

Inspection report for Lordswood Children's Centre

Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	367275
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Joan Lindsay

Centre governance	Governing body of Lordswood School
Centre leader	Annie Campbell
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Lordswood School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, staff and a representative from the local authority, and also spoke to a member of the advisory board. They also held meetings with partner agencies including the health services, parents and carers, and other users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents, including key policies, the centre's development plan, user surveys and the centre's evaluation of its services.

Information about the centre

Lordswood Children's Centre is a phase two centre, designated in October 2007 and directly managed by the local authority. The head of centre is also the headteacher of Lordswood School, where the centre is sited. The governing body of the school manages the centre on behalf of the local authority.

Lordswood Children's Centre serves a socially mixed area of Chatham. The reach area covers approximately 770 children under five, with almost 13% living in a 30% most deprived area. The centre serves seven Super Output Areas, ranging from two 30% least deprived areas to one of the 30% most deprived. This is an area of densely populated, predominately social housing at the furthest point of the centre's reach area. The elongated geographic shape of the reach area means that several neighbouring children's centres are in close proximity and so historically, the centre has contact with more children from beyond the reach area than within it. Some activities are run jointly with those other children's centres. There are four other schools and four private, voluntary and independent settings within the reach of the centre. The population in the reach area is largely of White British heritage.

The centre, which is open all year, provides a range of activities and classes for families with young children and babies. The accommodation consists of two family rooms (one with a dedicated outdoor space) and a one-to-one room. There are three

full-time members of staff, with two, the centre coordinator and the community liaison officer, only in post for a few months. Health services are conducted from the premises including midwifery, baby clinics and post natal groups.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Lordswood Children's Centre is providing a satisfactory service. The centre is effective in improving the lives of those who use it but is not yet reaching out to a wide enough range of users. This is because there have been upheavals in staffing so that the current team has only been in place for a few months. Consequently, some initiatives are too recent to be having a strong impact. In addition, the advisory board is still growing in confidence and, while it is supportive, it is neither as challenging as it should be, nor fully involved in forming the centre's development plan. An area of relative weakness is the lack of extensive data made available to the centre from the local authority and health services, and captured by the centre itself. A consequence of this is that the centre's development plan does not have targets that are specific or quantifiable enough to measure impact of its work on the families it serves in depth. Day-to-day management of the centre is good, however, and there is a very strong sense of purpose, enthusiasm and teamwork. This, coupled with a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses, means there is a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

The centre's particular strengths are in the way it makes users feel welcomed and their contribution valued. This, plus a good focus on developing children's early learning skills, means that those who attend enjoy the sessions and the children make good progress. However, staff are aware that they need to ensure that the more vulnerable members of their reach area especially those in the most deprived Super Output Area are encouraged to access the centre, especially in relation to the health services offered. In addition, there is a recognition that the range of services offered, or the way in which users can access information, are not yet effective enough.

There is a high priority given to safeguarding and the welfare of all the users. Consequently, safeguarding procedures are robust and permeate the work of the

centre. The welfare concerns of parents and carers and children who use the centre are quickly identified, and the actions taken to support and help them, in conjunction with other relevant agencies, are effective and appreciated by users. One centre user stated that 'I don't know what I would have done without their help and support. They are all so warm and friendly here.'

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Establish methods of obtaining relevant data to supplement that provided already by the local authority and Primary Care Trusts (PCT) to enable development targets to be measurable and time-specific and to accurately assess the needs of users.
- Extend the range of services provided to reach targeted groups of users, especially the most vulnerable and hardest to reach, by increasing the outreach work to engage more parents and carers and the wider community in the centre's services.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Healthy eating is promoted well in most of the centre's activities with very popular cooking sessions for adults and children and fruit snacks after most of the sessions. A fruit tasting session proved very popular, with several adults surprised at what their children were trying that they would not have accepted at home. One parent stated 'He always eats more here because he sees everyone else doing it.' Baby massage sessions are also very popular and parents say they help the emotional health and well-being of all the participants. However, the centre is aware that there is not yet enough focus on initiating and maintaining breast-feeding amongst the wider community and data on immunisation rates are not yet shared. In addition, there has been less focus on adult health, although courses to help with stopping smoking are to be run in the near future.

Adults and children feel safe and secure in the centre, not only because of the good physical arrangements for entry, but also because of the warm, welcoming staff. This encourages those who may be reluctant to come to the centre initially, to return. Children and adults who are most vulnerable are monitored well and supported through the Common Assessment Framework processes. The centre can point to notable successes where parents and carers have been signposted to specific help such as counselling and subtle but effective support has been given for parenting issues such as eating problems.

Children and adults show high levels of enjoyment of the activity sessions. During the cooking session, for example, children were fully involved in baking and also tidying up. In the Shake, Wiggle and Giggle session, children learned how to socialise and follow instructions while having fun. The centre focuses on the Every Child a Talker initiative in the various sessions and there is also a good focus on developing

children's social skills. This has had a positive impact on the achievement of children when they move through the Early Years Foundation Stage, with year-on-year improvements in those achieving 78 points or more. There is also some measurable impact that the centre is being effective in narrowing the achievement gap. Children and parents and carers are well supported through effective transition arrangements to the Early Years Foundation Stage, especially in the host school.

Children behave well in the centre and the staff are good role models in relation to developing positive relationships. Some users contribute to decision making, although at present, the parents' forum is very new and not yet a strong voice in the centre's development. However, the centre does regularly ask users for their views on activities and those are taken into account, for example re-naming a story session after there was low attendance, and offering activities through the school holidays.

The social and independent skills children are developing give them a sound base for their future. The centre recognises that it is not yet doing enough to enhance the skills of parents and carers in relation to developing literacy and numeracy skills and helping with employment issues, especially across the wider community. At present, there are one-off visits from speakers such as from Jobcentre Plus and users are signposted to other local children's centres or the host school, but this is only reaching a very small number of users and very few from the most deprived area.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
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	3
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?

3

The needs of those who currently access the centre are assessed well and used to target specific support. However, the needs of different groups in the wider community are not assessed systematically or routinely informed by effective

outreach work. Consequently, although the range of services meets the needs of some users effectively, there is not yet enough evidence to show the impact of the centre's work on some vulnerable groups such as teenage parents, disabled children and workless households.

The centre promotes learning and enjoyment effectively in the good-quality but limited range of activities currently on offer. As yet, the centre is not individualising learning enough through the use of challenging targets, and there is not a wide range of users accessing the services. The centre is aware of this and the recently appointed staff are already planning and implementing improvements on how to reach wider, more vulnerable groups. For example, a successful weekend play session for children with special needs was much praised by participants and is to be repeated.

The quality of the care, guidance and support for users within the centre is sound and, where specific support has been given, this has had a profound and positive impact, with users describing the centre staff as 'lifelines'. As yet, this does not extend far enough into the community as outreach work is only beginning, and it is not clear enough how users could access support and guidance elsewhere if not specifically provided by the centre.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The day-to-day leadership and management under the head of centre are good and there is a palpable sense of all staff aiming for sustained improvement. There are clear governance arrangements and the advisory board has representatives from most of the partner bodies, as well as the governing body of the host school. However, the board is largely reactive rather than proactive. Steps are being taken to resolve this through training and change of responsibilities so that the board is more knowledgeable and confident to hold the centre to account. The local authority has a systematic and effective process to monitor the work of the centre but the data that is provided is not always complete or in a form that the centre can use effectively to set challenging targets and so monitor progress.

Self-evaluation is generally accurate and based on realistic judgements, and can be supported by some evidence of impact, especially in relation to the achievement of

children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, the lack of data relating to some of the most vulnerable groups means that it is difficult to measure success in some aspects. The views of users are taken into account regularly through formal questionnaires, feedback after blocks of activities such as the five-week cooking sessions and through a 'comments wall'. It is clear that these views are valued and acted upon, and that the centre is proactive in trying to meet the needs of different users such as dads and male carers. Users are overwhelmingly positive about the centre, the support it gives, and the warmth and helpfulness of all who work there. However, user engagement is limited as outreach services, such as in other reach area schools, are still developing.

Partnerships between statutory partners are generally clear and understood, although some are stronger and subsequently more beneficial to users. For example, the strong links with the health visitor service has meant cross-referrals have been made to support families in need, but links with midwifery are still developing to get to the same level so that there is greater take-up of breastfeeding, for example. Links with local childminders are good.

The centre uses its resources well to meet the needs of the current users and plans are in place to improve the facilities further with re-building work bringing the two main rooms together. The accommodation is bright and suitable for the activities, with the centre benefiting from some shared resources such as a kitchen with the host school. Recent high levels of training for new staff are beginning to have an impact on the services provided such as an Inclusion Fun Day and a planned-for smoking cessation group. Consequently, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

The centre is fully accessible to disabled users and is a welcoming environment for all. However, there are sections of the wider community who are not yet accessing the centre, especially from the most deprived and furthest located area of the centre's reach.

Safeguarding is given a high priority in the centre and procedures are robust to ensure all those involved in delivering services are properly checked. Staff are well trained in child protection matters. Early notification of any child protection concerns leads to swift action in notifying the appropriate agencies and providing support, all of which is recorded systematically in the centre's confidential files. Risk assessments for all sessions are detailed and robust.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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	3
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	3

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

None

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 Lordswood Children's Centre on 9 and 10 March 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

During our visit, we looked at your centre's plans for development and numerous other documents, we spoke to a range of partners working with the centre, visited several activities and spoke to the people who work there. Those of you we spoke to told us how much you enjoy the activities at the centre and especially, how welcoming all those who work there are. Many told us how the centre has helped your children to be more outgoing, especially in experimenting with different foods, and how their independence and social skills had improved. The centre listens to your views and acts on them, although more formal reporting through the parents' forum is still new and so not yet effective.

There is a caring atmosphere in the centre and the staff are aware of problems and concerns, and act swiftly to help and support. Safeguarding is good and is at the heart of what the centre does, with staff well trained in child protection matters. This means that staff not only have the physical security of the centre users as a high priority but also are concerned to support their emotional well-being, especially when people are in difficulty.

There is a good sense of teamwork and wanting the centre to improve, and there is an awareness that, at present, the centre is not reaching as many different groups of people as it could and should. This is partly due to the newness of the majority of the staff but also because the centre does not have, or is not using well enough, information about some of the specific groups in the area. This means the centre is not yet setting itself ambitious and measurable targets for improvement.

To help the centre improve, we have asked that leaders work on obtaining more detailed information about the different groups in the local area so it can support them, by doing more outreach work and then using that information to improve its development plan so that it can set challenging, measurable targets.

Thank you very much for contributing to the inspection by being willing to give your time to talk to us and expressing your wholeheartedly positive views.

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