

Inspection report for Littlehampton Children and Family Centre

Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	362519
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Susan Mann HMI

Centre governance	Centre Partnership Group
Centre leader	Debbie Cullern
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Play Centre Nursery

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 Inspectors and an Early Years Inspector. The inspectors held meetings with centre users, managers and frontline staff, partners and representatives from the local authority. They also visited the linked early years provision at The Play Centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Littlehampton Children and Family Centre was designated in 2004. The governance of the centre is provided by the Centre Partnership Group, which is made up of senior managers of the centre, partners and users. It offers all elements of the core offer, which include integrated childcare, health services, family support and outreach, and links to Jobcentre Plus. There is an on-site crèche and Play Centre Nursery, commissioned by the centre to provide full daycare. Families also use one of several other local childcare providers, including childminders.

The centre serves a very disadvantaged area, with much of the population living in countryside or coastal regions. In some parts of the reach area, almost one quarter of households are claiming out-of-work benefits. The level of children's attainment on entry to early years provision is below average. The majority of families are of White British ethnicity. There are a number of families from Eastern Europe and Portugal who live in the reach area of the centre, as well as a small number of families from Black minority ethnic backgrounds.

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

Littlehampton Children and Family Centre provides a welcoming and inclusive environment which families enjoy. The provision is of good quality and this supports successful outcomes for its users. Effective systems are in place to identify those families who will benefit most from targeted services. Management and governance of the centre are well coordinated and focus on the needs of users.

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement is good. The leadership team and staff have a clear overview of the centre's strengths and of its areas for development and they are dedicated to continuous improvement to benefit local families.

There is strong evidence of at least good outcomes in all areas. The outcomes for children and adults in staying safe are outstanding. Families who are facing serious challenges and difficulties in their lives are given an exceptional level of constructive and encouraging support. This is delivered in an extremely caring and individual manner which parents greatly value. Procedures for safeguarding children's welfare are also outstanding. All staff are dedicated to promoting children's welfare and they are proactive in protecting children from possible abuse. Management of safeguarding procedures is exceptionally thorough and excellent liaison with other agencies ensures that procedures are highly effective.

The centre actively promotes equality and diversity. All children and adults at the centre demonstrate respectful and harmonious relationships with one another. Robust measures are in place to identify and engage groups within the local area who may be hard to reach and these initiatives are successful. The most recent inspection of the on-site nursery found that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making good progress and the gap between the lowest-achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and those above is narrowing.

The centre's leadership and management are strong. The Centre Partnership Board has made a promising start since forming one year ago and it fulfils requirements well. The centre recognises this is an area for ongoing development, so that this board continues to embed its role in the strategic planning and management of the

centre. Partnership working between agencies involved with the centre is outstanding. A wide number of key agencies work cohesively to plan and deliver a wide range of provision. Partnership with parents to improve outcomes for children is exceptionally good. Centre staff work extremely closely with families to identify need and plan strategies for improvement.

The evaluations carried out by the centre collect detailed information and feedback about individual courses and services. These are used informally to amend course content or delivery and ensure that the services provided are matched closely to users' needs. Managers are beginning to analyse information from evaluations to incorporate it into the strategic planning on a more formal basis.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop the process for analysing the information gathered by evaluation so that it is better used in the strategic planning of services.
- Extend the role of the centre partnership group in the governance of the centre through greater involvement in strategic planning and management.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Families access a wide range of targeted and universal health services. The high emphasis placed on improving emotional well-being, levels of fitness and reducing obesity has improved outcomes for those families attending the targeted services. One of these groups is 'Fun Fit Kids' for parents and children. Participants have made good progress on this course to reduce weight when needed and to adopt healthy eating habits. Almost all participants in 'Heath Trainer' sessions have achieved their targets with regards to weight loss, giving up smoking or reducing excessive alcohol consumption. The 'MILK' group provides support to enable successful breast-feeding, and this is enhanced by the centre's breast-feeding peer support workers who are volunteers who have been trained by the centre to provide this support. One participant in the 'MILK' group said, 'My involvement with MILK has been life changing.' Centre assessment indicates a gradual increase in the number of mothers who sustain breast-feeding until their baby is six to eight weeks old. Midwifery services operate directly from the centre, and the case-load midwives provide tailored and targeted services for most of the reach area. Emotional health is a strong area, and groups such as the 'Teenage Parents Group' have a significant impact on improving users' emotional well-being.

Outcomes are exemplary for how safe children and users feel. Adults trust staff implicitly and are confident in sharing their personal issues and concerns in order to gain help and support. Children using the centre are very well safeguarded. In

particular, children on child protection plans and looked after children are exceptionally well supported and evidence demonstrates this has a very positive effect on their overall outcomes. The 'Child Parent Relationship Group' has an extremely positive impact on developing close and safe relationships. A parent explained the difference this group had made to her and her children: 'I'm a Mum now. I used to be just a carer.'

Children enjoy their time in the early years provision. When they join, children's attainment is generally below national expectations. The most recent inspection of the Play Centre Nursery found that children make good progress and most then enter school with just below national average levels of attainment. The early years advisory teacher, nursery and other on-site early years provision have identified low attainment as a key issue for action and have implemented initiatives that are beginning to have a positive impact. In particular, progress is evident in improving children's communication, language and literacy skills through targeted working at the 'Little Explorers' group, crèche and nursery. Adult users demonstrate great improvement in their personal development as a result of their attendance at groups and through becoming involved with the centre's management and volunteer programme.

Parents are actively involved in the governance of the centre through their participation in the Centre Partnership Group. The centre plays an important role in the wider community because it is well established and provides a range of universal services which are very well attended. One parent described the centre as 'a real hub of the community'. Adults are given a good level of support to access further training and employment and this results in improved economic well-being. Staff give help with claiming benefits and accessing job information on the centre's computers. Some parents develop skills through volunteering at the centre and this has enabled them to secure paid employment.

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	1
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?

The provision offered by the centre provides a wide choice of good opportunities to most families in the reach area. The centre knows the needs of its users well. The open-access coffee shop area allows many who make their first visit to the centre to sit and talk with staff who are skilled at identifying their needs. The universal health visitor services at the centre also introduce families to the centre. Staff are able to direct each user to appropriate groups and services. Staff have good local knowledge of their reach area, and this is bolstered by a detailed analysis of data to identify those families and groups who are most hard to reach. Outreach workers play an important and effective role in ensuring these families are engaged in the groups that will help them the most. Many parents say that the outreach service has facilitated their participation in groups, such as the self-esteem group, which have had a very positive impact on their lives.

The centre's evaluation of how well services meet users' needs is enhanced by the excellent collaboration between partners and ensures targeted services are relevant and effective. Rates of participation in universal and referral services are good and improving. The centre works closely with the 'Expanding Communities' team to support families who come from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those from Eastern Europe and Portugal, in gaining access to services.

The provision to help children learn and develop is strong. The on-site daycare Nursery was last inspected in 2009, when it was judged to be good. Inspectors visited this setting during the children centre inspection but did not carry out a full inspection on this occasion. The quality of opportunities for children to learn and develop was deemed good. All on-site childcare provision, including the crèche and 'Little Explorers' group, provide stimulating and exciting opportunities for children to learn through play-based activities that are well planned and skilfully delivered. There is collaborative working with childminders and other early years providers to improve quality and give parents choice of provision. The aspirations and achievements of users are encouraged and enabled because staff are enthusiastic and engaged. The centre gives a range of good opportunities for parents to attend courses to develop their knowledge and skills. These include courses in mathematics, English and information and communication technology as well as sessions to help parents have a better understanding about their children's learning at school, so they are more confident about supporting their learning.

The quality of care for young children and adults is good. All who use the centre benefit from the nurturing and friendly atmosphere. A strength of the provision is the support given to families in times of crisis. The 'Freedom Group' supports women and their children who have been subject to domestic violence. One parent said that this group was 'excellent' and 'had made a big difference' to her life. During the course of the inspection several parents described the centre as 'a lifeline'.

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

Governance arrangements are clear and effective. The Centre Partnership Group is representative of all partners involved in the centre's work, including parents and members of the town council. They work well together to provide a cohesive approach to leadership. This group was formed one year ago, and it has made good progress in developing processes of involvement in strategic planning. These processes are still being embedded and so do not make a full contribution to the planning and assessment of provision. The centre manager is aspirational and focuses on meeting individual users' needs. Members of the senior management team have a good understanding of where the strengths and weaknesses of the centre lie and are proactive in tackling these successfully. Resources are used effectively to sustain good value for money. Very good collaboration between partners promotes this well. For example, the social care 'Family Resource Team' works with centre outreach workers to deliver the 'Building Blocks' programme which promotes good and enjoyable parenting. The centre receives constructive support from the area manager and local authority. This challenges the centre management to assess and adapt services to maintain ongoing development and sustain quality.

Centre leaders collect a large amount of information and data from users' and providers' evaluations of groups and services. They use this effectively to make changes to courses so that they meet the needs of users well. For example, following evaluation of the 'Building Blocks' course, the subsequent course was amended. It now includes an afternoon session where parents and children play together to reinforce the learning of the morning session and which promotes positive play experiences for both children and their parents. However, this evaluative information is not yet used sufficiently well in a strategic context to gain a comprehensive overview of the required development of services. Users are fully engaged in the services provided and the evaluation and feedback from children and adults is overwhelmingly positive. The centre continually strives to reach families who would benefit from its activities. It does this through a number of avenues, including outreach work and involvement in the 'Extended Communities' project.

Excellent partnerships between service providers significantly enhance outcomes for users by presenting highly cohesive provision. This partnership working is very well established. It is supported very well by the availability of accommodation which

allows many partners to be located at the centre and for health visitors and midwives to provide their services directly from the centre. In particular, the impact of the presence of the senior social worker on site to work as part of the centre's management team provides exceptional clarity of collaboration when providing services for the most vulnerable families in the area.

Safeguarding procedures are exemplary at the centre. The centre manager, as designated person for child protection, is exceptionally committed to ensuring children's welfare and keeping them safe. Processes for checking the suitability of adults in the centre are thorough. Recruitment processes are robust and consistently applied. All staff are trained in child protection and give safeguarding children's welfare a high priority. The wider safeguarding agenda is a great strength. Excellent partnership working, together with highly trained and committed staff, ensures that early intervention is successful so that parents are enabled to develop strong attachments with their children. Adults and children who are, or have been, subject to domestic violence are given extremely good emotional support and practical help to cope and move forward in their lives.

Inclusive practice is evident throughout the centre. One user commented about the variety of people who come to the centre that 'all are equal once you get in'. The premises are accessible for people with disabilities and there is good provision for allergy requirements in the food served in the early years provision and in the café. The centre evaluates the needs of user groups to ensure that good provision is available and provides good value for money. For example, a recent 'Dad's Group' came to an end because male carers attending began to integrate into general services and no longer felt they needed a dedicated group. Parents of children with additional needs receive a good level of support from the 'SNAP' group. Families who originate from other countries access the centre services regularly, and translation and support for developing English as an additional language are good.

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	1

adults	
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

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

The onsite crèche provision which is commissioned by the centre was last inspected on 14 January 2010 for its registration on the voluntary childcare register. This inspection gave an outcome of 'Met' and this information was taken into account during this inspection.

The early years childcare provision run by the Play Centre Nursery was last inspected on 4 February 2009 and was judged to be good overall.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Littlehampton Children and Family Centre on 3–4 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all those of you who took time to talk with us about your involvement and experiences at the centre. It was very enjoyable to meet you and it was very helpful to hear what the centre means to you and your families. It is clear to us that you value the people and the services at the centre, and many of you say that the centre has had a very positive effect on your lives.

Your children's centre has many good features and some that are excellent. Procedures for making sure children are protected from possible harm and abuse are exceptionally good and staff are dedicated to their well-being. Many of you told us that you feel that you and your children are very safe at the centre and that you trust the staff who work there.

The centre takes good account of your opinions about the groups and courses you attend. They ask for your feedback, and they use this to plan future sessions and

courses so that these are valuable to you. We have asked the centre to develop this process further, and to use the information they gather from these evaluations in the overall planning of the centre's development.

During the inspection we met many of the people on the Centre Partnership Board (CPG) which provides the governance for the centre. Two of these are parents who are on the board to represent your views. The Centre Partnership Board has been running for about a year and is already fulfilling its duties well. We have asked them to develop further so that they can take a more prominent role in the leadership of the centre and work with the centre manager and the local authority to improve services further.

Many of you told us how much you value the wide variety of services offered by the centre, such as health, social care and outreach services. We agree that it is extremely good to have so many services working with one another so well. In addition, we saw for ourselves how well parents, managers and staff work together to improve the lives of you and your families. On the basis of this, we judged the partnership working at the centre to be outstanding.

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