

# Inspection report for Lillington Children's Centre

Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	366393
Inspection dates	19–20 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Anthony O'Malley HMI

Centre governance	Warwickshire Local Authority
Centre leader	Alison Selwood
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspector and an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the Chair of the Strategic Advisory Board, staff, the senior leadership team, local authority representatives and partner agencies, including representatives from the health service. They also had discussions with users. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Lillington Children Centre is part of a cluster of five children's centres in South Warwickshire, managed by the charitable organisation 'Action for Children' on behalf of the local authority. Working with a range of partners the centre provides child care, a range of health services, family support, links to Jobcentre Plus and a childminder network.

Lillington Children's Centre itself is situated in a 30% most deprived area, although the catchment area was widened in 2006 which means that overall it is serving a 70% less disadvantaged area. Within this reach area there is considerable variation in the levels of deprivation between wards. Overall, around 7% of homes are workless and receiving benefits. The large majority of families in the area are of White British heritage, with approximately 20% from a range of minority ethnic groups.

Within the wider reach area, children's levels of attainment on entry to early years provision are similar to those expected.

## 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

Lillington Children's Centre provides effectively for the needs of children and families. Parents and carers told inspectors they appreciate the warm welcome they receive. 'It is like being part a family' and 'everyone is always willing to help' were just some of the comments shared with the inspectors. The centre has good arrangements in place for safeguarding children. Staff are particularly effective at ensuring that families whose circumstances make them vulnerable receive personalised and prompt support.

Outcomes for users, including users facing the most challenging circumstances, are good. For instance, through cookery classes parents and carers develop a good understanding of how to produce healthy meals economically. Information from case studies and feedback from users indicates that courses such as those on first aid, food hygiene, early parenting and money management all have a strong impact and contribute effectively to children's safety and well-being. The regular access to a speech and language therapist has made it easier for families to raise concerns about their children's communication difficulties and to access support quickly. An outstanding feature of the centre is the opportunities it provides for the personal development of users and the promotion of community cohesion. Parents and carers are fully involved in the governance of the centre and in shaping provision. Many users praise the centre for its positive impact on their personal lives and the local community. One mother's comment, 'I do not know what I would do if there was not a children centre,' summed up the feelings of most users who spoke to the inspectors.

The centre promotes equality well. Leaders have a good understanding of the population it serves and skilfully shapes its provision to provide high-quality universal services, while targeting groups such as teenage parents and children from workless households. Participation rates are good and show that attendance by the target groups is higher than other groups. Adults and children from minority ethnic groups

benefit well from the services provided.

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses and the centre has good capacity for further improvement. However, they have rightly been developing strategies to secure additional data about outcomes that will help them to set ambitious targets for the future. At present, some partner agencies do not provide evaluations of the impact of their work and this hinders planning for future improvement. Plans for improvement identify appropriate priorities, but targets within the plans are not easily measurable and they do not clearly identify the intended benefits for users. This prevents the local authority and centre leaders from robustly evaluating the full impact of the centre's work.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with key partners to ensure that there is sufficient evidence about the impact of the centre's services on user outcomes to promote robust evaluation and to help set ambitious targets for the future.
- Ensure that plans for improvement include easily measurable targets linked to the intended outcomes for users.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>2</b>
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Children and families benefit from a wide range of programmes that help improve their physical and emotional health. Health visitors provide good advice on many issues including breastfeeding and smoking cessation. Activity evaluations and discussions with users show that these have been of great benefit in helping parents and carers improve the health of their families. For example, one mother who had attended the popular baby clinics noted that they helped her, 'Keep my eye on my son's weight and get advice on teething and weaning...I honestly do not know how I would have managed without it.' Parents and carers demonstrate improving knowledge and skills in the preparation of a balanced diet. They benefit from the availability of fresh fruit and vegetable bags at an affordable price through the centre's partnership with the voluntary sector. Sexual health is also promoted well.

Children and families feel safe at the centre and users receive good advice on health and safety in the home and outdoors. There are strong systems in place to support any users who are subject to domestic violence, and the weekly 'Family Matters' meetings ensure that relevant information concerning children's well-being is shared and appropriate actions taken. There is good evidence to show that the centre makes effective use of the Common Assessment Framework and gives good support to children with child protection plans and looked after children. Consequently, the outcomes for the most vulnerable children and their families are steadily improving. These positive features are contributing to improved outcomes for children in the

Lillington reach area by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. For example, data show that the gap between the lowest scoring 20% of children and others is closing faster than twice the national rate.

Parents and carers say they feel 'included' and comment on the difference that the centre has made to their confidence, aspirations and achievements as well as their children's progress and development. High numbers of volunteers regularly help with centre activities and a significant number of these go on to further training and gain qualifications. However, the centre is unable to identify precisely how many users go onto pursue further training at local colleges or, for example, how many users have been helped find employment through the links with Jobcentre Plus.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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A key principle underpinning the work of the centre is an awareness of the negative impact poverty can have on children's well-being. Consequently, its key target group are parents and children facing the challenges of living on a low income. Events such as a Health Inequalities conference, led by the centre and its users, enable it to assess accurately the needs of parents and children. Knowledge gained through this and other creative strategies ensure that the centre successfully engages with families most at need while providing popular services for the whole of the reach area. The centre also provides a good range of initiatives to support parents and carers living on a low income, including free activities and services, and weekly benefit and debt advice.

A number of agencies use the centre to deliver services including the Integrated Disability Service, the midwifery service and children's services. These arrangements, while welcomed by parents, staff and children, are not yet fully integrated into a joint assessment or information-sharing system. A booklet for users gives details of local

services and is regularly updated to ensure accuracy of information.

A strong feature of provision is the centre’s outreach work. The centre recognises that a significant number of parents and carers are reluctant to visit the centre or enrol on structured activities for their children. In such cases, outreach workers and health visitors meet and support families in their own homes. They signpost families to appropriate services and encourage them to join relevant activities. Outreach workers also accompany families on visits to essential appointments, for example hospital visits, debt advice and support groups. The success of this approach often leads to excluded families joining more structured sessions with their children and then engaging in adult learning including basic skills, NVQ qualifications and vocational courses. Observations of centre activities, discussions with users and analysis of activity evaluations all provide compelling evidence that the provision is of good quality and helping a high proportion of users improve their economic prospects. The centre is having some success in increasing the number of fathers engaging with the centre. For example, there has been a gradual increase in the number of fathers accessing the baby clinics over the last year. The centre recognises the need to work with this group to help deliver additional relevant services in the future.

Effective support for families with children with disabilities is available through ‘Play Together’ sessions at the centre and families also attend weekly ‘Stepping Stones’ sessions at one of the other centres managed by ‘Action for Children’.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

Governance and accountability arrangements are strong and ensure all partners can contribute to strategic planning and service provision. Parents and carers are included at all levels, including two members on the Strategic Advisory Group. A multi-agency steering group feeds ideas and information into the Strategic Advisory Group and this ensures that the centre successfully complements local services offered in the area rather than duplicates them. The steering group has

representation from the health service, education, social care and the local council.

'Action for Children' has a strong relationship with the local authority and there is a clear commitment to developing and improving the centre's effectiveness. For example, the recently published agreement with health visitors demonstrates the readiness of partners to work in ways that are highly responsive to local needs. Similarly, the local authority and centre leaders have identified the need to secure more data to demonstrate the impact of the centre's work. They recognise that better data will help both parties evaluate the centre's effectiveness more robustly.

The centre has devised effective strategies to engage with high proportions of users from its priority groups. Staff and volunteers attend local community and school events to promote the centre, giving out leaflets and timetables and talking to families about the services. As a result, participation rates are good and reflect the centre's successful inclusion strategies. Adults and children with disabilities have gained much from contacts with the centre, further demonstrating the centre's successful promotion of equality and diversity.

A key strength of the centre is its approach to safeguarding. Procedures for ensuring staff are suitable to work with children are robust. All checks on the suitability of staff and the centre's records meet requirements. Staff work effectively with other agencies to ensure vulnerable children and families who attend the centre quickly receive the support they need. Accommodation and resources are used creatively to meet the needs of users and to ensure that the centre provides good value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	2
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	2
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	2
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	2
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	2
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	2
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been</b>	2

<b>commissioned to provide</b>	
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

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

N/A

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Lillington Children's Centre on 19–20 January 2011. We talked with parents and carers, staff, a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your centre. You told us that the centre is a very important part of your community and plays a crucial part in helping you as parents and carers, and as adult learners. We also read many things users of the centre have written about its work, and it is clear that it is improving family life in many ways, particularly those families who face difficult challenges. Your children's centre staff team is committed to providing the best possible services; and they work very closely with you to make sure that the centre's programmes meet your needs. Indeed, we found the way in which you contribute to the management and organisation of the centre to be outstanding. Staff at the centre take great care to ensure that 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.

The centre offers a good range of services and activities for all families in the area. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy and safe. The



children's good behaviour at the centre shows that they really enjoy their sessions and you and your children feel very safe there. Staff provide you with access to safety equipment and advice on how you can prevent accidents in and around your home to keep your children safe. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy by encouraging mothers to breastfeed and by promoting healthy eating through cookery courses.

The staff at the centre encourage you to engage in play with your children from a very early age at sessions such as 'Baby Clinic', the 'Chatter Matters' groups. We could see how much you and your children enjoy the activities you access at the centre and the positive effect these are having on you and your families.

To develop further the work of the centre, we have asked staff and the local authority to make sure that they have better evidence about the impact the centre is having on your lives. This will help them be clear about just how successful individual programmes are. We have also asked them to check that when they make plans for the future, the targets identify clearly the outcomes the centre is hoping to achieve.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).