

Inspection report for Thurnby Lodge Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Leicester City
Inspection number	366432
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Reporting inspector	Joan Cawdron AI

Centre governance	Leicester City Council
Centre leader	Shelley Marsden
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Dudley Avenue
	Leicester
	LE5 2EG
Telephone number	0116 2924590
Fax number	0116 2212768
Email address	shelley.marsden@leicester.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Thurnby Lodge Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Little Tykes

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.

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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with a range of users, staff, partners, and representatives from the advisory board and the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Thurnby Lodge Children's Centre is a phase one children's centre established in 2006 in a converted wing of Thurnby Lodge Primary School in the North East Neighbourhood area of the city. It provides the full core offer. The centre delivers integrated services from one main location and supports provision from several venues in the area. It has been subject to a recent organisational review by Leicester City Council. The centre has been adapted to meet the needs of families and those with disabilities. The centre serves the community in an area designated as being amongst the 30% most disadvantaged nationally. Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are much lower than those expected for their age. The majority of families in the reach area are White British. The proportion of families from different minority ethnic backgrounds is increasing and currently stands at around 30%.

The local authority provides governance for the centre. There is also a neighbourhood advisory board made up of parents and representatives of local organisations. The board is responsible for providing advice and assistance for the purpose of supporting the effective operation of the centre to meet the needs of the community. The centre is managed by a neighbourhood manager who supports one other children's centre and oversees two further children's centres managed by voluntary organisations in the North East Neighbourhood of Leicester. The centre manager is managed by an operational manager from the local authority.

Within the reach area, there are high levels of obesity in children and a high incidence of smoking during pregnancy, although recent data show that infant mortality in this area of the city is lower than others. Unemployment in the area is also well above the national average, with many families dependent upon workless benefits.

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

2

Main findings

Thurnby Lodge Children's Centre provides good services for young children and their families. It builds good partnerships with a wide range of agencies to meet needs, especially of the more vulnerable families. It also promotes the learning, development and enjoyment of all its users well.

Adult users are enthusiastic about developing healthier lifestyles for their families. The focus on healthy eating is starting to influence the children as they move on to school to choose healthy snacks. Users feel safe in the centre, and most feel safe at home.

Centre staff know the families well and liaise closely across professional boundaries to work in the best interests of the families and children. The centre provides good support through specific courses for adults, for example, for those wishing to develop their literacy or numeracy skills or to gain a qualification in health care. Adults make good progress on these learning programmes because courses are well taught and very closely matched to their needs. However, there are no structured programmes to guide those who are out of work on how to secure employment.

Adults and children show positive enjoyment of everything the centre offers, especially through the excellent opportunities to play, learn and have fun together. Interventions organised by the children's centre teacher have helped children to make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage in the linked schools, particularly in communication, language and literacy.

The headteachers of the schools and the neighbourhood advisory board provide strong support and are empowering the neighbourhood manager to instigate change. Under the committed leadership of the local authority's operational manager, the management team in the centre and all the staff work very well and flexibly together as a team. However, the centre carries out little evaluation of the impact of the

interventions being used in order to inform the strategic planning of future programmes.

Parents and carers are fully involved and well informed. For example, when asked about how the centre could be improved, a parent forum member said, 'We have more work to do on contacting those families who do not attend the centre.' This reflects the inspection finding that the centre has not identified all of the hard to reach groups within the reach area, and does not yet have clearly defined procedures for engaging these groups.

The centre provides good value for money. Its good leadership and understanding of the needs of the area through dialogue with users in the community give it good capacity to improve further. Safeguarding meets requirements well. Staff are trained and vigilant in recognising signs of abuse and all relevant checks on staff, other agencies and volunteers are recorded.

Particularly effective are the strong links between the centre and its linked schools and early years' providers. Some of the data that has been used to plan its strategy was out of date and more up to date information has now been sourced to better inform planning.

The centre has carried out a wide range of research activities. Analysis of some of the local authority data does not fully reflect what they are finding out from their own active research in the area. This activity now identifies that more robust data needs to be sourced and analysed.

The centre promotes equality and diversity well and staff take steps quickly if any discrimination is identified. Diversity is celebrated through its activities with users. Good progress has been made in narrowing the achievement gap of the different groups.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Take sharply targeted steps to extend the centre's work and promote services more effectively to meet the needs of those families not yet engaged.
- Make more formal use of evaluation techniques and development planning to improve the provision.
- Provide more guidance for those who are out of work on how to seek employment.
- Improve the analysis of more robust data to identify areas of need and target resources.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Courses for users on healthy eating and cookery provide skills in budget management and better understanding of food hygiene. Healthy eating projects, which include exciting activities such as planting seeds, watching food grow and eating it, support users to sustain healthier lifestyles. Physical activities, including access to outdoor play at the centre in all weathers, are having a positive impact. Children are developing good attitudes to more physical activities and to relating learning to the wider physical environment. Improvements are made for children in their attitudes and behaviours to others and in their improving attention spans and listening skills. Health protection is good when children play in the outside area in the summer; a large sail-type sun canopy which has ultra-violet filters ensures children are protected from the sun's rays. Children's physical and mental well-being is developing well. Their behaviour is positive and children work together cooperatively. High expectations are demonstrated and children respond well to these expectations. Activities enable parents to improve their understanding of the emotional development of their children through supported activities such as baby massage and 'Stay and Play'. Breastfeeding is supported by midwives, but drop-off rates are high and developments for better peer support are being considered. Weaning programmes support better diet, and help targeted at fussy eaters assist in this development. Health promotion information is good; a range of leaflets on dental hygiene, healthy eating, birth control and sexual health is prominently displayed.

The centre is very sensitive to the needs of vulnerable families and provides a good safe and welcoming environment. On entry everyone is checked and adult users understand the policies to ensure safety within the centre. Children are confident and secure with the adults caring for them. Family support workers provide a good range of resources to support safety in the home. Financial assistance to buy necessary equipment is accessed for those in need. Centre staff know their families well and give good levels of support to those most vulnerable. Staff have good knowledge of the centre's policies and procedures and demonstrate effective use of the Common Assessment Framework.

Early identification of special educational needs and the provision of support staff have facilitated entry into mainstream education for some children. Children enjoy and achieve at a high level through a range of sessions such as the crèche, 'peek-a-boo' and other pre-school activities. Tracking documents are in place to support the learning journey and are used well. Adults and children demonstrate high levels of enjoyment. They are developing in confidence and are improving their communication skills well. There is a good take-up of opportunities to play, learn and have fun together.

Children are fully engaged and occupied through the activities provided at the centre. They demonstrate positive behaviours in their interactions with each other and centre staff. Parents provide good feedback through regular one-to-one discussions with staff and a parents' forum engages well with parents and encourages them to make a more formal contribution on how to improve the provision. Parents from this group provide representation for the centre on the neighbourhood advisory board. These parents are good advocates for the centre and try to make contact with non-

engaged families. Foster carers attend the centre, where help is provided for them to develop ideas to support learning and how to observe children accurately. Feedback, however, lacks a clear structure. Views are sought from users and non-users through face-to-face contact and through questionnaires which are too long with too many broad questions that are difficult to complete.

Children are developing their communication skills well. They are confident around adults and enjoy exploring and using books, all of which provide skills for the future. One previously successful parent on the childcare programme is now employed by an agency that provides staff for the centre. Literacy courses are provided, with teaching and learning at a high standard, and are well supported. There is insufficient access or signposting towards the provision of information and communication technology for users. This provision is provided at a local community centre but there are perceived barriers for accessing this through some small costs and lack of crèche provision.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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 users 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 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	3

How good is the provision?

2

Staff understand users' needs well because of sensitive personal contact and local information. Users are confident that the staff will help them to find the right advice and support. Family support workers play a key role in helping families with children with special educational needs, those whose safety is at risk as a result of domestic violence and those who, for a variety of reasons, feel isolated because they have been relocated. Some staff speak a range of Asian dialects.

The centre's '0 to 5' activity room provides a good example for parents and carers of ways to promote the learning and development of very young children. Parents and carers are equal partners in accurately and carefully observing and recording children's learning and progress. Tracking systems help those working with children to understand the steps that are important, and this helps to ensure a very strong and

consistent approach to preparing children for nursery and school. It is also having a very positive impact on outcomes, particularly in communication, language and literacy. Achievements are recorded and celebrated well, whether this is a small step in a very young child's development or an adult's progress in literacy or in achieving a childcare qualification.

Provision to meet needs of children and adults with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. Through a creative partnerships project, the centre has provided support in one school to enable parents to engage with their children and to explore more stimulating activities using larger scale resources and music. Crèche support was provided in the children's centre to enable parents with younger children to be involved. The centre is not fully aware of the location of all of the hard to reach families or their needs.

Staff take good care of children and adults who attend the centre's activities. Users say that staff are not judgemental and that they help to reinforce effective approaches to developing positive relationships with their children. One parent said, 'The support has helped me to enjoy being with my children, and my children have commented that I am happier.' The centre provides good advice and guidance through personal contact and leaflets. Some leaflets are in the home languages of the centre's users. Leaflets include information about dental health, safety in the home, and information on work that can be accessed through the multi-access centre. Information relating to drug and alcohol misuse is less prominent. Partner agencies meet users in locations accessible to them, whether home, the centre or another venue. Families feel very well supported at times of crisis.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

There are well-established lines of governance and a clear structure of responsibility. Strong support is available from the operational manager of the local authority and from the headteacher of the primary school on site. An integrated management team approach effectively crosses the professional boundaries of the staff to meet the

needs of the users. Supervision of staff ensure safety and confidentiality are paramount. A central safeguarding file is in place and up to date with details of the checks made on those working and helping in the centre. Vetting is rigorous and robust, and appropriate checks on external agencies are carried out. The local authority's recruitment processes are adopted to ensure appropriate checks are in place with a strong focus on safety.

Strategic planning is good and the joint approach with the primary schools over the life of the centre has resulted in clear guidance and support from the neighbourhood advisory board. A recent 'visioning day' was held with the staff from the centre and the local primary school, where joint working and ideas generation were the main topics. The advisory board has good representation from parents, carers and partners and contributes to decision making. It provides good guidance and development, but has now been expanded to have greater oversight of a wider range of provision for the 0-19 agenda. Its new role as an independent body that can challenge decisions and review targets is still developing.

Managers and leaders are committed to driving the centre's improvements forward to provide a good range of services to ensure outcomes are achieved. This commitment is shared with staff and targets are set. Teams work well together across the boundaries of their professional focus, allowing for good information sharing between agencies and across the functional teams to ensure resources are used well to meet the needs of families. Changes to the delivery model where programmes are being delivered through different centres in the neighbourhood requires better planning and promotion of the benefits for the community.

The centre's targeted use of resources is resulting in the strong improvements in outcomes, particularly for families in greatest need. The centre has a buzz of lively activity and happy children. All areas of the centre are safe and clean, making them attractive to both children and adults. A wise selection of good-quality materials and resources, including books and toys, are available for use in the centre or on loan.

Resources reflect a variety of cultures and help to develop users' understanding of diversity. Inequalities are effectively identified and the centre is proactive in ensuring there are no barriers to access. Aspects of equality and diversity are built in to planning for learning, and the centre celebrates a range of different faith festivals, which include the tasting of different foods. Staff have identified the differences in the ways that boys and girls learn and have carried out much more work using outdoor play and practical learning activities to provide greater stimulation for these differences. Continuing re-locations into the area require ongoing strategies to locate and engage with these families. Gaps between different groups are narrowing with all children developing their skills and confidence. Through recent research the centre has identified where further improvements can be made.

Evaluation is satisfactory. A range of activities has been evaluated to identify how they meet the differing needs of some of their users and this has led staff to change some of their programmes. Changes to the delivery model and continuing re-

locations of different families into the area present challenges to the centre to keep their planning and evaluation activities up to date. The local authority has recently reviewed the self-evaluation form that the centre completes and agrees with many of the centre's statements.

Good partnerships with different agencies and providers help to secure swift identification and meeting of needs. Midwifery support will now form part of the offer through the multi-functioning team at the centre, while previously based in health care. Developments through the local authority in reviewing the effectiveness of its dispersed provision have brought together a group of providers to ensure cost effective services are provided across this area. Sharing of staffing and programme costs through rolling provision at a range of centres provides opportunities for participation by users in a range of locations.

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 extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Thurnby Lodge Sure Start Children's Centre on 27–28 January 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit, we talked with a number of you and met the professionals who work within the centre. Thank you to those of you who contributed to the inspection. We visited some of the sessions and looked at the centre's documents. We found that the centre's partnerships with other settings and services are very positive.

Those of you who spoke to us said that you feel the centre is 'very supportive and helpful and staff give you good advice'. Most importantly, you said it helps improve your lives, particularly those of you who are facing difficult challenges. You told us how much you have gained from some of the centre's courses and how effective these are in developing your confidence and improving your skills. We also found that the centre and its professional partners are working very well to bring together advice about health, education, jobs and money. This is helping many of you to improve your lives.

Particularly effective are the strong links between the centre and its linked schools and early years providers. The centre staff know you very well and work closely with other services to meet your needs. You say this is very helpful. You also told us how keen you are to develop healthier lifestyles for your families. Headteachers of the two local schools said that children who have attended the centre are confident and are developing well in the early days at school. You also said that you feel very safe in the centre and appreciate the help of staff to stay safe at home.

We saw how much you and your children enjoy everything the centre offers, especially the excellent opportunities to play, learn and have fun together. As one of you said, 'My children are happier because I am happy.' We found that the work of the children's centre teacher is making a great difference to your children's communication and language skills, especially their knowledge of letters and sounds. We were also impressed by the qualifications some of you have gained. This helps you to make good progress. Both you and your children are effectively improving your skills for the future.

To develop further the work of the centre, we have asked them to take steps to extending the work so that services are promoted more effectively to meet the needs of those families not yet engaged. This is so that all families are provided with opportunities for accessing the good-quality help and support that you and your families have received. We want them also to use more formal methods of development planning and evaluation to improve the provision. To improve the support for achieving economic well-being for you, the centre needs to identify the range of training and support that is needed to improve your job-seeking skills. The centre can then use this range of information to let you know how it is progressing.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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