

Inspection report for Leiston Children's Centre

Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	364909
Inspection dates	4–5 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Susan Smith HMI

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Katy Osborn
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	251555 Shining Stars Daycare

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.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with parents, staff, and representatives from other agencies including the health service. They also met with staff from the local authority who are linked to the centre.

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

Information about the centre

Leiston Children's Centre was designated in March 2006. The children's centre provides the full core offer of services. It is a Phase 1 children's centre. The centre and the day-care provision, Shinning Stars, were originally jointly managed by a voluntary management committee when it opened in 2005. However, management of the children's centre transferred to the local authority in 2008. Shinning Stars remains under the management of the voluntary committee.

The manager was appointed in December 2009. She also manages one other children's centre serving the Framlingham and Leiston Cluster area. The centre serves a rural community which is in one of the 70% most deprived wards in the country. The great majority of the population within its area is of White British heritage. However, there are relatively low levels of disadvantage in the centre's reach area. Levels of worklessness and proportions on benefits are comparatively low.

The majority of children start at the nursery and day care with skills and levels of development generally below those expected for their age particularly with regard to their communication, language and literacy development.

An advisory board acts as a link between the centre’s users and the local authority, which is responsible for governance.

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

The children’s centre provides an effective range of services that secure good outcomes for its users. Parents and users of the centre value the warm, welcoming, environment that it offers. They appreciate the friendly, approachable staff who have built high levels of trust among families. Consequently, they feel nurtured and well supported, particularly when they are experiencing difficulties or hardship. One parent, reflecting the views of many, said ‘this service was literally life changing’. Relationships between staff and children, and their parents and carers are exceptionally good and promote positive cohesion in the community.

The centre has developed good partnerships with a range of other agencies which ensure effective working practices, such as information sharing, safeguarding procedures and signposting to each other’s services. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and monitored rigorously. The centre works hard to develop links with all relevant partners and plans are in place for developing closer working partnerships with the local school.

The centre provides support for users of the centre who need transport or childcare so they can use important services and activities. This prevents the isolation of those who live in very rural areas and ensures services are accessible to all.

Despite having to operate without a full time family support worker due to the current local authority procedure on recruitment, centre staff work successfully together to meet the needs of children and their parents and carers. However, the number of families receiving this quality service will be hard to sustain on a long term basis if the centre does not have the full complement of permanent staff.

The centre functions efficiently on a daily basis because the manager is well-organised, motivated and intent on improvement. She provides inspiration with clear ambition to drive improvement and deliver quality services. In a short time she has had a huge impact by focusing on the audit and development of services in a structured way. In this endeavour she has fully included staff and morale and expectations are high.

Self-evaluation is reasonably accurate; however, the centre has yet to develop effective mechanisms for measuring precisely the impact its services have on outcomes for users, particularly for its key target groups or the difference made for children once they reach school. A relative weakness is the centre's partnership with the Suffolk Primary Trust with regard to receiving data that is up to date. This limits the centre's ability to demonstrate its impact on health outcomes for the whole centre reach.

The centre's recent progress and the energy with which weaknesses are currently being tackled are indicative of its good capacity to sustain improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve information sharing systems between the Suffolk Primary Care Trust and the children's centre, to ensure data is reliable and up to date, to enable the centre to evaluate the impact services are making against the national indicators for health.
- Improve further monitoring and evaluation systems at the centre to clearly show the impact of the children's centre's work on outcomes for children and families
- Ensure that the centre has a full complement of permanent staff to guarantee that the children's centres has the opportunity to provide service at its optimum capacity

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for users are good, but the centre has limited statistical evidence to demonstrate precisely the impact of the services offered. There is a broad range of programmes offered to families to help improve their physical and emotional health. The health visitor effectively signposts every new mother to the services available to

her and her family through the centre and where possible also gets a consent to contact form completed. This enables the centre to make contact with the families who may be harder to engage.

A range of information leaflets and reference books are easily available to parents and cover a variety of topics such as breastfeeding, healthy eating and child development. These help parents and carers meet the physical, emotional and nutritional needs of their children. Snacks of fruit and vegetables are provided throughout the centre to promote healthy eating. Parents particularly value the information on weaning available as part as the 'Early Day's' programme. The centre's allotment project has been successful in giving families the opportunity to grow, tend and eat their own produce. However, interest has declined and the centre is exploring ways to attract greater levels of participation. The re-launch of 'Bosom Buddies' a support and advice session for breastfeeding mothers has resulted in a steady increase in the numbers of mothers sustaining breastfeeding. Free family swimming sessions are available on Saturdays to promote physical activity, these have proved popular, with many fathers attending with their children.

Outcomes for staying safe are good. Children and families are safe at the centre and the staff give parents good advice on health and safety in the home and outdoors. They provide excellent role models that effectively support children's positive behaviour. The centre, in collaboration with partner agencies, is very effective in identifying and responding to the needs of vulnerable children and their families. Good use is made of the common assessment framework for recording and coordinating support programmes. Staff effectively build trust with families.

The family support worker case files illustrate how effective the support is in helping parents to become more confident and successful in managing their family lives. However, the current local authority freeze on recruitment has had a significant impact on the long term capacity of the centre to continue to offer good quality care guidance and support to individual families due to the lack of a dedicated family support worker at the centre.

A stronger emphasis on developing communication, language and literacy skills is helping children to do better in this aspect of their early learning. 'Rhythm and Rhyme' sessions, the song prompt library of resources and the book library encourage parents and carers to enjoy singing and reading with their children in the centre and at home. Parents and carers are beginning to value these resources greatly. Children behave well and all at the centre show a high level of respect for one another.

Parents and carers also enjoy and achieve well. They benefit from opportunities to gain qualifications in a range of courses for example, First Aid, literacy and numeracy skills and, to a lesser extent, English as an additional language. The centre recognises that there remains scope to increase adult involvement in training and education. Individual parents are signposted to the Jobcentre Plus services for employment and to the Citizens Advice Bureau for help with accommodation and

benefit entitlement.

The centre is beginning to collect the views of parents through widely distributed questionnaires and satisfaction surveys at the end of courses and events. A parents' forum is in place but parents prefer to give feedback at the 'talk back' sessions with the staff. Adults who were initially lacking in confidence and self-esteem are now among the most vocal in the centre. They happily express their views, thoughts and opinions through 'talk back' sessions with the staff. One parent has recently volunteered to take up the role of chair at the advisory board and several other parents now attend which allows a formal mechanism for parents to be involved in strategic decision making and development planning.

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	2

How good is the provision?

2

Staff take good account of available data about their reach area, information that comes from other professionals and parental feedback. The effectiveness of assessment of the needs of parents and others is good. Personal testimonies from parents indicate that well coordinated multi-agency support is precisely targeted and plays an important role in preventing families from falling into greater difficulty. The commissioning of counselling services has had a significant impact on the mental health of a number of users of the centre. The centre works well in partnership with other agencies to ensure it assesses the needs of users effectively. Centre staff are sensitive to the needs of families and they often go the extra mile to support parents in times of crisis.

Assessment systems for recording children's early development are very good and used well by staff in the day-care setting to capture achievements and plan for the next steps in learning. These strengths mean that the centre very effectively

promotes the learning and personal development of children.

The centre provides a meeting place for the childminding network at which support and training is available for childminders. There is a good range of activities to support learning and development. Sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Explorers' are well planned and beginning to be linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage showing clear learning objectives and covering all areas of learning. Several initiatives are run at the centre to help parents and carers develop their skills in supporting the communication language and literacy development of their children. Good quality resources and equipment are available to parents such as story sacks and CD recordings of the book of the month. This enables parents to support their child's learning in the home environment.

The centre's good range of services has continued to increase and clearly empowers those users who attend. Sessions such as the 'Baby Massage' and 'Living with babies' groups instil a good sense of well-being among mothers and babies. The centre's qualified teacher provides good support to the childcare provider on-site and works closely with centre staff and the local school. As a consequence, a transition arrangement for children with special educational needs/disabilities to the local school is very effective and there are plans in place to strengthen the programme to support transition for all children moving into the school.

The centre provides activities at weekends and through school holidays and consideration is given to the timing of activities throughout the week so that they are accessible for parents and carers. Outreach work carried out by the First Steps to Play worker helps families understand child development by engaging parents in their child's play.

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

The manager's success in securing a wide range of improvements since she was appointed is grounded firmly in knowledge of what constitutes good provision and a strong commitment to improving services to families. Relationships are good and staff are enthusiastic and positive about the work they do. Morale in the centre is high. They are proud of the impact they have on the lives of the children and families who attend.

Governance is good and systems to ensure accountability are secure. Supervision and clinical support is given to staff by relevantly qualified managers ensuring that their professional development and knowledge is current.

The centre is collecting a wide range of data and this is developing. They are able to measure the popularity of some services and can show that the most deprived families in the reach area have been served by the centre in some capacity. There is evidence to show the good impact of the centre's work on outcomes, and the centre recognises that the collection of evidence is an area to expand further.

Child protection arrangements are good. There is appropriate training on safeguarding matters for all staff. Consequently, all members of staff understand and follow the centre's child protection policy. Effective recruitment and vetting checks are undertaken and suitable arrangements are in place for those staff not directly employed by the centre. The single central record complies with requirements. Protocols and practice for making referrals and working with other agencies in support of families are good.

The centre has a strong commitment to providing an inclusive environment and removing barriers. Equality and diversity are promoted well. The users of the centre represent many groups from the local community and staff address possible barriers to attendance effectively. They have developed services according to the needs of those attending the centre and are now beginning to reach out to people in the surrounding areas for their views to shape services. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate. Targets are developed from the self-evaluation and identified gaps in service, but not all targets are sufficiently measureable to show if outcomes are improving and whether targets have been met.

The centre fosters good working relationships with a wide range of services such as Gateway to home choice and other housing associations and support groups, Home Start and Leeway in order to promote better outcomes for users. Partnership with

parents is good. Inspectors observed strong mutual relationships between parents and centre staff.

The advisory body is comprised of an appropriate range of professions so members have a good understanding of the centre's role and responsibilities. Resources are well managed and carefully targeted towards users with the greatest needs. Children with special needs and/or disabilities are well provided for by access to appropriate professional support.

The value for money provided by the centre is good because they have developed services according to the needs of those accessing the centre and are now beginning to reach out to the surrounding areas for their views to shape services and have a number of new projects starting. It is too early to evaluate the impact of some of these new projects but a strong sense of forward planning is clear.

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	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	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

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

The inspection report for EY251555 Shining Stars Daycare. The setting was inspected during the same week that the inspection of the children's centre took place. The setting was found to be good.

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 Leiston Children's Centre on 4–5 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

The manager has done an excellent job in securing improvements since she was appointed. All staff place the upmost importance on you and your families and always provide a listening ear for you. They are passionate about creating a welcoming environment where you feel at home and are able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you value the centre, which means you have no hesitation in using the services regularly. You are actively encouraged to contribute your views and your feedback is used constantly to develop the services provided to ensure they reflect any changes in your needs.

Considering the small size of the centre, there is a good range of services and activities for all families in the area, which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals. All centre staff are good at guiding you and referring you and your children to other activities and services they think you would also benefit from and enjoy. You told us over and over again that coming to the centre had increased your confidence and self-esteem. This is because centre staff and professionals from different agencies work closely with you and with each other to find out exactly what help and support you and your family need and making sure this is provided.

You told us that you think that the centre is a safe place for parents and their children. Inspectors agree with this view and think that staff work very well to ensure the health and safety of all who use the centre. The centre is also very good at helping children in need to be safe by working well with other agencies such as the health service and social care. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy by promoting healthy eating.

They also help you to support your children's learning and development at home by providing services which help you bond with your children, such as baby massage. They encourage you to engage in play with your children from a very early age at sessions such as 'Living with Babies' and 'Explorers'. The local authority does a good job in governing the centre and is well supported by the advisory board which has representation from parents so that your views are heard.

There are three main areas to improve. Firstly, the centre no longer has a family support worker of its own and, although staff are doing a good job in making sure that this work still goes on, this situation cannot last indefinitely. As a result, we have asked the local authority to make sure that the centre has a family support worker of its own.

We have also asked the centre to improve information sharing systems with the Suffolk Primary Care Trust. This will ensure that the children's centre receives data that is reliable and up to date so that it can evaluate the impact services are making against the national indicators for health.

Finally, we have also asked the centre to improve further monitoring and evaluation systems at the centre, including commissioned services, to clearly show the impact of the children's centre's work on outcomes for children and families. The leadership team has appropriate plans in place to address this issue and we have every confidence that it will be successful.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honesty and openness helped us immensely during the inspection. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future.

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