

Inspection report for Beech Hill and Sacred Heart Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Wigan
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Reporting inspector	Sarah Drake

Centre leaders	Janet Seddon and Andrew Poskitt
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Centre address	Beech Hill C.P. School Netherby Road Beech Hill Wigan WN6 7PT
Telephone number	01942 820755
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	enquiries@admin.beechill.wigan.sch.uk BeechHill_CC@wigan.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	106399 Beech Hill Community Primary School
	106461 Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY271055 Kids United

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

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

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's leaders, staff and the qualified teachers linked to the centre, members of the parents' forum and the collaborative leadership committee, and spoke informally with parents attending sessions. They also met with representatives of: Action for Children, Active Living, the Breastfeeding Network, Families First, Family Learning, the local authority including one councillor, childminders, health visitors and social workers.

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

Information about the centre

Beech Hill and Sacred Heart Sure Start Children's Centre is a phase two centre. It was designated in March 2008 and reached its full core purpose in 2010. Its main centre is based at Beech Hill Community Primary School. Activities also take place at Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, Woodfield Primary School, St Anne's Church Hall and Bookcycle (formerly Beech Hill library). The centre offers a range of universal services and other services which are commissioned either strategically or locally. These are delivered by its own staff or in partnership with other agencies, such as health professionals, Action for Children, Families First and Wigan and Leigh College. Services include baby clinics and baby massage sessions, stay and play sessions, family learning sessions and support into work and training.

The centre serves a reach area with diverse levels of prosperity including three super output areas which are among the highest to 30% most deprived areas nationally. Most families

are of White British heritage with a small minority belonging to a variety of different minority ethnic groups. The most recent available data indicate that 18% of families in the reach area with children from birth to four years are headed by lone parents and that 21% are dependent on workless benefits. The skills with which most children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision are well below those expected for their age.

The centre is led jointly by the headteachers of Beech Hill Community Primary School and Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School. It employs one full-time coordinator, one full-time equivalent link worker and one full-time equivalent receptionist/ information worker. Since September 2010 it has been managed on behalf of the local authority by a collaborative leadership committee which comprises a range of stakeholders including representatives of parents and of the local authority.

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

'We love the place, it's our sanctuary and we all need it.' This strong endorsement from a parent typifies the great value placed on the centre's work by all who use it. Since its opening, the centre has established itself as a trusted place to which increasing numbers of the local community go for help and advice. However, it is not yet attracting a large majority of potential users, especially from among key groups such as male carers and lone parents, to use its services. This is why, while much of its provision, in particular the care, guidance and support offered by all members of staff, is of good quality, the centre's overall effectiveness is satisfactory.

Strong partnerships with a wide range of agencies enhance the provision and help to create a cohesive approach towards offering support that is well tailored to families' individual needs. Over recent months the centre has been particularly successful in helping significant numbers of users to access training and move into work. It is also effective in helping users to boost their self-esteem and this is leading to their taking an increasingly active role in influencing the centre's provision. Relationships between users and with staff are good. Children are helped to understand about acceptable behaviour and the importance of

sharing. Activities to promote healthy lifestyles are popular and those who have attended these confirm that, for example, they are more likely now than in the past to cook fresh meals for their family. Good quality procedures ensure the safeguarding of those who attend the centre. Children enjoy the activities on offer and the skills with which they enter the Early Years Foundation Stage in the local schools are increasing. However, there is no system in place to track the progress of children who regularly attend sessions at the centre.

The centre's leaders and managers have an accurate view of its strengths and areas in need of development. The joint leaders work effectively with the coordinator who skilfully manages the day-to-day organisation and administration, ensuring that resources are focused suitably on those in most need. All who work at the centre are clear about their roles and responsibilities and they are willing to be very flexible according to changing priorities. The collaborative leadership team is becoming increasingly knowledgeable about the centre's work and, therefore, better able to offer it challenge and support. Recent and on-going reorganisation within the local authority has led to greater clarity about the expectations of children's centres and the overall pathway for children and young people from nought to 19 which the centre's leaders find helpful. However, it has also led to many changes in personnel and a reduction in communication related to the centre's specific needs and challenges. This is hampering its ability to plan strategically and to agree challenging targets for improvement. The centre has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that a large majority of families within the reach area, particularly lone parents and male carers, are actively engaged in centre activities.
- Develop systems through which to track the progress of children who participate in centre activities to help narrow the gap in children's achievement.
- To the local authority:
Improve the level of communication with and support provided for the centre to enable it to evaluate, plan and carry out its work in a timely manner.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre has a positive impact on the healthy life-styles and safety of those who attend its sessions. The establishment of baby-weighing clinics and the breastfeeding network within the building has led to increased contact between health professionals and new mothers who live locally. Around two-thirds of mothers who start to breastfeed are still doing so when their baby is six to eight weeks old. One mother commented that she feels sure that she only continued breastfeeding due to the support she received. Levels of obesity among local children in the Reception Year have fallen over the past four years whereas those in

the authority as a whole have risen. Activities, such as the 12 week 'Healthy Me and You' course, mounted by the Active Living team are popular. The large majority of attendees who live in the most deprived area in the reach completed the most recent course and achieved their goals, such as using more fresh food at home. Similarly, those who attend the 'Safe sleeping' sessions show a clear increase in their awareness of potential risks for their babies. Staff are skilled at gaining the confidence of users so that they feel able to talk about their concerns and to seek help. One parent wrote that attendance at the centre, 'has helped my family life feel less stressed and calm. We now enjoy being together and having lots of fun.' Social workers in part attribute a reduction in the number of referrals to social care of families in the area to the work of centre staff. Their involvement in cases related to child protection, looked after children and those subject to the Common Assessment Framework is welcomed and effective, with evidence of some families no longer causing the highest levels of concern.

The proportion of children in the reach area achieving at least the expected levels for their age by the end of the Reception Year is rising but the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is not yet narrowing. Work carried out to increase the communication skills of those children at most risk of delay is having a positive impact, particularly on their use of language for social communication which emerges as the weakest aspect when they start the intensive programme. Children attending the centre demonstrate that they feel at ease there and this enables them to experiment with confidence and learn new skills, such as those who attended a 'Let's learn and play' session. Parents at the same session commented that it was, 'really helpful because it makes you think about things you could do at home about shapes.'

Children and adults who use the centre behave in a positive manner and show respect for others. There are no reported incidents of bullying, racism or other harassment. The parents' forum comprises a high proportion of users who live in areas identified as among the most deprived in the reach. The centre's work has enabled them, and others who volunteer, to develop the self-confidence to contribute towards enhancing the centre's provision. They have a representative on the collaborative leadership committee and their suggestions are swiftly acted upon. For example, the wording of the safeguarding policy has been changed to make it clearer and more easily understood. They organise events such as the Christmas party and the Jubilee celebrations. Over half the families using the centre are engaged in training, adult learning or other relevant activities. Completion rates for courses are good, as are the numbers over recent months which have moved into work. Over one third of those who enrolled on the course 'Helping and Working in Schools', in September, 2011 have successfully found employment. In the words of one user, 'I think that if I hadn't had the course there on my doorstep at the centre I wouldn't have been where I am today.'

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	3

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	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	2

How good is the provision?

3

The centre provides a vibrant range of activities which take into account the interests expressed by families as well as local needs and strategically identified areas for focus. For example, a second 'Baby Mover' session has been added in response to local demand, and staff enable those most in need, due to mental health or other difficulties, to access nursery places for their two-year-olds. The work club, set up in response to the closure of the local library and run by an experienced volunteer, supports those lacking the skills and confidence to take the first steps towards finding employment. Its success is confirmed by the numbers attending and by visitors from outside the authority seeking to adopt its methods for their area. Staff engage a good proportion of the small numbers of young parents, those belonging to minority ethnic groups and families with disabled children and those with special educational needs, that are identified by the reach area data. Despite much effort, it is less successful in attracting lone parents and male carers and, overall, it is only managing to reach around half of all local families. The centre's work with children is helping to increase the skill levels with which they enter the Nursery and Reception classes in local schools. However, there is no system to track the progress of those children who regularly attend sessions at the centre. Therefore, it is difficult to judge the impact of its work or to highlight specific areas where the centre might help to narrow further any gaps in their learning. The needs of adult users are assessed well with many progressing well from basic to more advanced level courses, having successfully achieved their original goals.

The good quality care, guidance and support offered to families are captured by one parent's comment, 'I was lost and it was like my link worker found us. She found me and my son.' Users praise all staff for their willingness to listen and take action that is pertinent to their particular needs. Professionals from other agencies also praise staff's knowledge of individuals and their patience and perseverance in supporting them towards greater independence and improved family outcomes.

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	2

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.

2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Well-organised systems and procedures ensure that all who work at the centre understand their duties and lines of accountability. The receptionist/ information worker plays a key role as the first point of contact and is adept at signposting users to services but also makes sure that she does not extend her 'listening ears' role to giving advice. The coordinator effectively balances data analysis, staff supervision, developing links with partners, being accessible to parents with many other tasks to ensure the sustainability of the centre's services. The joint leaders liaise well to conduct their shared task. The number of registrations is increasing but is not yet high enough, particularly among lone parents and male carers. The centre offers satisfactory value for money. It is very welcoming and staff make all those who attend feel valued. It promotes equality effectively but the achievement gap for young children has yet to narrow. Good safeguarding arrangements are in place. Staff have up-to-date training, all those who work or volunteer at the centre are checked for their suitability to work with children and all activities are assessed for risk. The link-workers, who job-share, work closely with other agencies in relation to issues such as domestic violence and those subject to a child protection plan.

Over recent months members of the collaborative leadership board have been successfully developing their role. The involvement of representatives from more local schools has led to sharing of good practice and, for example, moderation of the assessment of children's skills on entry to school. Access to data is becoming easier and imminent changes to the system are designed to make the available data more specific to the reach area and, therefore, more useful to centre planning. Improvements to the sharing of information between health professionals and centre staff are, for example, providing more accurate data about live births in the area and easing the all-important first contact with parents. Self-evaluation and development planning are realistic and becoming more sharply focussed on target groups within the reach. However, communication with local authority representatives has been intermittent recently. For example, the required annual conversation concerning the centre's effectiveness which should have taken place by the end of March has not yet been held and so the development plan is still only in draft form, two months into the current year. This is having an impact on the leaders' and managers' ability to set challenging targets to move the centre forward. Good partnerships with other agencies mean that those in need often gain speedy access to necessary services and support. One councillor describes the centre as, 'the best thing that has ever happened to the community, because it has brought people out who were isolated before.'

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 secures 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

When making their judgements, the inspectors took into account the findings of the coordinated inspection of Beech Hill Community Primary School. They also took into account the reports for Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and Kids United Out-of-School-Club, both of which were inspected in November 2010.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Beech Hill and Sacred Heart Children's Centre on 30 and 31 May 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. The care, guidance and support that staff offer you are good, as are the centre's partnerships with many different people such as health visitors and others who support you to increase your skills.

Thank you for making the inspectors feel welcome when we visited some of your sessions. Particular thanks should go to those of you who talked with us and helped us to learn more about the centre's work. We know that those of you who use the centre really appreciate all that the staff do for you. However, there is more work to be done to get more people using it, especially lone parents and male carers. We have asked the staff to work even harder to try to gain the confidence of non-users so that they give it a go. You could help with this by spreading the word around the area about all the good things on offer and how much the

centre has helped you. It was good to hear comments such as, 'The staff are always there for you and are never too busy if you want to talk to someone.' It is obvious that you and your children feel safe in the centre. We were impressed by how many of you have gained qualifications and moved into employment since visiting the centre. Congratulations!

The centre helps you to share your concerns and to help each other as well as to get help from the staff. Some of you told us that you had only kept on with breastfeeding because of the help and advice you received at the centre. We also learnt about your new cooking and do-it-yourself skills, as well as how some courses have helped you to manage your children's behaviour more effectively. As one person put it, 'The course has helped me to control my child's behaviour and reminded me that you do not have to shout to be heard.' Another said that it, 'put a smile on my face and because of that my family's face.' Your children enjoy the sessions such as 'Let's learn and play' and 'Messy mayhem' and these are helping them to gain the skills ready for starting school. We have asked the staff to find a way of recording your children's new skills so that they can plan activities that help the children make even more progress. You may be able to help with this too since you are the ones who know your children best.

We were very pleased to find out that members of your parents' forum are helping to organise events such as the Jubilee celebrations and that parents have a say about things like the wording of the safeguarding policy. It is also good that a parent sits on the collaborative leadership committee which oversees the running of the centre. We know that reorganisation within the local authority has caused you some anxiety and also made it harder, recently, for the centre staff to plan for the future. So we have asked the local authority representatives to improve communications with centre staff so that everyone can work together to make the best use of available resources.

Thank you again for sharing your views with us. We wish you and the centre the very best for the future.

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