

Inspection report for Bicester Children's Centre at Glory Farm

Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	383873
Inspection dates	5–6 December 2012
Reporting inspector	Alan Comerford-Dunbar

Centre leader	Emily Cox
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Bicester Children's Centre at Glory Farm Glory Farm School site Hendon Place Bicester Oxon OX26 4YJ
Telephone number	01869 320 553
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	Emily.cox@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY409906 Bicester Children's Centre at Glory Farm

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: December 2012



Corporate member of
Plain English Campaign
Committed to clearer communication

361

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.

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/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at 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
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2012



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 staff and senior leaders, parents and members of the partnership group. They met with a range of partners, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Bicester Children's Centre at Glory Farm is a phase two centre which was designated in 2006. The centre operates in close partnership with one other centre called Bicester Children's Centre at Brookside. The centres share a joint timetable and staff perform their duties across both centres; families are encouraged to attend activities at either of the centres, which are situated approximately two miles apart. The other centre making up the partnership will be inspected separately.

The centre is located on a large site comprising several schools. It operates in a double-size portable building with a purpose-built outside play area. It provides the full core offer and a range of supporting services including health support, adult courses and educational workshops.

Families living in the reach area are mainly of White British heritage with nearly 90% of families in this group. The next largest group are of Asian British heritage at less than 2%. The percentage of children attending school in the area who are known to be eligible for free school meals is just over 10%. The proportion of workless families is around 8%. Currently, 185 families in the area benefit from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit.

The reach area has a mixture of housing, with the majority of houses being privately owned, although there are some housing association and privately rented properties. Currently, 1,040 children under the age of five years live in the area: of these, 740

are registered with the centre. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years education are at levels broadly expected for their age.

The part-time centre head has strategic responsibility for four children's centres across Bicester, known as Bicester central and Bicester rural. Day-to-day running of the centre is shared between two centre coordinators. The local authority is responsible for governance. The centre has an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, parents and professional agencies. The advisory board is responsible for both centres in Bicester town and is known locally as the partnership group.

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

Bicester Children's Centre at Glory Farm is a successful centre which has engaged with the large majority of families in its community; the overall effectiveness of the centre is good. Parents talk of feeling welcomed as soon as they walk into the centre. 'It's great here, everyone's so friendly' was the comment of one parent, which was typical of many others. Families speak very highly of the support they receive from staff. Arrangements to provide support and care to families are strong, mainly as a result of the close partnership links with health and social care colleagues. The centre provides good-quality and often intensive support for families, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Parents feel safe when visiting the centre.

Arrangements with agencies such as Jobcentre Plus are effective and enable the centre to improve the economic independence of parents. Advice regarding welfare and benefit issues is particularly effective. Evidence shows that just over a third of parents are involved in a range of relevant adult learning and training activities. Registration of families is increasing year-on-year. Despite this, the local authority does not provide sufficiently accurate, current information about the centre's reach area to enable the centre leaders to monitor and improve the participation of key target groups, such as lone parents and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

Through the expertise and skill of staff, who work well with early years education advisers, the centre enables children to make good progress in their learning, development and skills. Sessions for children link well to the Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes. Enjoyment and achievement for adults are also well promoted. Through adult learning classes, and also through learning from other programmes, such as parenting courses, many parents develop knowledge and skills to improve their own lives and those of their families.

The centre offers good-quality health provision which, overall, leads to positive health outcomes for families. However, in spite of the efforts of health professionals and centre staff, breastfeeding rates remain low. There are currently no antenatal or postnatal clinics being run at the centre, despite the availability of a suitable room and the recent purchase of appropriate equipment. Centre staff and midwives recognise the need to restart clinics in order to increase opportunities for staff to influence decisions taken by mothers in regard to breastfeeding.

Parents' involvement in decision making and governance is good. As members of the partnership group, and as representatives on the parent panel, parents make a clear contribution to the work of the centre. The centre's volunteer programme is well planned and provides additional support during activities. Very good use is also made of apprentices who contribute much to the work of the centre.

The quality of leadership and management at all levels is good. Managers are highly competent and the staffing structure effective. Self-evaluation is generally very accurate and a rigorous process which leads to improvement. The centre knows what it needs to do to improve. The delivery plan to improve the quality of provision and services is clear, detailed and includes a reasonable number of ambitious targets. All of these features show why the centre's capacity to improve is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should provide recent, accurate information about the key groups in the reach area so that the centre can increase its engagement with targeted groups, such as lone parents, and assess the impact of the activities it runs more effectively.
- Re-establish links with midwives to develop and provide antenatal and postnatal clinics at the centre in order to improve breastfeeding rates.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre actively promotes positive health outcomes for families. Staff work closely with health professionals who visit the centre. They make good use of 'Healthy Eating on a Budget' and 'HENRY' classes as a key resource to promote and reinforce healthy eating messages. Sessions are very effective in helping parents, from a

range of target groups, to understand how to prepare healthy meals. As one parent explained, 'My child now has a healthy lunch box,' The centre contributes well to the local priority to reduce obesity rates. These have now reduced to the current low rate of a little over 7%. Good work is being done to reduce smoking by teenage mothers, which had also been identified as a particular problem in the reach area.

Breastfeeding rates fluctuate and the most recent data show low rates at six to eight weeks, despite many as yet unsuccessful initiatives. Centre staff are working in conjunction with health visitors, midwives and breastfeeding peer support workers across the Bicester area to encourage more women to breastfeed for longer periods. However, the cessation of visits by midwives to the centre to hold clinics has significantly reduced opportunities to discuss breastfeeding options with women; parents and centre staff are united in their desire to restart the clinics.

Families feel safe at the centre. Those whose circumstances make them vulnerable and other key target groups, such as women living with domestic abuse, develop a very good understanding of how they can remain safe. Staff make good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and multi-agency referral forms to identify and respond effectively to safeguarding concerns. Case study evidence demonstrates the centre's success in taking appropriate and timely action to keep children safe. Evidence also shows that positive outcomes are achieved for children on child protection plans and looked after children. Staff are vigilant and all activities are appropriately risk assessed. Trips arranged by the centre are especially well organised and reviewed following the event; this results in appropriate changes to policies and procedures whenever the need is identified. Parents understand the need for safeguarding procedures and act responsibly. As one parent said, 'It's best to be safe, you never know.'

Parents make good progress in their learning and development. They benefit from a wide range of courses, like the course organised specifically for fathers when they identified a need to better understand postnatal depression. This course successfully helped fathers to better support their partners following childbirth. The proportion of children in the reach area who achieve 78+ scale points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile has improved over time from just over half in 2009 and is now around 67%. Children are well prepared for school as a result of their attendance at the centre and involvement in good-quality activities. Parents report gains in their children's social skills. The gap between the lowest-attaining children and the rest has reduced steadily from above 30% in 2009 to 22.0% in 2012, significantly better than the national average.

Parents make a good contribution to the work of the centre. One parent talked of 'being inspired' to volunteer because of the support she received from the centre. As she put it, 'I have received so much help, I wanted to give something back.' The personal development of volunteers is good and they also develop transferable skills which have enabled many to progress into employment or further education. A number of parents are actively involved in key decision making about centre services through the parent panel. Centre staff coordinate these meetings with parents to ensure that they are well organised and used effectively to gather their views.

Parents are suitably represented on the partnership group, which acts as a highly effective forum for them. Behaviour of children using the centre is good.

The centre works well with agencies such as Jobcentre Plus and other community organisations to help parents become 'work ready' and more employable. Parents make good progress into employment or further education. They are also provided with good-quality advice about benefits and 'better off calculations'. They receive detailed individual guidance which helps to reduce barriers to employment and in some cases significantly improves family income. Case studies show that some parents have successfully progressed from volunteering at the centre into employment and even an Open University place.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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

How good is the provision?

2

The large majority of families within the reach area access centre activities. The centre is located in an excellent position within the community, making it very accessible for users. Staff also run activities at the nearby Bicester Children's Centre at Brookside, which many users also find convenient. Registrations have increased steadily since the centre became operational in 2006 and are now at 72%. A 'Saturdays' group effectively engages with fathers and provides valuable time for play and physical exercise for families. All families receive careful and sensitive assessment of their needs by staff at the first point of contact. Parents have confidence when discussing issues with centre staff. As one parent put it, 'They are great here, a lifeline, in fact.' However, the centre is unclear about the effectiveness of some of the outreach activities it uses to engage with target groups. This is because the local authority does not provide enough accurate, relevant and timely information about target groups in the reach area. The local authority recognises this and is currently looking into ways to improve the situation. The lack of up-to-date information prevents centre staff from fine-tuning the services they provide to ensure they meet the specific needs of particular target groups.

The learning and development opportunities provided for children are well planned and, as a result, they make good progress. Staff have high expectations of all users, who consequently flourish. Activities are well organised, with all staff clearly committed to helping families succeed. Participation rates and attendance levels on all courses are good. The centre staff are very effective in working with specific groups, such as teenage mothers and fathers. The work with teenage mothers has resulted in increased breastfeeding rates and reduced smoking rates by young mothers. Achievement is always celebrated through words of praise, the creation of workbooks and displays of work on walls. The centre gives careful consideration to where an event is delivered. For example, it is currently planning to run outreach events to improve engagement with lone parents by working alongside the Salvation Army, which already runs activities in the community.

Both centre coordinators have a wealth of knowledge and experience. Parents and fellow professionals alike are full of praise for the advice and support offered by the coordinators and other members of staff. As one parent put it, 'If they don't know, no one knows' or, as another parent, said, 'They go way beyond what's expected of them.' Information, advice and guidance are clearly available and visible on helpful display boards located throughout the centre. Staff confidently give advice and guidance to families. Appropriate referral to other agencies ensures that users receive the best of advice. Families receive very good support in times of crisis as staff are confident when dealing with the complex needs of families and work well with a variety of partners to support families in most need. Information recorded on CAF documentation is detailed and helpful. The quality of childcare provided at the centre is good.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The part-time centre head is clearly focused on the strategic development of the centre. She is well supported by the local authority and the partnership group. Centre coordinators are very effective at maintaining morale amongst staff and supporting them to perform well in their various roles. Well-qualified staff feel valued by senior managers and there are robust procedures in place to ensure their continuous professional development. As a result, governance and accountability arrangements are good.

The centre's self-evaluation is accurate, and staff and partners are clear about the centre's strengths, weaknesses and future priorities. The resulting action plan identifies some ambitious targets which are clearly linked to the priorities identified by the centre. The centre is constantly striving to improve the way it caters for all families in the reach area but is somewhat hampered by the lack of up-to-date information about the numbers of specific target groups. Families' engagement in the centre is very effective. The parent panel and parents' involvement in the partnership group, as well as the good use of evaluations following all activities, ensure that families are fully involved in shaping activities at the centre. This demonstrates the centre's good capacity to continually improve.

Effective use is made of the wide range of resources available, thereby ensuring that the centre provides good value for money. All activities offered are run to capacity and there are often waiting lists. Sessions are run at both centres in Bicester town to ensure that available space in the centres is always being fully used. Good use is made of commissioned services, such as Homestart, to improve outreach to target groups. All activities, including commissioned services, are evaluated and monitored to secure high-quality provision. The centre uses high-quality resources and equipment, which are greatly appreciated by parents.

Equality of opportunity is good. Services meet the needs of the majority of families well, and enable good and improving outcomes. The centre is very effectively narrowing the achievement gap for both children and adults, and has numerous initiatives planned with partners to continue to do so. The centre has a warm and friendly environment, and all families feel included and at home. As one parent put it, 'It's great here, no matter who you are, you are welcome.' Equality for all is clearly promoted on noticeboards and during activities. Diversity is celebrated, especially through the careful selection of reading books used during sessions with children. Resources and provision for disabled children and those with special educational needs ensure they are fully included in all activities.

Families with circumstances that make them most vulnerable receive good support during times of crisis through the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework process. Staff's knowledge of safeguarding ensures that families receive the support they need at the time they need it most. A single central record provides evidence of rigorous vetting of staff and recruitment procedures. Staff training is appropriate and up-to-date, ensuring that safeguarding is good and all legal requirements are effectively adhered to. A recent training exercise, run in conjunction with the locality senior social worker, correctly identified a minor lack of knowledge for some members of staff. This was swiftly and appropriately dealt with by the provision of additional high-quality training. Robust risk assessments ensure all activities conducted are run safely.

Partnership working is strong and families benefit from the many activities being run at the centre. Staff are confident when directing parents to other agencies, knowing that their needs will be addressed. Service-level agreements are robust and reviewed on a regular basis.

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	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	2

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

Not applicable

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 Bicester Children's Centre at Glory Farm on 5–6 December 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

As part of the inspection, we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation, and talked with a range of children and adults, including parents, staff, and partnership representatives. We were pleased to speak to some of you about the centre's work and to listen to your views. We really enjoyed talking to you at the centre and in the various activity sessions you were engaged in. You expressed your views very clearly and we appreciated you telling us how things really are.

The centre is working well with health partners to improve your health and that of your families. We were pleased to see that obesity rates for children entering Reception Year have reduced year-on-year and are now well below national averages. The centre offers a range of good support to encourage new mums to breastfeed so that their babies have the best start in life. So, we are pleased that an increasing number of you are breastfeeding your babies. However, we have asked the centre to work more closely with health colleagues to encourage still more of you to sustain breastfeeding for six-to-eight weeks and preferably beyond. We have asked midwives to run antenatal and postnatal clinics in the centre every week so that you can have more frequent contact with staff and can benefit from the advice and guidance available to you.

The centre is effective at helping you to increase your knowledge about how your children learn through the many play activities and parenting sessions on offer. We noted how much both you and your children enjoy learning and were pleased that the centre always celebrates your success. The skills children have when they enter school are improving. The centre is very effective in closing the gap between the 20% lowest-achieving children and the rest.

Many of you who have undertaken training have increased your confidence and developed your skills, which should help you find employment in the future. We were very impressed by the advice and guidance you receive from staff about welfare issues and benefit entitlements. It was pleasing to see such an active parents' panel and that some of you are involved in the partnership group and in volunteering at the centre. We were delighted to hear how you have benefited from coming to the centre, increased your confidence and become involved in the many worthwhile activities available to you.

The part-time centre head is clearly focused and enthusiastic about the work of the centre. She is well supported by senior managers from the local authority, and especially so by the two coordinators responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre. Centre staff work very hard to make the centre as good as it can be. They have innovative ideas to improve what they do so that more families can benefit from its activities. However, they are hampered in this effort by the fact that they do not have up-to-date information about all the different groups in the area. We have therefore asked the local authority to provide the centre with accurate, relevant and up-to-date local information, which will help the centre to work out how well it is meeting the needs of particular target groups, such as lone parents and those families whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

The partnership group challenges the centre to do even more for you and your families. The centre sets clear targets in order to improve services for you. It is pleasing to find that you feel welcome at the centre. The inclusion of all children and families is good and the centre is a pleasure to visit. All of you, regardless of background, aptitudes or other differences, have equal access to the activities and services on offer. The centre makes good use of risk assessments and ensures all

activities are safe for you and your children. All of you told us how safe you feel at the centre.

Thank you once again for your welcome and your willingness to share your views with us. We can see why the staff enjoy working with you so much and wish you every success in the future.

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