

Inspection report for Lincoln North Children's Centre

Local authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	383695
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	For Under Fives Ltd

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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 the centre manager, centre staff, members of the management group, and a range of providers, parents and carers, volunteers and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at sessions at the centre and other sites.

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

Information about the centre

Lincoln North Children's Centre is a phase one centre designated in 2005. It serves an extensive urban population to the north of Lincoln. The centre offers some provision in locations other than the centre to maximise services for families in the wider area; families from further afield attend activities at the centre regularly. The area served by the centre is socially very mixed and densely populated. A large number of properties are council-owned. The vast majority of families are of White British heritage. The remaining few represent a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The centre serves communities that live in one of the 20% most deprived and disadvantaged areas in the country. The incidence of unemployment is above average. About a quarter of families, an above-average proportion, claim working tax and other benefits. Families in the area experience significant issues relating to poor health, extreme poverty, and low levels of literacy and numeracy, and there is an increasing prevalence of domestic violence and crime in the area. A high proportion of children from the reach area enter school with skills, knowledge and abilities that are well below those expected for their age.

The children's centre offers a range of health, social care and family support services, and crèche facilities are arranged to support activities on site. The work of the centre is monitored by the advisory board and the local authority. The day-to-day management of the centre is undertaken by the centre manager and the

strategic lead officer from the local authority. The local authority commissions a range of services in partnership with other agencies and providers including health professionals, schools, the speech and language service, other children's centres, and pre-school providers. The centre's outreach team, alongside a range of health and social care workers, provides targeted family support.

The registered early years/childcare provision on site (for up to 28 children) is managed by 'For Under Fives Ltd'. An inspection of this provision was carried out in 2010 under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. This report is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

The centre's overall effectiveness is good. It is a welcoming place where everyone feels valued and safe. Outstanding care, guidance and support have a positive impact on the well-being of families. Highly skilled family workers lend prompt and sensitive help to families in times of crisis. Child protection and safeguarding procedures, including for the recruitment and vetting of staff, are outstanding. Well-trained staff work closely with relevant agencies to raise any concerns promptly. As a result, families stay safe; the number of children on child protection plans has reduced. The support for children, and their families, where learning difficulties and disabilities are identified is outstanding. These children progress into school as well prepared as others of their age. Other outcomes for users are good.

Parents, carers and children enjoy coming to the centre where they say they feel a sense of belonging. Good-quality activities for families promote learning well and, as a result, enjoyment and achievement are good. Children's achievement is improving, as reflected in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile which shows an increase of 12% in the number of children achieving 78+ points last year. Children's progress from their starting points is good; the good early support the centre provides benefits children considerably when they start school. Adults develop good parenting skills because staff model effective practice for them to adopt at home. There has been a substantial rise in the number of adults on accredited courses. Many gain

relevant qualifications to help improve their economic well-being and an increasing number are from the most disadvantaged families. Case studies show that a significant number of adults return to work or training as a result of the centre's efforts. The centre's systems to track the progress of children through school are good. Systems to track the progress of adults and attending other providers are also good, but lack detail to enable leaders to set even more ambitious targets. The centre promotes healthy living well through the many activities which have a good impact on health outcomes, for example childhood obesity levels have fallen to below average. While health outcomes are good overall, smoking levels remain high and breastfeeding rates low.

Parents and other adults make an excellent contribution to the centre's work as volunteers and through the parents' forum. Parents constitute over half of the advisory board. They are very proactive in raising local issues and organising activities that promote a sense of community in the area. In effective partnership with the centre's leaders, this highly determined parent body is very ambitious for the community, particularly to support the families most in need. While an increasing number of the most disadvantaged families use the centre regularly, many still do not benefit from the services it provides. Equality and diversity are good. The inclusion of all children and families is core to the centre's ethos. The centre successfully meets the duties that apply to it and is narrowing the gap and improving the life chances of many families. Evaluation is systematic and clearly identifies key areas for improvement. Those families who use the centre make very good gains in their learning and development. Effective leadership, good-quality provision, good outcomes, rising numbers of the most disadvantaged families being reached, combined with excellent vision and drive by parents, leaders and managers, demonstrate an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve health outcomes by setting more ambitious targets to increase breastfeeding and smoking cessation rates.
- Work more closely with schools, colleges and other providers to track the gains children and adults make in their learning and long-term economic well-being.
- Use the ambition and expertise of parents and volunteers to promote the centre's work and increase participation from the families in most need.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Children and their families feel very safe at the centre. Excellent safeguarding procedures and vigilant care arrangements ensure families are safe. Accidents on site are rare. Child protection is high priority. Families in crisis and seeking urgent assistance are protected quickly with multi-agency support where necessary. As all partner providers share information and use the Common Assessment Framework to review cases, families and children, especially those in local authority care, benefit exceptionally well. The fire service carries out home-safety checks to aid safety at home for any families identified as at risk. High-quality parenting courses help

parents secure better relationships, behaviour and safety for their children and help them manage their distress at moments of crisis. Regular safety courses remind parents of everyday hazards; consequently, emergency hospital admissions among children under five have fallen notably in the last year.

Health outcomes are good overall. Health visitors, centre staff and others help parents learn, for example, the benefits of weaning and healthy food options to give children a healthy start. Children extend their physical development well through outdoor play and have healthy snacks at the centre that parents are encouraged to replicate at home; as a result, obesity rates, by the age of six, have fallen substantially in the area. The same level of success is not evident in the smoking cessation rates and, although breastfeeding rates are rising, they remain below the average. Through home visits and attendance at baby clinics, staff identify health and safety concerns promptly. Mothers who experience depression are supported extremely well by staff.

The centre addresses users' feelings of isolation and low self-esteem exceptionally well; as a result, many feel they can tackle problems more easily to benefit their families. Typical comments are, 'I couldn't have coped without help from the centre when my child was diagnosed as having special needs,' and, 'The centre was a lifeline when I became depressed.' Children join activities eagerly. Families enjoy toys and books, explore glue and paints and learn from each other. They play together and have fun; parents learn from staff how to help their children progress. 'Helping Hands', particularly designed for children with special needs and/or disabilities, gives parents the knowledge and skills they need to accommodate their children's needs very effectively.

Relationships, based on mutual trust and respect between staff and families, are excellent. Children's behaviour is excellent; they quickly learn to consider others. Staff encourage parents to raise issues or concerns, suggest ideas for future activities and promote the centre's work. A very active body of parents, including fathers, works enthusiastically to engender pride, confidence and ambition in the community. With over 150 people attending the fathers' day event and a sell-out for the Halloween party, their hard work is proving very successful.

Children are prepared well for school through good-quality learning experiences. They have fun socialising and play and explore independently inside and outdoors. They progress well in their personal development and adopt good hygiene and eating habits. Their speaking and listening skills improve rapidly because parents are shown how to talk and share books with them. The early identification of children's needs enables professionals to act quickly to support families so more children make a good start in school. Children who need extra support with their speech and language are identified early and referred to specialists.

High attendance indicates the centre's popularity and usefulness. Family learning activities, such as the 'Chatter Matters' and 'PEEP' give parents a good understanding of parenting skills and early years' education. The crèche is a valuable asset that

frees parents up to attend relevant courses. Good educational opportunities that include degree courses have helped an increasing number of parents, over thirty last year, develop relevant skills, experience and qualifications to move successfully into employment or training and thus improve their life chances. Parents say that staff help them with, for example, advice on managing money, thus restoring their self-esteem and promoting a move away from a welfare dependency culture. The centre is unsure how many parents attend education and training elsewhere.

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	1
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	1
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 centre provides good purposeful learning for adults and children. For example, 'Stay and Play' and 'Baby Bop' activities give families quality time to learn, and develop a sense of self-help and independence. Children play and explore in a very safe, caring environment; parents receive helpful advice and support from professionals, share experiences and build trusting friendships. Many attend courses that help them support their children's learning and development, particularly sessions that they feel are non-threatening, for example 'Musical Mayhem' and other events. Once confident, a good number progress to more challenging courses that equip them for further education, training or work. Volunteers have excellent opportunities to become involved in the work of the centre and gain experiences that benefit individuals and the wider community. They are being trained to promote breastfeeding as an option for new mothers. Provision to encourage lower smoking rates, particularly for mothers during pregnancy is less evident.

Staff assess families' needs and celebrate successes effectively at the centre but are less proactive in tracking the progress and achievement of adults who move on to other education and training providers. Assessments also focus very effectively on children's needs and ensure activities are interesting and relevant to their lives. Parents are shown how they can record their children's success through notes in children's learning journeys and make observations at home. The centre's data show that children progress well. Headteachers from partner schools report that children

starting school now are better prepared; the gap between the lower-attaining groups and others of the same age is narrowing. However, not enough is done to evaluate how the centre might improve provision to help children achieve more.

Care of children and their families is excellent. All families, but particularly those most in need, report that their lives are better for having had the help they needed, particularly at low points in their lives. Outreach services are very effective and outcomes following all home visits are monitored closely. Referrals through various service providers or self-referrals result in home visits that provide excellent support, particularly for families in greatest need or those facing urgent crisis. Lone parents and fathers are supported well. Specialist support, for example child development services, ensures that children's individual needs are identified early and met effectively. Parents are very appreciative of the way centre staff provide constructive guidance that alleviates some of the pressures families face. All groups are supported equally well. Support for the few families of minority ethnic heritage is good and staff signpost services, for example access to learning English, appropriately.

Very good partnerships ensure support is prompt and effective in safeguarding children and their families, particularly those in the target groups. Excellent use of the Common Assessment Framework ensures resources are targeted effectively. Work with housing associations and welfare agencies keeps children safe, warm and well looked after, particularly if families face immediate financial hardship. When emergencies arise centre staff respond quickly and tailor support to meet individual needs very effectively. Partnerships with health and social care are good and centre staff coordinate well with care workers to support families in crisis; as a result, the number of children taken into care has fallen considerably.

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

Good leadership and management have a positive impact on outcomes for families. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear. Clear links between strategic planning and provision lead to improvements. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities and are supervised well. Excellent community representation on the advisory board and parents' forum ensures a strong local voice in decision making. Leaders understand well key issues that face the centre, particularly the need to encourage more families from disadvantaged circumstances to use the centre.

The centre seeks and uses feedback from users very effectively to develop and improve provision. Value for money is good because resources are used effectively to secure good outcomes for families. Action to promote greater equality has led to an increase in families using the centre, particularly lone parents, fathers and young parents and carers. Outstanding learning experiences for children with additional needs reflect exemplary support for this group. For example, respite support is available to allow parents time for themselves. Families experiencing exceptional hardship with respect to debt, receive support to budget more effectively. The centre is helping to narrow achievement gaps between different groups effectively and helping families of differing backgrounds to respect each other. All parents and carers have high confidence in the care the centre provides. Safeguarding arrangements meet current statutory requirements very effectively. Staff and partners understand very well their role in identifying and reporting concerns and do so promptly. The centre works very efficiently with other agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. Hence users' ability to stay safe is outstanding.

Good partnerships with other services contribute to good outcomes for users. Services are integrated well and deliver cohesive provision. The local authority monitors its commissioned services scrupulously to ensure outcomes for families are consistently good. However, some partners do not evaluate the impact of their work at a local level. Excellent partnerships with voluntary, community, social care and health professionals contribute to the outstanding care, guidance and support for users. Good partnerships with day-care providers and childminders enable effective transition for children into school and this helps improve outcomes for families.

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	2
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	1
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	2

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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Lincoln North Children's Centre on 16 and 17 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. Aspects of its work are outstanding.

We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you and the staff. Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak with us, particularly those of you who came to the parents' meeting. It was particularly good to hear that you regard the centre as a very safe and welcoming place, and that you make good friends there. It is not surprising that every day more families are using the centre. It was really good to see so many of you supporting your children's centre so enthusiastically and that you want to help your community improve. The centre provides many good services. You appreciate the good support from all staff and were eager to explain how well the centre has transformed the lives of some families in your area. We were very impressed with how some of you are helping to lead activities in the community.

The centre works well with a range of partners such as social care, early years' education, and health providers. It provides good support for your children, so that they have a very good start in life. 'Stay and Play', 'PEEP' and 'Baby Bop' are very popular and provide good opportunities for parents and children to play and learn together. As a result, your families enjoy improved relationships and have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe, fit and healthy. Many of you benefit from various parenting classes and education and training courses to increase your employment prospects. Providers work very closely with staff at the centre to offer you the best services possible but recognise that they need to do more to encourage mothers to breastfeed and to support adults who want to try and stop smoking.

The centre manager and all staff work very hard to support you. The governors and other professionals have a good overview of the centre's work. Staff are supported well by leaders to ensure the best outcomes for you all. The centre involves you fully in evaluating the activities it offers and this is having a positive impact on future developments. We have asked the centre leaders to look more closely at the data they gather to make sure the centre is doing everything possible to improve the services it provides for all groups in the community and to work with you to encourage more families to use the centre.

We wish you every success for the future.

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