

Inspection report for Westy Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	366408
Inspection dates	16 – 17 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Gill Jones HMI

Centre governance	Warrington Local Authority
Centre leader	Carol Fenlon
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Alderman Bolton Primary
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Westy Sure Start Nursery EY317001

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 users of the centre, staff, professionals who work for partner organisations, members of the advisory board and representatives from the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Westy Children's Centre shares a campus with Alderman Bolton Primary School and is in the refurbished infant school building. It opened as a Sure Start children's centre in 2005 following on from the Sure Start Local Programme in 2001. It serves the community of Latchford East, an area with high levels of disadvantage and Latchford West, which has pockets of high disadvantage, both bordering the more affluent areas in Warrington South. A higher proportion of adults in the centre's reach area are unemployed and in receipt of income support than found nationally. The community within the reach area are mainly White British. A small proportion of families are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Children who start in the Early Years Foundation Stage have levels of skills, knowledge and understanding below those found nationally.

The centre aims to provide the full phase one core offer. The linked nursery provision and crèche is closing at the end of March 2011. The local authority will provide an alternative mobile crèche on site. In January 2011 a local authority officer took over as interim centre manager on a part-time basis. Prior to this, in 2009/10 the centre manager was absent on maternity leave and her position was covered by a children's centre manager from another centre.

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

4

Main findings

Westy Children’s Centre provides a satisfactory quality of provision which is leading to gradually improving outcomes for children and families who live in its reach area. However, some aspects of leadership and management are weak, leading to inadequate capacity to secure improvement.

Westy is a busy, welcoming centre. The café and children’s indoor soft play area provide a useful meeting place for the community. Centre staff are approachable and welcoming. Parents and carers hold the receptionists and café staff in high regard because they interact with the children and families well; this was evident during the inspection. The family support workers have made a strong impact on improving the lives of vulnerable users since the centre’s inception in 2001. Parents and carers who use the centre regularly say it is like ‘a second home’ and they ‘always find a friendly face and someone to talk to if they are feeling down’. Staff promote equality of opportunity well within the centre and respect diversity. Testimony to their success is parents and carers commenting that ‘we don’t feel judged’. The centre’s promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory overall because the centre provides for a satisfactory range of users. However, the centre does not analyse its reach area well enough to ensure that it is extending services to meet the needs of all vulnerable groups of users.

Outcomes in the reach area are satisfactory. The percentage of mothers choosing to breastfeed is increasing, but remains below the national and Warrington average. The centre hosts an excellent ‘Bosom buddies’ group and mothers explained this is enabling them to sustain and enjoy breastfeeding. Children who attend the centre’s nursery provision are achieving well and the majority go on to achieve the early learning goals by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, children’s performance in communication, language and literacy in the reach area, although improving, remains below that found nationally and in Warrington, particularly for those living in the most disadvantaged circumstances.

Parents and carers say they feel safe at the centre and children appear happy and play confidently. Those who spoke to inspectors talked about how the centre had helped them to 'turn their life around'. Some users volunteer at the centre as a measure of their appreciation and willingly attend the Parents Forum meetings. Mothers explained to inspectors how the centre supports them to deal with domestic violence and abuse; others spoke about the help they received for postnatal depression. Young parents feel welcome and attend the centre regularly, making good use of the café, soft play area and crèche. Partnership between Youth Workers and the centre is strong. Centre staff make appropriate use of statutory processes involving partnership work with health and social care to support children and families identified as in need. However, safeguarding overall is only satisfactory. Nearly half the under-five-year-olds in the reach are not registered with the centre. Although staff attend local authority internal allocation meetings (IAMs) with the health visiting team to safeguard the most vulnerable children in the reach, some of the lower attaining children and their families do not receive support because the centre does not know about them. The centre's processes to identify and assess need in the reach area are inadequate.

The centre provides a range of universal courses and activities which promote the learning and development of children and their families. Ante- and postnatal care is available at the centre in well resourced and attractive rooms. All the groups for under-fives support the areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage and particularly focus on developing children's speech and language. Many of these services are popular, attracting users from outside the reach area. Adult learning is popular, and crèche provision appreciated, but the number of users who continue this route decreases after attending one course. The centre has not evaluated this aspect of its work. The centre provides a notice board for Jobcentre Plus, but guidance about employment opportunities is not a regular feature. A strength of the centre's satisfactory partnership work is the regular attendance at the centre of the Citizens Advice Bureau. Users are highly appreciative of this service and explained how it is enabling them to deal with debt management.

The leadership of centre staff in the past two years has been inconsistent owing to unavoidable long-term absence and temporary management. Although the interim centre manager has identified the centre's strengths and weaknesses in a very short timescale, plans for improvement are not robust. In addition, the advisory board has a limited understanding of its role and responsibilities and is not representative of the range of partners working at the centre. The local authority targets for the centre and the processes to hold the centre to account for improving outcomes are underdeveloped. Leaders and managers are not using the data available to the centre sufficiently well to determine its work or to analyse its impact. Consequently the assessment of need, governance, ambition and the quality of evaluation are inadequate. Although centre staff identify issues accurately, such as more users attending activities from outside the reach than within it, instability in leadership has reduced capacity to tackle them at an appropriate pace. Overall, the centre is not demonstrating sufficient capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen governance by:
 - ensuring the local authority holds the centre to account regularly for improving outcomes
 - improving the advisory board's understanding of its role and responsibilities
 - increasing membership from partner organisations to the advisory board.

- Improve the quality of self-evaluation by:
 - using all the data available to the centre to inform development planning
 - writing a plan that clearly sets out priorities and improvement targets for improving outcomes in the reach area and use these to evaluate the impact of the centre's work.

- Improve safeguarding in the reach area by:
 - ensuring systems to identify and assess need in the reach area are robust
 - increasing the number of under-fives registered and the number of families using the centre from the most disadvantaged groups within the reach area.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Parents and carers using the centre explained how the centre helps them to improve the health, safety and well-being of their children. They appreciate the individual care, guidance and support they receive from family support workers and feel safe at the centre. Staff make good use of the Common Assessment Framework to safeguard children known to be at risk. They work well with housing, health and social care to wrap care around the child and family appropriately. Case studies show this has a positive impact on children's lives. However, school data show families of some very low attaining five-year-olds in the local primary schools have had no contact with the centre. Consequently, the centre is not confident that it is safeguarding the development needs of all the children in its reach area effectively enough.

Mothers with postnatal depression, referred to the centre by health visitors, say the centre makes 'a huge difference'. One said, 'without it, I don't know how I would have survived'. Another explained how the centre provided a package of care to enable him to look after his son, saying 'it has changed my life'. Parents and carers

appreciate the child health and safety packs and the parenting courses which increase their confidence in preparing their children for school. All users value this centre highly and explain how their family's emotional health, safety and well-being is improving, giving their children a more positive future as a result.

Local authority data show outcomes in the reach area improving slowly, although they remain below the national and Warrington average. Obesity rates of five-year-olds are reducing and parents say centre programmes such as 'Snack right' and 'CHEW, Cook healthy eat well' are helping them to improve their family's diet. In addition, parents and carers are increasing their confidence in promoting healthy eating through using the café and advising each other. Children using the nursery school and crèche appear relaxed, happy and attend well. They are confident using all the indoor and outdoor areas available to them and their progress is good. Parents and carers attending 'song and sign' courses are learning how to improve their children's speech and language. They are enthusiastic about the positive impact this is having on their children at school. However, outcomes for the most vulnerable children are improving more slowly than for others. The gap between the achievement of the children living in the areas of greatest disadvantage in the reach area and their peers remains wide.

Parents and carers using the centre's services are active volunteers. They are keen to 'pay back something in return'. They contribute to the development of activities and work in the café. Those new to the area explained how the centre has enabled them to make friends. Users appreciate the debt counselling from the Citizens Advice Bureau, one saying 'they read all the forms for me and help me to fill them in'. A parent has recently become chair of the advisory board and is keen to drive future improvements. Young mothers appreciate the opportunities to take courses and 'have some time for me'. However, their knowledge about pathways into employment is limited. Although users of the centre are benefiting from its services, because registrations in the reach area are low, this limits the impact the centre is having on the local community.

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	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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	3

access to training	
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How good is the provision?

3

The staff assessment of individual users' needs once they enter the centre, linked to the Common Assessment Framework is good. Some compelling evidence from the family support workers demonstrates the impact of this work in improving the outcomes and life chances of families facing difficult circumstances. However, the centre acknowledges that changing partnership arrangements following the recent reorganisation of the local authority has led to confusion between health and the centre about registrations. Some vulnerable users told inspectors they found out about the centre 'by chance' and 'by another mum from school taking me there because I had problems with my partner'. This illustrates weaknesses in the current system. Registrations in the reach area are low, both of children under-five and of newborns. Conversely, activities are popular, attracting nearly two thirds of users from outside the reach area. The centre does not use its available data to analyse or target needs in the reach area sufficiently well.

Staff plan activities carefully to support the Early Years Foundation Stage and are supported well by the Early Years consultant. A coherent series of courses support speech and language development from birth well. These include 'Tiny stars', 'Rhyme time' and 'CHAT'. Good relationships between staff and users at these sessions are developing parents' confidence in helping their children's speech. An underdeveloped aspect of the centre's work is in promoting the route into further education and the workplace. Users enjoy the courses provided, but very few spoken to during the inspection saw this as a pathway into employment, particularly among the younger parents. The nursery and crèche provides good support for vulnerable families and enables parents and carers to book appointments with the Citizens Advice Bureau away from the demands of young children. The 'light and sound' room, which is designed to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is a valuable resource. However currently, few children with such difficulties use the facilities.

The centre provides a satisfactory level of care, guidance and support for users. The ante- and postnatal care clinics provide good advice. However, because of the arrangements between health and the local authority, families in the reach area use various clinics across Warrington, so not all pregnant mothers visit the centre or are aware of its services. For some services not available at the centre, users are sign-posted elsewhere by centre staff and health visitors. However, very little information on sexual health and domestic violence is on display.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents	
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and other users	
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 interim centre manager is working well with staff to steer the centre through a difficult period of change. Staff are hardworking, highly committed and successful in improving some outcomes for users of the centre. Consequently, the centre is providing satisfactory value for money. However, the instability in leadership is limiting the capacity of the centre to sustain improvement. Although relationships in the centre are strong and day-to-day management is secure, the lack of strategic drive and ambition over time and in particular, weak assessment of need in the reach area and development planning reduces the centre's capacity to improve. Governance is inadequate. The local authority focus on gathering robust data is sound, but because prior to 2010, centre data was unreliable; systems to hold the centre fully to account lack rigour. In addition, the extensive consultation period held by the local authority to close the nursery and crèche and the subsequent community unrest, means the centre has lost focus in recent months and there is no permanent centre leader in place to turn this around.

The centre has robust procedures for recruiting staff and the relevant checks are all in place. Cooperation between partner agencies who protect the health, safety and welfare of children and their families is satisfactory. However, weakness in the procedures used by health professionals and the local authority to register new users since the centre's inception in 2001, particularly of newborns and under-fives, has led to local headteachers identifying some children in need developmentally in the reach area at school age. These vulnerable children have missed out on the provision the centre offers and consequently the opportunity to develop their skills, knowledge and abilities in line with their peers. This confusion in registration arrangements still exists and is limiting the centre's otherwise strong effectiveness in promoting equality of opportunity and diversity.

Staff evaluate activities with users regularly and adapt courses appropriately as a result. However, these evaluations do not link formally with centre development planning. Leaders do not use data routinely to check the centre's effectiveness or to find out more about the reach area. For example, the rate of emergency hospital admissions for under-ones is rising, but the centre does not know why. In addition, because only 57% of under-fives register with the centre and overall analysis of the centre's impact is weak, it is difficult to attribute some of the outcomes in the reach

area to the centre's work.

The geographical working across Warrington by partner organisations means targeting the reach area is a subsidiary consideration for health and social care professionals, particularly as the wards Westy serves are not the most disadvantaged in the local authority. Because the centre has been without a substantive leader to drive improvements and the local authority has been unable to hold a centre leader to account, this has reduced its overall effectiveness and capacity to sustain improvement.

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	4
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	4
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	3
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	4
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

Westy Sure Start Nursery inspection report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Westy Children's Centre on 16 and 17 March 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to those of you who spoke to us about Westy. It was a privilege to hear some of your experiences and it is clear the centre has made a huge impact in enabling you to improve the quality of your lives. You told us about how centre staff 'show respect' and you 'never feel judged'. You explained about the packages of care you receive to help you out of crisis and you moved inspectors by saying how the centre has helped you 'turn life around'. You feel welcome and safe at the centre, as did the inspectors. The groups you attend are popular and enable you to gain skills and knowledge to help you improve the lives of your children and families well. A particular strength of the centre is the excellent support for breastfeeding by 'bosom buddies'. Those of you who breastfeed your baby are providing a healthy start to life and are developing very close bonds between you and your baby. The centre promotes good relationships. They know you and your families well and you place a high level of trust in staff to help you in times of crisis or just if you need some company. Staff's commitment and hard work reward your trust in them.

However, although the activities, groups and staff at Westy provide a satisfactory quality of service, some aspects of its work are not strong enough. In particular, the centre's analysis of children and families needs in the reach area is weak. Consequently, it does not use this information well to plan and evaluate the impact of its services. The majority of users live outside the reach area. This is an indication of the quality of services provided, but it also means that a large percentage of potentially vulnerable families in the reach area are not aware of what the centre has to offer. We know this because of the data available to inspectors on the outcomes achieved by five-year-olds. A quarter of the children living locally did not have any contact with Westy and that has increased to nearly half of those under-five years old. Because of this, we have asked the centre to increase the number of under-fives registered in the reach area and to improve its arrangements to analyse the needs of children and families living locally, particularly of vulnerable groups. We have also asked the centre to improve the quality of governance and to strengthen the advisory board. An interim manager is leading the centre's work. She is working well with staff and supporting them during a time of significant change, because the nursery and crèche is closing. However, the impact of this lack of leadership is that although staff continue with business as usual, the drive and development planning is failing to secure improvements in some aspects of the centre's work. This means that the centre does not have sufficient capacity to sustain improvement.

Thank you again for spending time talking to inspectors. We wish you and your families all the best for the future.

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