

Inspection report for Lime Tree Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Birmingham |
| Inspection number | 384071 |
| Inspection dates | 10–11 January 2012 |
| Reporting inspector | David Speakman |

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| Date of previous inspection | N/A |
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| Linked school if applicable | Mayfield Special School Heathfield Primary School |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Lime Tree Children's Centre Nursery (EY338943) |

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: January 2012



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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, centre staff, representatives from the centre's partners and commissioned services, the family support team and the senior management team. They met with representatives from the advisory board and centre users, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Lime Tree Children's Centre has evolved from a Sure Start local programme into a fully operational designated children's centre providing the full core offer. Lime Tree Children's Centre operates as part of a cluster of children's centres serving the Lozells and East Handsworth area of Birmingham. The other centres that make up the cluster are Cherry Tree and Birchfield, each within a mile of the other two. Working together, centre leaders have developed practices that enable sharing of expertise, as teams are deployed between the centres. The centre has an advisory board consisting of parents, professionals from partner agencies, stakeholders and a representative of Birmingham City Council. The leaders of the three children's centres attend board meetings but have no voting rights.

The centre provides services on site and at community venues such as local schools, churches and support centres. The centre is located in the middle of a residential area, and on the same site as Mayfield Special School and Heathfield Primary School. The centre has a 51-place nursery for children from 0–5 years. The centre is open 52 weeks of the year on weekdays from 8:00am to 6:00pm.

There are 1895 families with children under five within the reach area for Lime Tree Children's Centre. Socio-economic ratings show that the area is one of the most deprived wards nationally and in Birmingham, with 91% of the families living in the 10% most deprived areas. More than 85% of the population are from a minority ethnic background. Within the Lime Tree reach area, the largest ethnic group is Pakistani, followed by Bangladeshi, Black or Black African. There are an increasing



number of Polish families moving into the area. The population is extremely transient and many families stay for a short time.

Unemployment is high; 41% of households with a dependent child have no adult in the family working and claim out-of-work benefits. This proportion is much higher than the city average. Within the Lime Tree reach area, 37% of children live in single-parent households. The level of skills and knowledge shown by children on entry to early years' provision is low in comparison to that expected for their age.

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

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Capacity for sustained improvement

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

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Main findings

Lime Tree Children's Centre is an outstanding centre. Provision is excellent; services are delivered sensitively and meet the needs of the vast majority of families engaging with them. Consequently, outcomes are outstanding and the centre has a high level of success in improving the lives of families in its community.

Systems for the assessment of community needs and those of individual families have been very well thought through and are highly effective. Assessment gives the centre staff an extensive knowledge of the needs of individuals, families and target groups. This enables them to tailor and implement targeted packages of support. The centre's partnerships with a very wide range of professional organisations mean staff are able to draw on valuable expertise covering almost all concerns brought before them. The centre is particularly successful in supporting individuals experiencing domestic abuse and those families bringing up a child with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Care, guidance and support are excellent. The commitment and dedication of all staff to the well-being of the community are fundamental to this aspect of their work.

The centre has a very good success rate in improving the health of adults and children in its reach area. Children are kept exceptionally safe and the staff, especially the family support workers, show great expertise in this area of their work. Adults engaging with the centre in order to improve their life chances, through learning to speak English or in gaining qualifications, have a high level of success.

Parents comment that the centre has helped them achieve what they never thought possible and their 'dreams have come true'. Others remarked on how the centre has enabled them to become independent and their experiences with the centre have changed their lives. Children make excellent progress in the nursery. Many have significant special educational needs and/or disabilities or have very little or no experience of the English language. By the time they leave the nursery, the centre demonstrates exceptional progress for the majority of children, particularly in learning how to communicate in English and in their personal development and gaining confidence. Both children and adults are highly successful in gaining skills that will equip them well for the future.

Parents and carers feed back to centre staff on how the centre has helped them and their views on the courses or services they have accessed. There is a wealth of verbal feedback, which is noted and is used effectively in helping to shape future services. At 'Stay and Play' sessions, parents and carers confidently engage with staff, but this does not sufficiently extend to discussions on their children's learning needs and preferences or how parents and carers can support learning at home. Currently, there are no formal systems in place by which the community is able to have an impact on the running of the centre. There is not a strong parental representation on the advisory board and there is no parents' forum.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Self-evaluation is thorough and is used very effectively to plan and prioritise challenging targets. Staff development is excellent and there is a wide range of relevant expertise among the staff. Leaders have a strong commitment to supporting the community, as do all staff and professionals working with and from the centre. The large majority of advisory board members are fully committed to the centre, and the systems to hold staff at all levels accountable are robust and highly effective. Consequently, the capacity to sustain improvement is outstanding.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the level of engagement with parents and carers at 'Stay and Play' sessions to raise further their knowledge, understanding and involvement in their children's learning and development.
- Establish formal procedures through which centre managers can increase the impact that the community has on the governance, leadership and management of the centre by:
 - re-establishing an effective parents' forum
 - improving the procedures for parents and carers to feed their views to the advisory board.

How good are outcomes for families?

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There is a strongly improving trend across performance indicators linked to the



health of the community. This is reflected in the centre's Healthy Setting Award. Services that focus on healthy eating and nutrition have had a significant impact on child obesity, which has reduced dramatically from 23% classified obese in 2008 to 12% in 2010. Immunisation rates are high, with 95.7% of children having had recommended immunisations by the age of two. There has been a significant increase in numbers being referred to smoking cessation programmes through ante-natal clinics, for example. However, the cessation rate is lower than the centre's targets, so family support workers persevere, with some success in helping smokers give up. Clinics focus on the health of both child and parent. The centre reports a high percentage of new mothers continuing to breastfeed beyond eight weeks. At 'Stay and Play' sessions and in the nursery, children have the opportunity to exercise, run around and play in the open spaces outside.

Parents, carers and their children are kept very safe by the centre through the rigorous attention to health and safety. They benefit from close supervision during activities and a fully secure environment. All families' circumstances are assessed very carefully and sensitively through the team around the child (TAC) process. This ensures the full cooperation of the service users and enables staff to direct families to the most suitable support. This process is particularly effective for vulnerable children and adults. Families are supported very effectively when they most need it. For example, valuable support is offered by the family support team and other services relevant to the case to users who experience domestic violence. Case studies demonstrate the effectiveness of the centre's intervention and the highly positive impact it has had upon the lives of parents, carers and children. Home safety visits contribute to parents' understanding of how to keep the home a safe place for children. This has resulted in a fall in the number of hospital visits for accidental injuries to children in the home.

Children enjoy learning and make exceptional progress. This is particularly so for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or children who speak English as an additional language. Together, these two groups make up the very large majority of children served by the centre and its nursery. Assessment information for the latest cohort to move through the centre shows that 50% made exceptional overall progress, 25% good progress and 25% made expected progress. By the time children move into school, attainment is at age-related expectations in all areas of learning except problem solving and number. The gap is closing between the lowest-achieving children and their peers. Children thoroughly enjoy activities and are fully engaged in outdoor and indoor activities that cross a wide range of areas of learning. Free flow and choice encourage independence and confidence. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified early and selected to join with other groups to ensure full inclusion. Adults make excellent progress in improving their skills and qualifications. The centre records notable success in improving parenting skills, learning English, information and communication technology, nutrition and gaining qualifications in National Vocational Qualifications at levels 1 and 2 in childcare. There are cases where these have led directly into employment. Both adults and children are exceptionally well prepared for the future.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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| The extent to which children, including those from target 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 | 1 |
| The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |

How good is the provision?

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At registration, all families take part in detailed discussions with family support workers, who are skilled in evaluating needs and in planning highly appropriate programmes of support. This leads to an individualised approach and effective signposting of users to professional services. Once users' needs are identified, progress is reviewed fortnightly among the team members so that programmes can be adapted to suit changing needs. As a result, progress in resolving issues is often rapid. Support programmes are regularly reviewed and adapted to meet service users' changing needs. One typical comment was, 'I felt isolated. The centre provided a continuous level of support and really raised my confidence levels.'

Nursery staff use their expertise very effectively to help children build on their limited skills on entry, which prepares children very well for joining school. The centre has case study evidence to show that, as a result of the exceptional learning in the nursery, some children with significant special educational needs and/or disabilities are now thriving in mainstream education. Centre staff have helped others with more severe needs gain places in Mayfield Special School. The outreach and family support team and health professionals work together closely to support fully the welfare needs of all groups and particularly the centre's target groups. For example, the parenting programme is highly effective in improving parenting skills. The centre has an excellent record of handling cases of women who have been victims of domestic violence. Based on the success rate, family support workers have adapted the support materials to be suitable for other community groups. The centre now supports men who experience domestic abuse.

The team around the child and Common Assessment Framework processes are used very effectively to ensure excellent multi-agency working between centre staff and a



wide range of other professional partners. The centre is highly effective in supporting cases involving child protection, domestic violence and special educational needs and/or disabilities. Care and support plan options are reviewed regularly, and there is a wealth of knowledge and skill contributing to family support work.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups | 1 |
| The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups | 1 |
| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups | 1 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

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The centre manager, other managers in the cluster and the lead professionals from the centre's partners form the senior management team. They provide inspirational leadership and have created a determination among all centre workers to provide only the best for the community. Their efforts to promote the work of the centre to maximise the number of families engaging with it have been very effective. As well as working with the large majority of its own reach area, the centre provides targeted services for 885 families from outside its reach area. Day-to-day management and professional supervision are robust and ensure staff have relevant, up-to-date and high-level expertise. Roles are clearly defined. There is an excellent sense of teamwork, ambition and drive. This leads to a very successful integrated approach to providing highly effective services for users. The centre provides excellent value for money.

Levels of accountability ensure the centre's operations are highly effective. All centre workers are subject to the centre's own performance management procedures as well as their own employers' monitoring and review. The local authority holds regular reviews as the centre leader's line manager. The advisory board has experienced some membership difficulties, but has mostly resolved these, and a very strong core of advisory board members is effective in challenging and holding leaders to account for their performance. They have identified the need to strengthen the contribution parents and carers make to the leadership and management of the children's centre. Governance is good.

The centre celebrates diversity and values all cultures represented in the reach area equally. There is no discrimination based on gender, ethnicity or ability and all have equality of opportunity to engage in services to improve their lives. The staff profile mirrors that of the community, and staff have the language skills to communicate with people in their own language. On the rare occasion that this is not possible, translation is found. Through its excellent partnership with Mayfield Special School,

the centre has focused support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities or their siblings to ensure there is no negative impact on development.

Safeguarding is outstanding. Full checks are made on any adult working or volunteering at the centre to ensure their suitability to work with children. Records are updated regularly. Staff are highly trained in child protection and in dealing with domestic abuse, ensuring highly effective actions to combat any potential risks. Staff are qualified in administering first aid. They are vigilant about fire safety and make very careful checks of any potential risks in activities.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes | 1 |
| The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |

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

The report of the most recent early years inspection of Lime Tree Nursery was used to inform the outcomes of this inspection. The nursery was judged to have outstanding overall effectiveness.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Lime Tree Children's Centre on 10 and 11 January 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us about your experiences with Lime Tree Children's Centre. You told us how much you value everything the centre has done for you. We saw how much you and your children enjoy a range of activities in the nursery and at 'Stay and Play'. Children are exceptionally well prepared for the next stages of their learning when they move into school but we have asked for you to be given more information during 'Stay and Play' about how you could help support your children's learning.

The centre is particularly successful in supporting its identified target groups. They have helped those of you who do not speak English, those experiencing abuse in the home and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families. Some of you spoke very highly of the support you have received. We read and heard about many success stories in these areas as well. The real strength of the centre's work is the way in which staff assess your specific needs and draw on the excellent range of expert knowledge to tailor programmes of support. Your cooperation in this process is an essential part of their success.

The centre has great success in helping you and your families achieve healthy lifestyles. Work in helping you keep your homes safe places for your children and avoid accidents in the home is successful. Healthy cooking and eating sessions are helping to bring down child obesity, and you cooperate very well with the child immunisation programme, achieving the highest rate in the city. Children make excellent progress in the nursery in learning skills for the future. Adults also make similar progress in gaining skills and qualifications that are improving their lives.

The centre manager and his senior management team provide excellent leadership and encourage a strong sense of ambition and drive among the staff. The advisory board checks on the centre's work effectively and helps it to improve, but it would like to know more about what you think and would value your contribution to governing the centre. We have asked the centre to look at ways to achieve this. Everyone at the centre works together as a good team to provide the best that they can for you and to direct you to suitable services. You told us that you appreciate all that the centre staff do for you and your children. A high proportion of the community are using the centre's services and benefiting from them.

Safeguarding is outstanding. This aspect is given a very high priority. All workers and volunteers are checked to confirm their suitability to work with you and your children. They are well qualified in all the important areas connected to your safety and that of your children. The centre is outstanding, but the leaders and staff are determined to make it even better and have set themselves challenging targets.

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