

Inspection report for Barton Children's Centre

Local authority	North Lincolnshire
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Castledyke Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY332384 Castledyke Day Nursery

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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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of North Lincolnshire County Council, members of the advisory board and parents' forum, parents and carers, and a number of partners, including health and social care. They observed sessions at the centre, looked at the centre's work and a range of documentation.

Information about the centre

Barton Children's Centre is a phase one children's centre providing the full core offer of services to a community that is in one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The centre's reach area comprises a small market town and rural villages in the Barton and Ferry wards of North Lincolnshire.

The population of families who live within the reach area of the centre is predominantly of White British heritage with a small population of Traveller families. The centre serves an area with high levels of social and economic disadvantage. There are 1027 children under five years of age in the centre's reach area, with 354 children living in the most deprived areas. There is a high number of workless families dependant on state benefits. The rate of unemployment and the proportion of people who leave school without qualifications are higher than the national average. The rate of teenage conception in Barton as measured in 2009-11 is 26.5 per 1000 girls 15-17 years. North Lincolnshire Homes is the main provider of social housing, with some privately owned rental accommodation. For those increasing number of families dependent on public transport it can be difficult to access services, employment, leisure and other facilities.

Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority and is supported by an advisory board that includes the headteacher of the local school, health and voluntary sector providers, members of the local community and parents and carers, as well as a parents'

forum. A range of health, social care, family support and education services operate from the centre with associated professionals and centre staff.

Child-centred sessions are provided through a range of activities at the centre, such as 'Stay and Play'. Crèche facilities are provided for parent-focussed sessions. Full day-care provision is delivered by Castledyke Limited, which is co-located at the children's centre. Most children enter day care and early education with developmental skills that are lower than those expected for their age.

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

3

Main findings

This children's centre serves the needs of its community well. Partnerships with other services are good, particularly health partnerships, which allow teams to work very effectively to meet the needs of users. Leaders are aware of the ongoing issues and challenges for children and families in the reach area. The good quality provision and effective family support ensure that families, including those whose circumstances may have made them vulnerable or who are disadvantaged by economic and social isolation, benefit from the services offered.

Inclusion is central to the vision of the centre and all staff have a strong commitment to promoting equality and diversity. The centre is successful in its targeted work to support children and families who are most in need. Although the centre is successful in reaching most groups, particularly those with additional needs, it is aware that there are some groups, particularly fathers and those from the Travelling community who are currently less engaged than others with the centre's services.

The outcomes for children and adults within the centre's reach area are good overall. Parents and carers participate in activities and courses which build their confidence and develop their parenting and life skills. While there is an agreement in place for working with Jobcentre Plus, not enough is done to engage parents and carers in developing clearer learning pathways which would prepare them for work.

Good inter-agency working means that highly skilled professionals identify the needs of potentially vulnerable families at an early stage and intervene appropriately. This prompt action and good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) ensures efficient use of resources. Partnerships with health professionals mean that new and prospective parents have access to onsite pre- and postnatal midwifery and health visiting services. In addition, antenatal sessions, which promote healthy living and smoking cessation, are accessed by prospective parents.

Governance provided by the local authority is good. In order to create a service within the current financial climate, a total restructure of services has been created with a focus on small teams providing support towards prevention and intensive work. A single point of entry is now in place for all referrals to more effectively manage the allocation of resources. The range of programmes and good outcomes, as well as the good quality of provision, confirms that overall the centre is very effective in meeting the needs of its users and provides good value for money.

Evaluation and target setting are satisfactory. All sessions are reviewed and parents' and carers' views sought. Partners contribute well to discussing and formulating improvements to services. Its self-evaluation is broadly accurate. Following the very recent restructure within the service, a disruption to service delivery occurred when children's centre staff were served notice and had to re-apply for roles within a revised model. Some families were very disappointed at the loss of services and their perception is of limited communication to outline the steps taken during this process. While those families in most need have been supported through the transitional phase, the centre's current ability to deliver a range of services is still limited due to the current low staffing levels. Planning and target setting for the centre's priorities within this new method of delivery has yet to be put in place. Because of the lack of engagement with users, and the delays in creating its plans for the future, capacity to improve is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the numbers of fathers and Traveller families who engage with the services available to them.
- Engage in dialogue with Jobcentre Plus to provide more information on job vacancies and further guidance on how adults might acquire the necessary learning to become more work ready.
- Improve communication to better inform parents and carers and other users to increase their understanding of the centre's services following its restructure.
- Make improvement planning more effective through better use of data and measurable targets, which include review dates to assess the impact on improving outcomes.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre is focused on improving the health and well-being of families, and in the majority of cases outcomes are improving. Some families engage in sessions to show parents and carers creative ways to use different fruits, vegetables and other healthy snacks. The centre also encourages physical activity to be a part of everyday family life. Parents and carers and their children benefit from being outdoors as they take part in enjoyable activities in the outdoor play areas and the garden. Activities organised through a range of partners during school holidays also include many physical activities held outdoors, and some are held in other locations in the reach area.

The effective partnership working between health professionals and family support workers results in positive outcomes for new mothers, particularly those considered to be most vulnerable. Close contact with health visitors at the centre pick up any issues early, including any babies who missed their immunisation. The 'Wriggle and Giggle' sessions have contributed towards early attachment and positive relationships between mothers and their babies. Healthy snacks are provided in some sessions.

The centre has successfully engaged with the breastfeeding mentoring programme. Good progress has been made with increasing numbers of mothers breastfeeding and almost 40% sustain this beyond the first six weeks. Parents say they have increased enthusiasm towards breastfeeding and value the support that is available. A strong focus on talking about the benefits of breastfeeding is being introduced by health professionals into schools in this area. Specialist services, such as speech and language development and behavioural management sessions are providing parents and carers with skills to support their children more effectively.

Children are well prepared for nursery and mainstream school due to effective delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum at the centre. Good progress has been made towards the achievement gap for the lowest achieving 20% in the Barton area. Children are becoming inquisitive learners through well-planned play and learning experiences, some of which are delivered by staff from the co-located day nursery. They promote a sense of belonging and respect that users appreciate. As a result, they enjoy and achieve through their activities at the centre. Educational courses for adults have resulted in some parents and carers progressing onto further programmes, some into volunteering and some into work.

All users feel and are kept safe when using the centre. Good relationships with all its partners ensures that those potentially vulnerable families, including those with children with additional needs and children who are on child protection plans, or are looked after, are well supported. The development of a new single point of entry for all referrals means that teams can be assembled quickly to support children and families when needs are identified. Case studies and discussions with parents and carers provide strong evidence that having

access to programmes on strengthening families helps them to form relationships and to trust others. This enables them to improve their children’s communication skills, learning and behaviour and to settle well into school.

Sessions for fathers provide opportunities for them to spend time with their children and to engage in useful activities, such as healthy cooking and eating and fun activities, such as film nights. Following the recent re-organisation these activities have not yet been offered. One father commented, ‘These sessions were great as I could spend time alone with my children, and this also gave my partner a break, we all benefitted’. Other fathers comment how good it was to be included in ante-natal programmes and to be able to talk to health visitors during the early weeks of their child’s life.

Parents and carers comment on the difference that the centre has made to their confidence, aspirations and achievements as well as their children’s progress. They talk about how the staff support them through difficult times and that without help from the children’s centre their lives would be very different. One parent told us how the support from the centre had saved her relationship with her partner.

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.	3

How good is the provision?

2

Despite some unfilled staff posts, the range of services on offer meets the needs of current users well. To promote children’s learning more widely, outreach provision has been provided in other locations. These sessions are effective in promoting the Early Years Foundation Stage provision and focus particularly well on children’s personal and emotional development, communication and language. One father said ‘I was made to feel really welcome at ‘Stay and Play’, they gave my daughter different things to do as she is very bright, and she continues to develop well’. The sessions also provide opportunities for parents and carers to socialise with their babies, about the importance of eye contact and in using, singing, music and books to stimulate their children.

The centre staff and their collaboration with other professionals ensure that a wide range of assessment tools is used to identify needs. The CAF system effectively brings together health visitors, midwives and mental health workers to provide sensitive, individualised support where needed. The centre provides good accommodation and support for emergency care and contact visits for looked-after children. A few of these supported visits have led to the successful return of children to their parents. Parents who have attended parenting support programmes comment that: 'Learning how to communicate and listen to our children has improved our skills in coping with different situations, and managing behaviour better.'

Achievements are recorded and celebrated well, whether this is a small step in a very young child's development, or an adult's progress in developing their language, literacy and numeracy skills. Childminders attend the centre regularly and are supported well through the provision of books and learning resources. The children under their care are provided with an opportunity to use different equipment and resources in play at the centre, which broadens their skills and contributes well to their development.

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.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Strategic leadership from the local authority has been effective through the re-structuring, with their vision clearly outlined in their 'Children and Young People's Plan'. A training programme for all staff continues to ensure that safeguarding remains a high priority. Policies and procedures are accessible to staff and central records of Criminal Records Bureau checks are up to date and are reviewed every three years. Workflow charts of the referral process are in place to ensure all staff are familiar with the new arrangements. All staff are issued with a safeguarding card which details the steps to be taken including appropriate telephone numbers.

Recruitment is managed centrally by the local authority and a new computerised system for recording interventions with families is now in place. Some roles within the new structure have not yet been able to be filled due to the procedures that have to be followed within the terms of employment legislation and local authority protocols, although approval for recruitment to these posts has now been agreed.

Regular and effective supervision supports the personal and professional development of staff well. The centre's advisory board is made up of a good cross-section of their partners and parent representatives. It has, in the past, provided a steer for the centre to focus on meeting the needs of families in the wider reach area, and in planning how best to utilise

the resources of all partners. There is good commitment from members of the advisory board to continue to work together to support families in this period of austerity.

There is a wide range of good quality play equipment, toys and books, which are used effectively to encourage children's learning and development. Although the centre is small, it has access to a range of accommodation across the wider reach area through schools and voluntary organisations that provide opportunities for engagement to those who would otherwise be socially isolated. There is dedicated accommodation for midwifery services, and space for confidential one-to-one private conversations. The centre has a multi-person vehicle that can be used to transport families or play equipment to other locations.

Equality and diversity are promoted successfully. This is because all services are designed to engage users from a range of backgrounds, and can be seen in the good work that is taking place with young parents and those families suffering from domestic violence, as well as through the discussions taking place to increase contact with the Traveller community. Information is displayed on many important topics, such as sexually transmitted diseases, domestic violence (sheets with tear off slips containing confidential phone numbers) and on multi-faith celebrations.

The centre is good at collaborative working, which is increasingly important following the local authority re-structuring; the ability to work with partners ensures that a wide range of support is available. Partners range from major public services, such as health and social care and local voluntary organisations. All partners expressed their commitment to providing services for families in this rural area.

The centre's use of feedback from those it serves is satisfactory. Many have engaged with services provided both in the centre and the wider reach area. Their views on services have been sought. Prior to the reorganisation, information was provided to users to explain what was known about the situation at the time. However, since then, there has been limited communication with both users and partners. This is due to the time allocated to staff training during the early weeks of the implementation of the changes to staffing and to the method of operation.

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	3
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 reach area 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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Barton Children's Centre on 19-20 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

Thank you for making us feel welcome and for taking the time to talk with us about your children's centre. Your views were very helpful. Whilst many of you told us that the staff have been friendly, welcoming and supportive in the past, there have been some changes that have interrupted the level of service you currently receive. We agree. We have asked the centre to keep you more involved with its planning to deliver services within its new budget, and how you might help them improve services in the future.

The main job of a children's centre is to ensure that all the services for children and families work together in your best interests. Your centre has done this well in the past, by working together with partners, such as health professionals and other organisations, particularly in those more rural areas in which you live. The activities help you to learn how to lead a healthy life and to be more confident. The new centre team, although currently not all posts have been filled, are committed to maintaining this service. The partnership with Jobcentre Plus has not provided you with enough information on how you might better prepare yourself for taking the steps to become more prepared for work. We have asked the centre manager to develop a more focussed approach with them, and to improve the planning and target setting for all its activities so that you will all be able to see the progress being made.

Some of you told us that taking part in the centre's activities has given you the opportunity to make new friends, learn new skills and not to feel so alone. Particularly helpful has been the support provided through programmes on developing your parenting skills, to support you continue breastfeeding, and understand how to better ensure the safety of your children. Children who use the centre make good progress in their learning and development. Some of you commented how fathers are no longer provided with sessions that focus on their relationships with their children, and we have asked the centre to consider how best they can continue to do this good work. We have also asked them to develop opportunities to provide support to those with young families in the travelling community in this area.

We saw how much you and your children enjoy the activities in the centre, including the opportunities to play, learn and have fun together. We found that the work of the centre in supporting children to develop their communication and language skills is good, especially in their knowledge of letters and sounds. Without the use of some of the locations in the wider community, the centre would not be able to offer you this range of activities.

Thank you again to those of you who gave of their time to talk with us and we send everyone at the centre our best wishes for the future.

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