents' and carers' views and to promote the work of the centre in the wider community
 - encouraging parents and carers to engage in voluntary work in the centre.
- Track the outcomes for adults who are referred to other services or undertake adult education courses in order to:
 - evaluate the impact of this work on the community
 - use this information to shape the pattern of further services and maximise the impact of the centre's work on the community.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Children develop a good understanding of healthy diets as they enjoy healthy snacks such as fresh fruit, brown toast and water when they attend the centre. Parents and

carers build an awareness of healthy diets through cookery courses. They apply their learning to cooking at home. One participant said, 'I will never buy pizza sauce again. I will make my own.' The health in the area is improving steadily. A large number of mothers visited midwife clinics last year to support children's health. As a result of the centre's efforts to promote breastfeeding, the proportion sustaining breastfeeding has risen from 29% to 48%. Immunisation rates are higher than the national average and child obesity rates are lower. The emotional health of parents and carers is promoted well. They are confident in the centre, meet new friends of all ages and sharing worries gives them confidence and builds self-esteem.

Family support workers ensure the safety and well-being of children and their families. They work effectively with other professionals in meeting the needs of children at risk and subject to support under the Common Assessment Framework. A large number of home-safety checks have been carried out to raise parents' and carers' awareness of safety in the home. Any equipment provided is professionally fitted by the Fire Service. Children attending the centre behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. Users say they feel safe at the centre and have trusting relationships with the staff. As a result, parents are confident to share any concerns with centre staff.

Staff in the crèche, 'Stay and Play' and nursery intervene early to identify and support any difficulties with children's language development. Parents and carers gain the skills to support speech development through initiatives such as 'Every Child a Talker'. Assessment records confirm children make good progress in developing communication skills and in other areas of learning. Observation of a Forest School session showed this activity to be effective in promoting good or better learning in all six areas of learning. Staff supported children in the forest area to explore the environment through activities such as searching for hidden bananas. Children worked very well together, turning over stones and using magnifying glasses to examine mini-beasts and other objects they found. They enthusiastically collected items such as twigs and branches to show each other and talked about them. Behaviour is good in the nursery. Relationships between children and with adults are good and support effective learning.

Parents and carers engage in effective activities that help them build their own knowledge and understanding of parenting, basic skills, managing household finances and preparing to return to work. Written comments from participants suggest good progress, but the impact of the work of partner agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus or colleges cannot be evaluated fully because the centre's leaders do not follow up outcome data to assess effectiveness of adults signposted to further education in partner institutions. Parents and carers contribute their views through written and verbal evaluations of the activities which they attend. However, there is no formal system to gather parents' and carers' views through, for example, a parents' and carers' group to form a link between the children's centre and the community.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

The early years inspection in March this year stated, 'Provision in the nursery is good. Children are supported by experienced, enthusiastic and well-qualified staff who are skilled at promoting positive attitudes to learning.' This was found to be the case currently. The range of services for adults provides purposeful learning and meets their needs well. A course on managing children's behaviour is full and maintains good attendance. The course takes into account parents' individual needs which are determined through discussion of their concerns. The course is well structured, and time is built in for meeting participants' requests. The parent partnership worker plays an essential role in ensuring the centre takes note of parents' needs and requests. She has on-going dialogue with parents and provides an effective link between them and the senior leadership team. A number of courses are provided in response to parents' requests. Some of these have included courses on information and communication technology skills, paediatric first aid, sewing and cookery, all of which have been very successful. Feedback comments confirm that the centre is effective in encouraging adults to learn skills that are useful. Other services that are of great value to individuals and groups of community members include providing children, who come from homes where play space is very limited, with opportunities to play in large open spaces. Outreach work continues during out-of-term time through flexible working arrangements. Partnership with a private provider supports a holiday club on the site.

Staff provide high levels of care, guidance and support, and they consider this to be the core of their work. Staff are fully aware of children's medical issues, are vigilant and act accordingly. Parents and carers express complete trust in the care shown by staff, who keep them fully informed of any actions taken. Family support workers play a critical role in the care, guidance and support for children and families. Families in need of support are identified through self-referral, recommendations from professional partners or through family support workers attending services at other venues. Outreach work is tailored well to suit individual needs. As a result of

their approach to outreach work, an increasing number of parents and carers are using the centre. Case studies show a good level of success in supporting vulnerable families. Some cases are resolved through multi-agency involvement and successful application of the Common Assessment Framework process, which ensures that tailored support meets needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance of the children's centre is good. Since taking on the responsibility, the headteacher and the governing body have established a clear strategic plan for on-going improvement. It has been an important factor in the centre's improvement. The headteacher and the governing body have established the children's centre as an effective stage in a continuous education for children from 0 to 11 and as a service to families in its reach area. They have led a number of important changes, including reducing staffing to overcome financial constraints. It has managed contraction well to ensure that there is still a strong feeling of teamwork among the centre staff. Professional supervision carried out by the headteacher is effective in ensuring good-quality provision from professional partners and centre staff. Governors regularly visit the children's centre and observe its work.

The last early years' inspection concluded, 'On-going improvement, well-targeted future plans and close monitoring of the educational programme are evident. The management team and staff show a strong commitment to improving outcomes for all children.' The strategic development plan indicates their commitment to improvement has strengthened. Senior leaders evaluate provision and recent trends, and base the next steps in the children's centre development on identified need. Assessment shows significant improvement in children's progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage as a result of effective monitoring and evaluation. The numbers of families using the centre is steadily increasing as the community recognises its improvement.

An exceptionally strong partnership with school means that the children's centre has access to high-quality facilities and outdoor resources that are used effectively in supporting children's good achievement across all areas of learning. Skilled staff provide good-quality services. An extensive range of partnerships support both children and their families to improve the quality of life. As a result, the centre gives good value for money.

Priority is given to safeguarding children and families in the centre. Safe recruitment procedures are followed meticulously and all relevant checks are made to ensure that staff are suitable and safe to work with children. Daily safety checks are routine. However, they are not specific enough to address any changes or out-of-the-ordinary situations. Child protection procedures are thorough and training is regularly updated. A high level of importance is placed on multi-agency working to promote and safeguard children's and families' welfare. A recommendation from a previous Ofsted visit was to improve procedures to ensure the security and safeguarding of all children using the site. All required actions have been addressed and safety of children and adults on site is good.

Recent training on promoting equality in terms of ethnicity and disability has helped raise staff awareness of equality and diversity issues. A number of new initiatives have been implemented and staff have successfully engaged a number of families from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language. Staff support minority ethnic groups at other venues and are working at bringing these groups into the centre. However, engaging more families from these groups remains one of the centre's key priorities. A sensory group for families of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities has been introduced. Diversity is celebrated through themed weeks based on a wide range of different heritages and cultures. Community events such as the family picnic help bond the community. As one parent or carer wrote, 'It's a great idea because there's enough hatred in the world and this way we can all get to know each other and get along better.'

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the	2

reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Inspectors took into account the inspection report for Bells Farm Nursery which was inspected in March 2011. This inspection report judged the childcare provision to be good. They also took into account the findings of the concurrent inspection at Bells Farm Primary School, particularly those judgements relating to safeguarding, which was judged to be outstanding, and governance, which was good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Bells Farm Children's Centre on 12 and 13 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you to all of you who took the time to talk to us when we visited Bells Farm Children's Centre recently. Special thanks go out to those parents who agreed to have us visit some of your group sessions and for making us feel welcome, especially when discussing some confidential issues. Your cooperation was important in helping us form our views and make accurate judgements about your children's centre. There have been some major changes to both the organisation of the centre and its leadership. There is a new manager, and the headteacher of the school has taken on responsibility for the children's centre. We are aware of the difficult times your centre has passed through over recent years, but with the determination of the leadership team and the children's centre staff, Bells Farm Children's Centre has survived and emerged as a much better source of help and support for your community.

The centre works well with a range of professional partners, such as health and social care, to support children's development and help the adults who use the centre to learn new skills and gain confidence. Children make good progress in all areas of learning from a very early age in the crèche, in sessions such as 'Play and Stay' or 'Chatterboxes', and in the nursery. They make particularly good progress in developing their personal and social skills and in learning how to communicate effectively. Their progress is carefully monitored and children get a good start to their education. Although you give valuable feedback on the sessions you attend, staff have not yet started to follow through the successes you have when you follow their advice and take on further education courses at college, for example, or take advice from Job Centre Plus. The centre does not, therefore, have the information to assess how effective some of its professional partners are in their work with you. We have asked them to start gathering this information.

Your views make a difference to the work of the centre, but there is no formal process to organise the way in which you support its work; very few volunteers work regularly in the centre, although a number of you do help out at community events such as the very successful family picnic. We have asked the centre to organise a parents' and carers' group to enhance the level of contribution that you make to the work of the centre. This group could also help the centre's staff reach out to more parents and carers to encourage new families use the centre's facilities and services, another area that we have asked the centre to look at.

It is very important to the centre staff that they help you in difficult times and with other problems that worry you. They work very hard at this, and people such as the family support workers have a great deal of success working with you individually or joining with other professionals to help find solutions to more difficult cases. We think the care, guidance and support the centre offers are outstanding. We know from what you have said to us that you value this level of care very much and that you feel the centre is making a big difference to your lives. Many of you told us that the staff at the centre are friendly and you feel safe there. We could see that children and parents enjoy many of the activities and that those of you who attend are wiser in terms of being better parents. The centre management is particularly effective at ensuring that its staff have a good understanding of procedures for protecting children. Services also work together well to help families who come to the centre during particularly difficult times.

We would like to wish you, your children and the families who live in the Bells Farm area the very best for the future and hope that you will respond positively to the centre's requests for support to help it grow even stronger.

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