

Inspection report for Beacon children's centre

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| Local authority | Lancashire |
| Inspection number | 361099 |
| Inspection dates | 8–9 July 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Jean Kendall HMI |

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| Centre governance | Advisory Board |
| Centre leader | Helen Mountford |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
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| Linked school if applicable | N/A |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Beacon Day Nursery EY394335 Beacon Crèche EY367657 |

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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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with advisory board members, parents, carers and a representative from the local authority. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation.

Information about the centre

The Beacon opened as a children's centre in July 2005, having been a Sure Start Local Programme before that. The centre provides the full core offer including childcare and early learning, family support, health, and childminder network support. A privately run 46 place Nursery for children from birth to five years operates out of the centre. It was last inspected in January 2010. The centre also provides crèche facilities for up to 24 children aged from three months to five years. This provision was last inspected in February 2009. The centre operates a wide range of services from a number of satellite venues including a second 30 place neighbourhood nursery run by a voluntary committee. Most children enter early education with knowledge and skills that are below expectations for their age. Inspection reports for the childcare provisions can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. The centre has Investors in People status.

Governance is through a federated advisory board with representatives from partner agencies, the voluntary sector and parents. The board also acts as an advisory board to Pendleside children's centre which is under the same management.

The centre serves a community that experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage being located in an area in the top 10% of the most deprived wards in the country. The majority of families are of Pakistani heritage and speak English as an additional language. A small community of White British families is located in the eastern corner of the area. In recent years there have been a number of Eastern European families moving into the area, who tend to stay for short periods of time. Levels of unemployment are high and many of the existing jobs are low paid. Housing is mostly social or private rental.

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 users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Beacon children's centre provides good quality services with several outstanding aspects. This well-led, vibrant centre is friendly and welcoming to all users. It is buzzing with activity and children's happy laughter. Its inclusive approach ensures that the many drop-in sessions are at full capacity with enthusiastic parents and their children. New and prospective mothers benefit from a full range of services which very effectively promote their health and well-being. Those who speak English as an additional language receive good support from bilingual support workers and play a full part in the centre. The centre runs several targeted groups including a thriving young parents' group and an active fathers' group. These groups provide excellent opportunities for social interaction and further education. Many centre users went out of their way to tell inspectors how much they enjoy activities and about the excellent practical and emotional support they have received. Inspectors agree with their views.

A key strength of the centre is the way in which all partner agencies cooperate to deliver cohesive support and a full range of services. All partners who spoke with inspectors were quick to praise the centre's open and proactive approach. The care, guidance and support offered to all families, including those who are hard to reach or facing difficulties, are of exceptionally high quality. Consequently, those who are introduced to the centre through outreach and home based support are keen to continue to benefit from the full range of provision. Parents who have children with special educational needs and/or disabilities have good access to the full range of provision.

The centre makes an excellent contribution to improving the health of families and educational achievement of children. Centre staff and health care professionals are persistent in the promotion of healthy lifestyles through stay and play sessions, outreach, home visits and specific support groups. As a result, health outcomes are improving strongly from a low baseline. Children who attend the day-care provision and the play and development sessions are making good progress in all areas of learning. Schools and early years providers report that children who have attended Beacon sessions show improved personal skills, knowledge and understanding in the

Early Years Foundation Stage and are well prepared for further learning.

Children and users report that they feel safe in the centre. This reflects the high priority given to the promotion of safety and welfare, and good safeguarding arrangements. All staff are subject to appropriate checks; the site is safe and secure with good quality risk assessment in place. Children are well behaved and confidently explore their learning environment and interact with each other. They grow in confidence because their contributions are valued and encouraged by staff. Family relationships are similarly nurtured in the very well attended parent and child groups.

The centre makes a good contribution to the economic stability of parents who access courses through the volunteering programme, the young parents' group, fathers' groups and basic skills and English for speakers of other Languages (ESOL) classes. However some parents who spoke with inspectors feel that there is scope to develop these provisions further, for example in providing classes in translation. Inspectors agree and centre leaders recognise that they could do more to take account of the views of all users and the wider community when designing and improving services.

The centre manager provides strong and effective leadership that puts high expectations for the community at the heart of the centre's work. Staff are enthusiastic, committed and hard working in the pursuit of these shared goals. They have a high level of expertise supported by good quality professional development. Centre leaders and the advisory board have a very good understanding of the needs of the wider community, the centre's strengths and areas for development. Self-evaluation is accurate, self-critical and takes full account of contributions from all staff and partners. It is supported by the good quality data provided by the local authority although these are not fully integrated into the self-evaluation process. Plans for improvement are well defined and driven by ambitious targets. The success of the centre is well demonstrated in the improving outcomes in health and children's educational achievement. However, there is limited evidence to show the impact of provision on adults' achievement and economic stability.

Given the improving outcomes, the shared ambition and drive, and effective action planning, the centre has excellent capacity to build on its good provision and further improve outcomes. It is very effectively monitored, supported and challenged by the local authority through annual conversations and challenge visits each term. The centre provides good value for money.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Refine the good quality self evaluation further by:
 - making full use of the data provided through the local authority to evaluate the impact of activities and plan further provision
 - developing measures to evaluate the impact of support to adult users, for

- example regarding entry into further education, employment or training
- Develop processes to take into account the views of users in developing provision and give feedback about what has happened to their suggestions

How good are outcomes for users?

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Outcomes for centre users are good with strongly improving outcomes in families' health and children's educational achievement. This is the case for different groups within the community including those who speak English as an additional language, young parents, fathers and those who have children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Improving health outcomes are the result of excellent support from midwifery services, specialist health professionals and outreach and family support workers, together with the persistent promotion of healthy lifestyles in all family sessions. The various stay and play sessions make a strong contribution to both the physical and emotional health of parents and children. The centre is proactive and innovative in its engagement with different initiatives. The 'Give me room to breathe' initiative has been nationally recognised as good practice and has resulted in a reduction in the incidence of infant sleeping death.

There are highly effective systems in place to provide early notification of pregnancy which means that services can be sign-posted early and multi-agency support put in place where appropriate. As well as promoting family health, these systems identify families in need and help to ensure children are safe. Early intervention is highly effective in preventing difficulties escalating. Parents who spoke with inspectors had a good awareness of how to keep their children safe.

Children who attend day-care provision and/or stay and play sessions are making excellent progress in their learning. Parents' and children's enjoyment is evident through the consistently very high attendance at drop-in activities and the high take-up of nursery and crèche places. Children are happy and confident in their interactions with adults. An increasing number are achieving 78 or more points on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and six or more points in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development. Specialist speech and language therapists make a strong contribution through personalised support, staff training and the 'Talking Together' sessions.

The good early years provision means that children are well prepared when they move to school or other early years settings. Parents also thoroughly enjoy and gain much from the adult courses provided at the centre and through outreach. In fact, they would like to see more on offer. Adult users make a very positive contribution to the centre through their welcoming behaviour, their respect for one another and staff. They are also pleased to contribute their ideas to improve the offer and quality of provision. However, opportunities for them and members of the wider community to do so are limited.

>These are the grades for the outcomes for users<

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| The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| 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 users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development | 1 |
| The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre | 2 |
| The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training | 2 |

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides good quality services and excellent care, guidance and support through its centre based activities, outreach support and home visits. Constructive relationships help parents feel confident to seek advice and support. Staff have a good level of expertise and professional knowledge to successfully help families improve their health, well-being and achievement. Support for parenting is high quality and well coordinated.

The assessment of need for all families is supported through the early notification of pregnancy. Services and activities are very well sign-posted. For families facing complex difficulties, the assessment of need and follow-up multi-agency support is excellent. Case files are very well ordered, indicating the impact of support and where further work is needed. Staff often play a leading role in implementing the common assessment framework (CAF) with good engagement by partner agencies and parents. Where a child protection plan is in place the centre works very effectively with social services and the child protection team. The centre provides an excellent resource for these services and for families in crisis who may access activities and services through a child protection plan.

Staff know the community well; they are aware of needs and demand for services. The centre is very proactive in taking services out to groups who are hard to reach and who they know to be vulnerable. These services are supported by excellent partnership working and the centre's persistence in establishing links with hard to reach groups through schools and other settings. There are many examples of good quality outreach work, including the regular stay and play sessions for mums and children at the nearby women's refuge, links with the playbus to engage with the White British community and the thriving fathers' group. Staff are seeking ways to further develop links with the more recently arrived Eastern European families and

are continuing to develop outreach provision and links with schools.

Assessment is used effectively to record children's progress and inform teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The crèche and nursery providers receive good support from the qualified teacher, which they value. Childminders also receive good support in assessing children's learning and development through the well organised network. These strengths mean that the centre very effectively promotes the learning and personal development of children. Parents also attest to the positive impact of stay and play sessions on their own learning and enjoyment. Their close, affirming relationships with their babies and children are obvious for all to see.

The courses provided for adults are highly valued and provide good quality learning and development in basic skills, use of English and childcare. Anecdotal evidence shows that the Parents with Prospects course for young parents, delivered in partnership with Blackburn College and Lancashire The Young People's Service, has helped several participants gain access to further education and training. Fathers also make considerable gains in their learning through the FAKT (fathers and kids together) group. The group provides opportunities for adult education as well as involving dads in children's learning, development and leisure. The location of a Jobcentre Plus kiosk and referral system helps parents gain access to information about jobs and benefits. However, the impact of such services and activities on supporting parents into education or employment is not known and is an aspect which could be developed further.

>These are the grades for the quality of provision<

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| The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users | 2 |
| The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users | 2 |
| The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community | 2 |
| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community | 1 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management are consistently good at all levels and excellent in some aspects. The centre manager and senior leadership team provide excellent leadership with high expectations for the community firmly at the heart of the centre's work. The advisory board and staff share their aspirations and are motivated and proactive in taking services out to the hard to reach and vulnerable. The recently restructured advisory board has good representation from partner agencies and parents. They have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses and of ways in which they might extend their challenge role. Together with centre leaders, they set

ambitious targets based on good self-evaluation and comprehensive data. This leads to good quality action planning which is supported by excellent partnership working.

Inspectors spoke with representatives from a range of partner agencies, all of whom spoke very highly of the centre's open approach to partnership working to the benefit of the community. There are high quality partnerships with health professionals, social care, schools, early years settings, Lancashire young people's service, the local college and police. These active partnerships do much to secure the health, safety and achievement of families and children. Constructive links with the local authority special educational needs teacher secures good quality services for families with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Strong partnerships with providers such as the women's refuge, playbus and Healthy Adventures enable the centre to engage with hard to reach and vulnerable families. It also takes the lead in promoting training and professional development for child minders.

Good safeguarding arrangements are supported by the clear lines of communication and collaboration between agencies to ensure children are safeguarded. All checks, vetting and recruitment processes meet current guidelines and staff have up to date training in safeguarding, child protection and first aid.

The centre is highly inclusive and promotes equality and the celebration of diversity to an excellent standard. Staff are sensitive to the different cultures and needs of those who use its services. There is a high level of registration from all groups. The centre itself is a highly cohesive community where positive relationships flourish. The key target groups and most vulnerable receive excellent support which is tailored to their needs and delivered through strong partnership working.

The local authority very effectively supports the centre's self-evaluation and action planning by providing a comprehensive data set based on national indicators and local data and the centre's returns detailing reach numbers. It provides further support and challenge through visits each term and an annual conversation that summarises the centre's achievements against ambitious targets. However the centre does not currently analyse the data to evaluate the impact of specific activities and link this directly with the self-evaluation form. Centre managers also recognise that they could do more to gather the views of users of the wider community and use these to inform planning.

>These are the grades for leadership and management<

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| The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood | 2 |
| The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community | 1 |
| The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community | 2 |

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| The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties | 1 |
| 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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities | 2 |
| The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide | 1 |
| The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community 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

Information from the most recent Ofsted inspections of Beacon Crèche and Beacon Daycare Nursery have been taken into account to a limited extent when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Beacon children's centre on 8 and 9 July. We judged the centre as good overall with several outstanding aspects, including its capacity to sustain improvement and the quality of leadership and management.

During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you and the professionals who work with you. Many of you went out of your way to tell us how much you enjoy the activities provided through the centre. You told us that staff are friendly, hard working and give you excellent support. We agree with you. We found the centre to be welcoming to all families and buzzing with activity and children's happy laughter. The staff have a high level of expertise and offer excellent practical and emotional support to families who need it.

The centre does some things especially well. All the professionals from the different agencies work exceptionally well together to make sure you receive the right advice and support. Families who are facing complex or difficult times receive excellent support. In fact, staff provide excellent care, guidance and support for all centre users. Their highly inclusive approach means that families from different parts of the

community are all welcome. The day-care provision and stay and play sessions provide well for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The centre makes an excellent contribution to improving families' health and children's educational achievement. It does this through the many stay and play sessions, the nursery and crèche provision and home visits. Health outcomes are improving and children make outstanding progress in their learning and personal development. This means that they are well prepared for school.

You told us that you feel safe at the centre. This reflects the good work the centre does to promote safety and welfare and the good safeguarding arrangements. Children are well behaved and confidently explore their learning environment. You play an important part too. We were very impressed by the positive and supportive relationships you have with one another and with your children.

The centre makes a good contribution to help improve the economic stability of users. We spoke with some volunteers who are gaining a lot from opportunities for further training and work experience. The thriving young parents' group and the fathers' group provide excellent opportunities for social interaction and further education. A few of you told us that you would welcome more opportunities to develop your skills, for example by learning translation skills.

The centre manager provides strong and effective leadership. She is well supported by the local authority and the advisory board. All staff have high ambitions for everyone in the community. They all work hard with great enthusiasm. They have a really good understanding of your needs and are constantly striving to improve the quality of provision. Between them all, they have excellent capacity to bring about further improvements.

There are two things that we have asked centre leaders to work on in the immediate future:

- to further improve self-evaluation by making better use of all the available information to assess how effective activities are
- to take more account of your views in planning activities.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and sampling the centre's work. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Jean Kendall
Her Majesty's Inspector

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