

Inspection report for Aspley/Bells Lane Children's Centre

Local authority	Nottingham
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Reporting inspector	Lois Furness

Centre leader	Claire Turnbull
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Ambleside Primary School Rosslyn Lane Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	My Start Nursery EY 230699

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.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, parents and carers, volunteers, representatives from Action for Children and Nottingham City Council, members of the advisory board and representatives from some of the centre's partners including health and education.

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

Information about the centre

Aspley/Bells Lane Children's Centre provides services aligned to the full core purpose for children's centres. This phase one centre was designated in 2004, developing from a Sure Start local programme. Its main building is on Minver Crescent, with a satellite building on Amesbury Circus, in the middle of the Bells Lane estate. This means a children's centre building is adjacent to each of the two local primary schools. Some services are delivered at other community venues, such as the library, a local church and the two schools.

The centre works as a cluster with Sure Start North West Children's Centre, which is also located within the Aspley ward which is included within the top 10% most deprived wards in the country. Over half of the children under five years live in households that are dependent on workless benefits. The vast majority of families are White British with an increasing population of Black or Black British, Asian and Eastern European families. Provision for nursery education funded places and the two-year-old early learning programme is made on site at My Start Nursery. Most children enter childcare and early education with a range of skills, knowledge and abilities that are much lower than those expected for their age.

The service manager or centre manager, who was appointed in December 2010, is responsible for the management of the two children's centres in the locality and centre staff work across the two locations. Although governance is the responsibility of Nottingham City Council, strategic management is the responsibility of Action for Children which is commissioned by the Council to provide the children's centre service. Support and guidance are provided by a local advisory board which consists of a range of professional partners, community representatives and staff.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Aspley/Bells Lane Children's Centre is a satisfactory centre. However, there are numerous good aspects to its work. Parents who use the centre are full of praise for the welcoming and supportive staff team and say the centre makes a real difference to their lives. 'Staff are always willing to listen,' and 'Staff here are amazing, they are always willing to help,' were just some of the comments made by parents. Safeguarding families whose circumstances may have made them vulnerable is strong. Families experiencing significant change or challenge in their lives receive effective tailored and targeted support through the Family Advice sessions and close partnership working with a range of agencies. This sustained engagement with families needing intensive support leads to improved parenting skills and effective emotional support in times of crisis. There is good use of the Common Assessment Framework for those families in greatest need. Parents and carers who use the centre have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and ensure the safety of their children. Children also are developing a good understanding of keeping safe through opportunities for physical play.

Recruitment of local people to the staff team and a close working relationship with Broxtowe Partnership Trust are improving the centre's contact with some hard-to-reach families and young parents. In some aspects, the centre can demonstrate outcomes for families are good and improving rapidly, such as children's achievements at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Also, as a result of focused work on encouraging more families with disabled children to engage with the centre, there has been a marked improvement. However, as yet, the centre cannot

confidently demonstrate the impact it is having on outcomes across the full range of outcome areas, for example on the percentage of mothers sustaining breastfeeding or the percentage of children in the Reception Year who are obese. Consequently, all outcomes, apart from the extent to which children are safe and protected, are satisfactory rather than good as the centre has evaluated them. In addition, there is not enough secure information to demonstrate whether the improvement in outcomes is affecting the vast majority of families in the area, particularly those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable or hard to engage.

The service manager and other senior leaders set high standards for staff and have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision. Although governance is satisfactory, the targets set by the local authority are unrealistic and are not specific enough to the needs of this centre. Also, the centre's own service development plan lacks measurable success criteria. This lack of sharply focused targets and success criteria makes it difficult for leaders to evaluate the impact of the centre's work and for governors to hold leaders to account. The 'annual conversation' senior leaders have with the local authority does not provide a critical analysis of the centre's performance. The advisory board meets regularly and consists of a good range of professionals and staff. However, although members of the parents' forum are invited to attend these meetings, this does not always happen and the few members regularly attending the forum mean that parents and carers are not having sufficient involvement in decision-making processes. Even so, sound improvements in some areas, such as an increasing involvement of teenage parents, alongside good partnership working and the good commitment of staff, mean the centre has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Implement actions to ensure more families from the reach area, especially those from targeted groups, access the centre's services.
- Centre leaders should work closely with the local authority to improve governance and accountability by:
 - the local authority setting challenging but relevant targets so leaders are able to measure the success of the centre's work
 - the local authority's annual conversation providing centre leaders with clear guidance about how to improve further
 - ensuring the service development plan includes success criteria which focus on improving outcomes especially those for breastfeeding and obesity
 - involving more parents and carers in the decision-making processes.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The emphasis on helping families who use the centre to raise their awareness of how to keep safe is strong. Adults say they feel safe in the centre and relationships with

staff are good. Comments such as, 'I know I can talk to anyone about my problems,' and 'Staff always make me feel welcome,' show how happy some families are with the centre's work. Parents and carers engage well with tailored support packages, and outcomes for families who have received this support are good. The use of the Common Assessment Framework is well established and the number of children in need of a child protection plan is decreasing. Families appreciate this multi-agency approach to the support given to them saying it reduces stress and speeds up the processes for providing them with help. The centre has made good use of schemes to provide safety equipment in the home and home-safety workshops effectively support parents and carers in carrying out their own risk assessments.

Health outcomes are satisfactory and most parents and carers spoken to say the centre has helped their children to eat more healthily. The healthy breakfast sessions are well attended, and this provision helps parents and carers to provide healthy foods for their children. Some comment on the usefulness of the 'Cooking from around the World' sessions which have helped them to introduce their children to a range of healthy foods, experimenting with different tastes. However, despite a good range of activities promoting a healthy lifestyle, there has been an increase in the figures for child obesity. The emotional health of families is promoted appropriately through the personalised support offered by the centre's staff. Programmes such as the 'Incredible Years' have effectively supported some families in more confidently managing their children's behaviour. An above-average proportion of mothers take up breastfeeding, but this declines sharply after the first six to eight weeks. Fitness levels of children are promoted satisfactorily through the good use of the outside area, and sessions such as 'Active Tots' help to ensure families are involved in health-promoting activities.

The behaviour of children who attend the centre is good and the Early Years Foundation Stage profile information shows that children make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development and in their communication, language and literacy skills. By the end of the Reception Year, children have broadly average skills in these areas of learning. Adults who attend the centre also make good progress in their educational and personal development. However, the outcome for enjoyment and achievement is satisfactory rather than good, as too few families from the target groups engage with the centre's work.

A satisfactory range of opportunities is provided for families to offer their views, for example, through the parents' forum, questionnaires and the 'Thinking Tree'. Parents and carers are asked what courses they would be interested in, and they are confident that their wishes will be considered

A minority of families' economic well-being is improving through the wide range of courses offered including National Vocational Qualifications. Adults are given advice and support by staff from Jobcentre Plus, Credit Union, Family Information Service and Family Advice Sessions. A successful programme for volunteers is in place and, of the last group of volunteers, a few are in employment while others are continuing to gain experience through unpaid work. 'I feel I am doing something for the

community; giving something back,' commented one volunteer.

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	3
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	3
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	3
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?

3

The good range of services supports families' emotional as well as physical well-being. Parents and carers enjoy the group sessions such as baby massage and Incredible Years, which support them in developing their parenting skills. The 'New Leaf Smoking' cessation service has helped a small number of adults stop smoking. There is close attention to child protection, and all relevant staff have been trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework. Equipment provided by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents has helped some families make their home a more safe environment, for example by installing window and cupboard locks. The good links with midwives and the Family Nurse Partnership ensure good antenatal and postnatal advice.

Outreach work is good and the family support workers provide a valuable link between vulnerable families and the centre. Case studies show the success of this work. However, follow-up of referrals by one-to-one support is very time consuming and limits the number of families, especially from target groups, that engage with the centre's activities. Consequently, assessment of need is satisfactory although leaders are using emerging attendance data to inform future priorities and are considering how to use resources more effectively to engage more families. Progress is being made as evidenced by the higher take-up of activities and services than in the previous year, including that of the most vulnerable groups such as teenage parents, black minority ethnic parents and children with disabilities. The birth registration service offered onsite is helping new parents and carers to become better informed of the services available.

The centre promotes purposeful learning for children. The 'Stay and Play' sessions are well attended and sessions are planned carefully according to the needs of the

children attending. As a result, children are involved, happy and engaged suitably. All children are assessed when first engaging with the centre and their progress tracked appropriately using the Early Years Foundation Stage tracking system and through the 'developmental journeys'. Parents are invited to contribute to planning by selecting activities for future sessions by choosing from a photo book their child's favourite activities. This provides the opportunity to discuss children's strengths and interests with parents as well as talking to them about the early learning each activity or experience supports. Although the personal development of adults is celebrated and they are encouraged to build on their achievements, an insufficient number of the target groups are engaged with the centre's activities.

Care, guidance and support for families are strengths of the centre's work. Reception is very welcoming and staff know the families who use the centre well. Families approach staff with confidence and recognise the centre as a place of safety. Guidance information is available in the form of leaflets, posters and through drop-in sessions. Family advice sessions are available on a daily basis which allows parents to walk in and access support for a variety of issues, including housing, debt and benefits. Those families that access the centre are confident that the centre will help them during times of crisis. Good links with Relate and other agencies ensure good support for those experiencing domestic violence.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leaders and staff work well as a team ensuring the centre runs well on a daily basis. Day-to-day accountability is clear, and there are established systems of supervision and performance management, complemented by appropriate opportunities for training and professional development. Staff are committed to the work of the centre. They understand which groups need to be targeted and are reviewing their practice in order to engage more families within the area. The service development plan is a useful tool to identify the actions needed to improve, but the lack of measurable success criteria limits its effectiveness.

Governance is satisfactory and the commissioned service of Action for Children ensures good policies and procedures have been established to guarantee efficient day-to-day management of the centre. Target-setting processes, however, lack rigour, and the annual conversation with the local authority does not provide enough guidance to centre leaders about how to improve provision. An advisory board

consisting of a good range of professionals and staff meets regularly. However, very few parents and carers actively contribute to these meetings, meaning they are insufficiently involved in strategic development.

Partnership working is a strength. Information sharing is good, for example between the centre, social care and health professionals. Protocols and practices for referrals are used carefully by staff. The families who use the centre have regular opportunities to be involved in evaluating how well the provision offered has supported them. Case studies show the vast majority are satisfied and think their views matter. Support for some target groups, for example teenage parents and those with disabilities, is improving, but there is still work to do to engage fully with all vulnerable groups including fathers and lone parents. Even so, resources are used satisfactorily and the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Safeguarding procedures are good and the environment is welcoming and safe. The centre keeps detailed records about staff which contain valuable information on, for example, their qualifications and courses attended. Records indicate that all staff working at, or with, the centre have been subject to statutory checks. A strength of the centre is the comprehensive manner in which risk assessments are conducted across all services. The coordination of family support and outreach work and improving systems for sharing information about families most at risk, are beginning to have an effect on their willingness to engage in a wider range of services and, therefore, prevent risks escalating. Inclusion and the promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity are at the heart of the centre's work, and statutory responsibilities for the promotion of equality and diversity are met. Staff try hard to remove barriers for families to the activities and services on offer, for example, by providing crèche facilities. However, although those who engage with the centre are pleased with its work, there remain too many families especially from target groups not engaging in the centre's activities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The 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	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	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 Aspley/Bells Lane Children's Centre on 17 and 18 November 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to those of you who came to talk to us in meetings and during activities. We found this very useful and you gave us lots of useful information about the centre and its work. We were pleased to know you feel the centre is making a difference to your lives and you receive good-quality care, guidance and support. We agree with you that the centre is a friendly and welcoming place with staff you can trust to help and support you. We were pleased to hear that many of you feel more confident about your role as a parent since you have been using the centre. We have evaluated the extent to which the centre keeps you and your children safe as good. We found the centre is really good at helping people at times in their lives when they most need it. This is because action is taken quickly and different people and organisations work well as a team to support you and your children.

The staff try hard to find out if services are useful to you. We know that you are asked for your views on activities and that some of you have made suggestions about what you would like, for example on the 'Thinking Tree'. However, we think you should be more involved in shaping the centre's services and so we have asked for centre leaders to find ways in involving more of you in the parents' forum and the advisory board.

Although a number of families do attend the centre we have asked the staff to find ways of involving those families who are vulnerable or are hard to engage to attend the centre's activities. There is no doubt that everyone who works at this centre want to make it as good as it can be. The service manager and staff know the services that are successful and what needs to be improved. They have outlined all of their improvement points in an action plan. However, the leadership is unable to

check if all actions are really effective as the plan does not include measurable success criteria. We have suggested that governors help the centre leaders to improve outcomes by setting challenging but achievable targets and by providing more precise advice about the centre's performance.

Thank you again to everyone who was willing to speak to us. It was a real pleasure to meet you and your children. We hope you continue to thrive and enjoy your time at Aspley/Bells Lane Children's Centre.

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