

# Inspection report for Sleaford Children's Centre

---

<b>Local authority</b>	Lincolnshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	383815
<b>Inspection dates</b>	3–4 May 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Michael Miller

<b>Centre leader</b>	Robert Cole
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	n/a
<b>Centre address</b>	Money's Mill Complex, Carre Street Sleaford NG34 7TW
<b>Telephone number</b>	01529 306888
<b>Fax number</b>	01522 516081
<b>Email address</b>	Robert.Cole@lincolnshire.gov.uk

<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Heckington St Andrew's CofE Primary School (120526)
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Sleaford Day Nursery (EY102277)

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.

---

**Report published:** May 2012



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080).

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



## 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 children's centre manager, its practice supervisor and other centre staff. They spoke with parents and carers, and representatives of the advisory board. Discussions were held with representatives from the local authority, health professionals, and a wide range of partner organisations and educational bodies who provide services for the centre's families. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Sleaford Children's Centre was designated as a phase two centre in February 2008; it started to fulfil its core purpose in November 2009. It is situated in a purpose built complex in the town centre. It moved from a local secondary school in May 2011. It now shares its buildings with an established youth centre. The children's centre consists of several large community rooms, training and meeting rooms, and smaller consultation spaces on different floors of the building. The centre has a small outdoor space, which is currently used as a courtyard garden and relaxation area. There is an outreach, satellite centre at Heckington which is attached to the local primary school. This consists of a community room and a shared reception service. There is full access to all areas, at both the Sleaford and Heckington centres, for users and their families who may have a disability. In addition, outreach services are provided, in partnership with the district council, through a mobile playbus. This serves the local villages throughout each week.

Full-time early years provision is available, off-site, at the privately run Sleaford Day Nursery. The centre works in partnership with the nursery to make crèche provision available to support families when accessing its services. The centre's manager is answerable directly to the local authority. An independent advisory board (known as the Partnership Board) now provides advice and guidance, and oversees the centre's

work and activities. A parents' forum is being established to provide additional advice and support for the centre, and to develop its programme of services. Consultations are currently starting to discuss the clustering of the Sleaford Centre with the Caythorpe and Ancaster Centre, and the Billingham Centre, which are also under the management of the centre's leader.

The centre serves communities which live in one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The percentage of workless families in the area, and those in receipt of benefits or subject to financial hardship, is broadly average but increasing. The centre's reach area has been expanded and increased threefold since the centre was first established in 2008; it now covers 11 political wards. There are 18 primary and/or infant schools in the centre's extended area. Within this area live some 2000 children aged between birth to five years. Over 1000 families are registered with the centre and some 60% of these are regular users. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities are broadly in line with those expected for their age when they enter early years provision. Most families are White British; the proportion from other heritage groups is below average, but with an increasing population from Eastern Europe.

## 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**

**2**

## Main findings

This is a good, well-managed centre. It meets the needs of its communities well Its activities and services result in good outcomes for children and their families. The positive approach shown by the centre's leadership, its users and partners is indicative of the impact of the centre's searching self-evaluation. Its planning supports effectively its good capacity for further development and improvement. As one parent said, 'This centre has provided a great hub for my family's support.'

Over the past year the centre has met very effectively the twin challenges of moving into its new location and taking on a considerable expansion in its reach. It is proving successful because of the hard work and commitment of its staff, and the dedicated leadership of the centre's manager. It has quickly gained a justified reputation because of the calibre of teamwork amongst staff, and the quality of the partnerships developed to secure vital services for its families. Discussions and

evaluations of the services families receive, justify well the very positive views families and the centre's commissioned partners have of the facilities it provides.

The centre manager uses well users' evaluations to assess the impact of its services. Feedback from families is good. The local authority provides the centre with a range of helpful data in order for the centre manager to assess the impact of the large majority of its services. However, sufficiently up-to-date or reliable data have not always been available from the authority or commissioned partners to judge fully whether the centre is reaching all of the groups in its area. As a result of the district council's needs assessment in 2011, the centre is in a much better position to target its hard-to-reach groups; in this it is becoming increasingly successful. From April 2012, the council has negotiated new contracts with its commissioned partners to ensure the provision of regular, quarterly data regarding their performance against the targets set for their services. There is still work to be done, but discussions with a range of the centre's partners show there is a willingness not only to be more accountable, but also to extend further their links with the centre.

Following its move in May 2011, the centre has taken a practical approach to the need to change its governance arrangements. An advisory board shares its professional members with Billingham Children's Centre. Parents do attend the board meetings, and contribute through an informal parents' forum which was established in November 2011. However, this has not yet been properly constituted to enable the forum to apply formally for additional grant funding and extend users' sense of ownership and influence in extending the centre's work.

The new accommodation includes a very pleasant, multi-purpose courtyard area. However, the centre ran out of funds before it could develop this facility, with protective cover and safe surfaces, to enable children's regular use in all weathers. This limits children's potential learning experiences. At Heckington, outdoor facilities are adequate, but planning for their integral use for children's developmental and creative activities in all weathers is not consistent.

The centre has a number of important strengths. Discussions show there is a secure sense of trust between families and the centre staff. Users feel entirely safe at the centre, and express confidence in the staff because they feel they will be listened to and given good advice. Families praise the impact of the parenting courses on the quality of their own and their children's well-being. As another parent commented, 'I would not be as strong a parent as I am now without the help of the centre.'

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Work with the local authority to ensure the increased sharing of data between the centre, its partners and commissioned services provides sufficient information for the centre to target even more effectively its hard-to-reach groups.
- Ensure the establishment of a properly constituted parents' forum to enable users

to develop further their sense of ownership, enjoy an increased influence on the centre's work, and provide feedback and advice to the advisory board.

- Develop and plan more specifically for the use of the outdoor facilities at both the main and outreach centres, to make these a more regular and integral part of the children's creative and developmental activities in all weathers.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>2</b>
----------

The centre has built good working relationships with its local schools, pre-school and adult education providers. Work with its education partners has ensured good outcomes in preparing children for school and in helping to close the achievement gap more quickly, particularly for children who live in the locality's more deprived areas. Attainment in children's personal, communication and literacy development is rising. The centre's involvement with a national initiative to support children's language acquisition is helping raise parents' and carers' appreciation of their children's language and communication development. Data show children benefit well from the centre's activities; there has been a marked reduction in the numbers of children requiring intensive help. Parents' awareness of their role in supporting their children's speech and language development has been enhanced well through a project to encourage children's speaking. Commissioned courses with the local college help prepare adults well for return to education or employment; completion rates are good. Although such courses are currently held off-site, their success has encouraged the local college to plan for in-centre adult literacy and numeracy courses from September 2012.

Adults and children enjoy learning and improving their personal skills and understanding. They feel a sense of ownership of the centre, although their newly established parents' forum has still to be formally constituted. Nevertheless, parents are empowered well to take a lead in their children's play and learning through 'Pop-in-and-Play' and parent and child group activities. Parents contribute regularly to the assessments of their children's learning and development through the 'Learning Journey' records. As a result of activities organised by health trainers and parent involvement workers, families are showing improving awareness of healthy lifestyles and managing healthy routines in their homes. Users have started their own 'walking group'; this is valued not only for the physical exercise but also for the social opportunities it affords. An important next step for the centre is to develop its all-weather outdoor resources and facilities, ensuring the use of these are planned more regularly into its activities for children.

There are good outcomes in terms of both the physical and mental health of users. Families benefit well from the centre's emphasis on 'prevention rather than cure'. Case studies show the centre is quick to take action to support its more vulnerable children and families. Their needs are assessed thoroughly through the Common Assessment Framework and 'Team Around the Child' support. Families benefit well from the coordinated support they receive when they require multi-agency assistance. Users say they feel physically and emotionally safe while at the centre, and appreciate the consistency of the care, guidance and support they receive.

Children behave well during the centre's activities and, for example, learn to help tidy up at an early age.

The role of a range of centre staff and commissioned workers has been important in raising successfully users' awareness about home safety and hygiene. Child obesity rates have been falling and are below average. Dental decay in the under-fives is low. Parents speak well of the ways the centre's first-aid courses have helped them take better care of their children. Teenage pregnancy rates are lower than the national average. Immunisation rates are overall above the local authority average. There has been an increase of 20% during the last year in the uptake and sustainability of breastfeeding. A parents' breastfeeding support group has been very active, and proved a good example of users' positive contributions to the centre. As a result of the work of the centre and its volunteers, there are now a good number of commercial premises in the town supporting a 'breastfeeding friendly' approach.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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

### **How good is the provision?**

**2**

The centre takes a holistic approach to the learning, development and welfare of the families it serves. Good quality care, guidance and support is enabled because of the efficient ways the centre's services are integrated. Typical of users' comments is, 'The staff have helped me stand on my own two feet, and help me feel brave enough again to go out there.' Parents' and children's ideas help form an integral part of the planning of the centre's activities. This has helped it to establish itself at the heart of its communities. The Heckington outreach centre has good links with the local school, its linked pre-school provision, the local church and library. Children accessing day care at the main centre, including funded and respite care, attend an outstanding partner pre-school setting.

Provision has expanded significantly since the centre moved into its new site. It has used the 2011 needs assessment well to target hard-to-reach groups and serve

effectively those most in need. It has established a crèche to support specifically those children and their families with a disability or special educational needs. This has helped increase considerably the number of such families it is able to support. The centre is ambitious on behalf of both its actual and potential users, and planning is advanced on a number of new projects. Typical of these is the development of the partnership with the Ethnic Minority Community Service to provide an outreach bus to meet the needs of the Traveller community.

Established successes are to be seen in the ways health and centre workers are proactive in promoting and supporting smoking cessation and work with the fire service on promoting safety through smoke free homes. All regular health related clinics are well-attended, and work with midwifery is well-established. In one helpful parent-craft session, the midwife was giving soon-to-be-mothers very good advice on getting their partners to change their baby's first nappy. Fathers are supported well, resulting in nearly 60% of those in the reach area being registered, and some 20% being regular users of the centre. Young mothers praise the advice they receive to help them develop their parenting skills and deal with toddlers. There are good links with the local Jobcentre, and mutual referrals which benefit users well.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

The centre's manager has built an effective team of skilled and well-qualified staff. Good development planning is in place to take the centre forward. Commissioned services have been chosen well, and targeted to meet specific as well as universal needs. This is ensuring the centre provides increasingly good value for money in the ways it builds and targets its services to its communities. All the centre's partners with whom discussions were held expressed a keen interest in expanding and developing further the services they offer. This ambitious approach is typified by the centre's very effective work with its partner agency in supporting the victims of both male and female domestic abuse. Users feel included and valued.

The centre's approach to ensuring equality and combating discrimination is integral to its ethos. Users praise the welcome they receive and how the centre's approach raises their self-confidence and self-esteem. Families which include members with a disability or special educational need compliment the centre for the ways it supports and encourages them. As one such father said, 'It's always great coming here.'



Effective safeguarding arrangements stem from a rigorous approach which is understood well and practised by all staff. All necessary checks are undertaken regarding the suitability of staff and adult volunteers to work with families. Child protection and health and safety have a high profile; risk assessments are thorough. The importance of early intervention is embedded and centre staff play an important role in any multi-agency work. Child protection work, involving the centre, health workers, family and social care services, is established firmly and operates efficiently.

Governance and accountability arrangements are good. The local authority and the centre's manager have good systems for evaluating the centre's work. New contracts and clear targets for commissioned services have sharpened the accountability of partner providers. This is starting to enable the centre to have the data required to assess fully the impact of their services and performance against local and national criteria. Outcomes are reported properly to the advisory board to aid their general monitoring responsibilities. Membership of the advisory board includes parents and a helpful range of professional partners. The centre itself has identified the lack of a more formal, constituted footing for its parents' forum as an aspect for development.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

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

The findings of the February 2012 inspection of the Billingham Children's Centre, when it was found to be good, were taken into account. This centre is under the

same leadership and management as Sleaford Children's Centre.

The findings of the inspection of the Sleaford Day Nursery in April 2011, when it was judged outstanding, were also used to guide the inspection team's findings with regard to educational provision and outcomes for pre-school children. The Nursery has a memorandum of understanding with Sleaford Children's Centre for the provision of pre-school education. This setting was not re-inspected at the same time as the inspection of the children's centre.

In addition, the findings of the last inspection report on Heckington St Andrew's Church of England Primary School were taken into account. This school provides an outreach base and facilities for Sleaford Children's Centre. In March 2010 this school was found to be satisfactory. It was not re-inspected at the same time as the inspection of the children's centre.

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Sleaford Children's Centre on 3–4 May 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time to talk with us during our recent visit. The discussions we had with you about your experiences, and those of your families, were very helpful. Nobody had any criticisms of the centre's work, only praise for the ways it works with you and your families. You clearly have confidence in the staff, and appreciate how the centre's work has led to good improvements in your families' lives and in your children's development. We saw that staff work together well to help keep your children and families safe and healthy. Safeguarding arrangements are good, and there is good attention to your welfare. Your centre helps you and your families to develop and promote well your health and well-being.

There are a number of good things about your centre. The most important include the fact that you feel confident in walking through its doors and knowing that you will receive not only a warm welcome but also valuable help and support. The centre and its partners are particularly good in the ways they support you when you and your families find yourselves in a time of difficulty. We were also pleased to see that a number of you contribute through the Partnership Board and attend the more informal parents' forum. This helps the centre manager to understand your needs and those of your wider community. Your centre's leaders are now looking to help you put the forum on a more official footing. This is to help it apply for additional grant funding for the centre, and extend the ways you can support it. Many of you already play an important role as volunteers and we do hope this continues.

In the year since the centre moved from the St George's Academy site, its new and larger accommodation has helped it to develop its programme significantly. Many more of you are now able to benefit from its activities and services, both in the town centre and at Heckington. However, we feel the courtyard at the main centre should be developed further to enable children to enjoy the use of this outdoor area in all weathers. In addition, at Heckington, planning for the use of the existing outdoor facilities has not been regular enough, and resources need to be developed to enable this. Furthermore, until very recently, your centre's leaders have had some difficulty in assessing fully some of their successes compared with other children's centres nationally. This is because they have not always received sufficient data either through the local authority or from those with whom they have commissioned their services. This situation has improved significantly in the last couple of months. However, we have discussed this with people from the district council and asked them to make sure that the centre continues to receive the data it needs, and in a form which is helpful and easy to use. Your centre's manager and the local authority representatives have all agreed with our recommendations.

We thank you again for all your contributions to the inspection and trust that, in the years ahead, even more families from your communities and local area will be able to join you and benefit from the centres' growing services and activities.

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