

Inspection report for Liscard Children's Centre

Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	365691
Inspection dates	11-12 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Dave Ellwand

Centre governance	Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
Centre leader	Sarah Harper
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Reach High Day Nursery EY335798
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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.

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre workers and senior managers, the chair and members of the advisory board, health and education professionals, local community partners, and user groups and parents and carers.

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

Information about the centre

Liscard Children's Centre is a phase one development situated on the Liscard Primary School site. The area served by the centre is mixed, with many of its wards being ranked as in the top 30% of the most deprived areas in the country. The area is characterised by high unemployment, high numbers of lone parents and families receiving benefits, low levels of breastfeeding and high numbers of women receiving help for maternal depression. Most of the families are White British with a small number from minority ethnic groups. A higher than average proportion of households, where dependent children are present, have no adults in employment. The immunisation rate for 2007/08 is slightly higher than that of the rest of Wirral. The percentage of women who are pregnant before their 18th birthday is slightly lower than the Wirral average. The proportions of children in Reception classes who are overweight or obese are significantly higher than the national average.

Children’s knowledge, understanding and skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage, are below those found typically for children of that age. The centre provides the full core offer and a wide range of supporting services, incorporating a crèche, drop-in health support, adult courses, community sessions and parenting courses.

The governance of the centre is by the local authority, in conjunction with an advisory board, made up of representatives of partner agencies and from the local community. The advisory board also manages the nearby Seacombe Children’s Centre.

The centre manages the Reach High Nursery on site, with places for 21 children. The nursery had a separate early years inspection at the same time as the children’s centre, and this inspection report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

This is a good children’s centre providing good quality care throughout all its activities and services. Users of the centre praise the staff for their approachability and helpfulness, and have built up trusting relationships with them. A typical view expressed by a user is, ‘I’m made very welcome, and there’s wonderful support.’

The children’s centre is very effective at meeting the needs of users and of the wider community. The centre’s leadership team are well supported by a highly effective staff and have a very clear view of local needs. They ensure that the provision of the centre reflects and effectively addresses the priorities of improving the health, safety and well-being of the local community. In the last two years children’s achievement has improved. There is strong evidence of the centre’s effectiveness on the development of children’s knowledge, skills and understanding upon entry to primary school.

Communication with parents and users of the centre is good, with very effective community meetings and forums for parents, grandparents and carers. These provide opportunities for users to look at the centre's effectiveness and future planning, suggesting future directions for the services provided. Although the forums contribute to the centre's advisory board, there are currently no parents or carers on the board. However, the advisory board and local authority managers provide very effective support and challenge for the centre.

Multi-agency partnerships and the highly effective outreach support provide well-integrated services to users and all contribute to good and improving outcomes for children and their families. The centre management team is strong with a high commitment to accountability and further improvements to the services for the community. Staff supervision is very effective, and is supported by good training and development opportunities.

The coordination and planning of provision with other providers and nearby children's centres ensures good value for money and avoids duplication. The centre is starting to collect more thorough and accurate data from a new registration system and from partners, and is beginning to use this in more detailed target setting and planning for improvement. Self-evaluation is accurate, broadly evaluative and in line with inspection findings. The leadership team are aware that further use of data will strengthen the process, and enable better target setting for improvement. The centre's capacity to improve is good.

Health and safety and safeguarding arrangements are good, as are the equality and diversity practices and procedures. As a result, the centre is safe and inclusive, as well as innovative and effective in its approach in improving the take-up of its services by a range of families, including those identified as potentially vulnerable and hard-to-reach families.

There is good information, advice and guidance about adult learning programmes. There is also good access to guidance about preparation for work and welfare from independent providers. However, Jobcentre Plus is able only to supply basic information about employment opportunities, and does not have the capacity for advice sessions within the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further strengthen the self-evaluation and target setting process by using clear outcome measures to precisely inform future planning.
- Build the capacity of parents' group members to play a greater role in the formal governance of the centre.

- Improve the effectiveness of the partnership with Jobcentre Plus to:
 - reduce the number of workless households
 - give better opportunities for those dependent on unemployment benefits to have advice and guidance on employment prospects.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre is effective in promoting healthy outcomes for users through its activities and through services provided in conjunction with other agencies. Most activities include periods of physical play to stimulate the children's movement and exercise. There are well-planned outdoor play activities at the centre, which can be adapted by parents and carers for use outside the centre. Parents, carers and children gain a good understanding of healthy eating, and know how it can help them to prevent them from gaining weight. Family support workers provide a wide range of assistance for families, including help for their emotional health, and there is an effective range of well-designed courses to effectively improve parenting skills and reduce stress, such as 'Mellow Parents' and 'You make the difference.'

The numbers of mothers breastfeeding in the reach of the centre is lower than the average for Wirral overall, but is improving, as a result of support from centre staff. One mother commented on the very effective peer support that has developed from other mothers attending group sessions. The centre provides well-planned postnatal support and very good support for mothers who are affected by postnatal depression. All staff have had additional training for this condition, and can make immediate and very effective referrals, as described by one centre user as 'they don't just pass you on, it's more like an introduction to someone you can trust.'

Children's development of personal and social skills is good. The headteacher of the neighbouring primary school commented that the transition to primary school from the centre is very smooth, and noted the improvement in the children's readiness to learn. The 'Every Child a Talker' initiative has been very effective together with specialist speech and language help and support for children with poor communication skills and as a result, they make good progress. The narrowing of the attainment gap in the Early Years Foundation Stage between the lowest attaining children and those who are of average attainment has narrowed considerably for those children attending the centre. Children enjoy the centre's activities and are very well-behaved. Parents and carers comment on the well-chosen range of activities to stimulate and encourage further learning. For adults, community meetings give informal introductions both to helpful topics and areas of learning, such as family learning, parenting skills and mentoring for very young parents, as well as advice and guidance on courses leading to accredited qualifications. The centre has provided specialist advice on welfare benefits and employment, but has not been able to work closely with Jobcentre Plus, so recognises the need to further develop this work.

Safeguarding is thorough, with good team working between the agencies in partnership with the centre. Parents, carers and children feel safe in the centre, and opportunities to learn safe practice are built into many activities. Outreach workers also promote home safety, and give detailed support and advice to families. The centre has a close working relationship with health visitors and voluntary organisations in the area to tackle or to help prevent domestic violence and to bring about improvements to the lives of children, parents and carers. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and 'team around the child' process is well used by centre workers to coordinate support for children identified as potentially vulnerable. These processes are well monitored and recent quality audits have shown improvements in accuracy and effectiveness. The multi-agency team ensures that there is full liaison over children who are looked after or subject to a care or protection plan. The well-considered processes of review and referral are followed to ensure that there is a full discussion between agencies as well as documentation, so information is shared fully.

Users readily communicate their views about the services offered to them by the centre, through community and forum meetings, evaluations and questionnaires to influence the centre's offer of activities. However, the lack of a formal involvement of parents and carers on the advisory group limits the part they can play in supporting improvements.

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

The quality of care throughout the centre is consistently good, and the range of services provided by the centre and the multi-agency team meet the needs of the users well. The centre has a very good understanding of its users and their communities, and parents and carers spoke of a 'personalised approach, that finds out what works best for us, to meet our needs and likes.' Assessments are carried

out well, and an early years consultant has ensured that there are consistent and well-conducted processes to assess, record and communicate children’s needs and levels of ability. Children’s initial starting points are particularly well-recorded and shared with parents and carers in journals as a basis for tracking progress. These identify how home, centre and school can work well together and contribute to each child’s development.

Assessments are well used and fully discussed with partner agencies in working with families and the analysis of needs is thorough and fully reviewed by managers. Family support staff ensure all children are supported well, and where necessary, they also complete individual behaviour or healthcare plans for the family as part of the CAF. The centre ensures that the provision is linked to priority needs, and works well with portage and other schemes to give good support to families with children with disabilities. The staff are well trained in using CAF and there is a good process of quality review of the system to ensure its effectiveness.

Parents and carers feel that the range of services is good, and is responsive to their needs and inspectors agree. There are good and varied opportunities for family learning courses which are tailored to the centre users’ needs. There is also a range of parenting courses readily available. There are very well-considered courses for families, including children, to help them cope with the emotional impacts of domestic violence. There is effective provision of welfare advice, although there is insufficient support from Jobcentre Plus for centre users to fully explore employment opportunities.

A robust partnership promotes learning, and achievements are celebrated by the centre with certificates and events. ‘The centre provides invaluable support for all people looking after children. I believe that at least part of my children’s confidence and social skills is due to attending the children’s centre’ said one parent, and many more talk of gains in their own confidence and understanding. Information, advice, guidance and support is provided to aid users in understanding their children’s development, and helping them identify further learning or access to qualifications for themselves. As well as notices and leaflets, centre staff regularly talk with users and potential users to provide a broad and responsive service. The centre tries many effective ways to increase the registration of hard-to-reach families, and has public events in parks and open spaces, as well as knocking on doors in priority areas, to talk directly to families with whom they have had no previous contact.

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 centre is inclusive and gives high priority to equality and diversity. It meets all statutory duties and anti-discriminatory practice is kept under consideration through training sessions, in appraisals and supervision sessions. Policies and procedures about respecting and valuing differences are robust. There is good support for the involvement of men in centres, both with activities for fathers, and including them in the main range of provision. One father said, 'I take turns with my partner in bringing my children here, and I'm always welcomed and have no problems at all in joining in'. There is strong support for families of children with disabilities, including the Aiming High project, which helps the children and their siblings to be better prepared for taking advantage of all the services which the centre can offer. Additional training has enabled centre staff to work alongside specialist support for children with communication, movement or perception difficulties, and has helped them be better aware of their needs.

The leadership team has looked critically at the centre's effectiveness, and helped staff to identify areas for improvement. There is good use of feedback from users, and the use of questionnaires and evaluations ensure the centre provides good quality services. This has been shared with the staff team, users' forums and community meetings, with discussions and use of case studies. The self-evaluation, agreed with the advisory group, is largely accurate and evaluative and has clear links to national and local priorities and to strategic planning. The development plan which comes from this process is incomplete as yet and leaders are aware that it requires additional data to be incorporated to set measurable targets. The centre has a good process of review and supervision, and very clear and well understood lines of accountability. The centre manager has worked successfully to develop the capacity of the advisory group, and is very highly regarded by them and partner agencies for her thoroughness in developing the teams' accountability. The local authority provides good support and challenge for the centre manager and the team and a very good link to strategic planning for the service.

Governance arrangements are fully understood by all the centre's staff and partners. The leadership team for the centre provides very effective monitoring and day-to-day management of the centre. Supervision of staff at all levels is well-conducted and enables an effective review of progress towards targets and is linked to appraisals and personal development of staff. Centre staff can access further training with support from the service, and colleagues act as mentors to help training and its application to the working environment. Resources are managed well and accommodation is welcoming and used to best effect to provide good value for money.

Safety is of the highest priority and procedures and policies are good. Effective, regular training enables staff to keep up-to-date, and strengthens the safeguarding practice of staff, children and families. There is a constant review of best practice

and recommendations from the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The centre makes good use of the CAF, Team Around the Child and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference processes to identify and provide targeted support for vulnerable children and their families. The centre and service are thorough when making recruitment and vetting checks on all staff who work with children and families in the reach of the centre. There is considerable support for families who have experienced domestic violence, and the centre also provides a safe environment for supervised visits by parents who are separated from their families.

Good partnership working ensures high quality integrated provision, although there is less coordinated support for exploring employment prospects. The sharing of data and relevant information to improve outcomes for families is improving. There is a good basis for looking at the longer term analysis of outcomes, with the improvements in data collection, but it is too early to see the benefits at this stage. The staff and partner agencies form a strong team, with confidence in the centre and with high morale.

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 children's centre inspection findings were informed by parallel inspections of the Reach High Nursery on 10 May 2011 and of the separately managed Liscard Primary School on 10 and 11 May 2011. The full inspection report for this event can be found on the Ofsted website.

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 Liscard Children's Centre on 11 and 12 May, 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

Those of you we spoke with told us that the centre plays an important role in improving your lives and the lives of the children you care for. You told us that you had confidence in it, because it provides you with good care, guidance and support. We found that the centre's arrangements to keep you and your children safe are good. Many of you confirmed that you and your children feel very safe. We found the centre very welcoming, and we found the centre management and staff were caring and considerate in all its activities and services. Many of you told us the staff were helpful and easy to approach. 'I'm made very welcome, and there's wonderful support,' is a typical view.

The children's centre is very effective at meeting your needs as users and those of the wider community. The centre's manager has a good team who work well together, and who have a very clear idea of your area and its needs. The centre gives priorities to improving the health, safety and well-being of your local community.

We judged the communication between you and the centre as good. We noted some of this good communication includes the community meetings and forums for parents, grandparents and carers. We heard that many of you had had a chance to comment on the centre and make suggestions for the future. Although we heard that the forums and discussions are useful to the centre's advisory board, we noted that at the moment, no parents or carers are members of the board. However, the advisory board and local authority managers provide very effective support and challenge for the centre.

We judged that the team from different agencies, such as health visitors, midwives, early years staff, family support staff and many more, all work well together. This is both in the centre, at outreach activities and on home visits. We think this team's work is good, and helps improve the life chances for you and your children. We think

that the centre management team is strong, and is set on improving the services further. They are well trained and plan all they do to create a better service in your area, tying it in with other centres and partner services, so that it provides good value for money and makes the best use of where and how activities are arranged. The centre is now getting better information, which will help it find out more about the needs of people in the area. It will also help it check that it's making progress. We judged that child protection and procedures to support equality were good.

The children's centre is good at getting some of the families who have additional stresses or problems to come and make use of the centre for the first time. It is good at giving advice about your children's development, about them going on to primary school, and learning and skills for adults, too. There is good guidance about job preparation and welfare, but we felt that Jobcentre Plus could do more to bring you better advice or information about getting back to work, when you are ready.

We have asked the centre to do three things to improve it even further for you. The first is to have a better way of measuring its successes, so that it is easier to see what improvements it still has to make. We have asked the centre to think about how it can help you and other users of the centre to contribute more to the decisions about how the centre will operate best to meet your needs, by becoming part of the advisory group. We have also asked senior leaders to provide more opportunities for parents and carers to access the support of Jobcentre Plus to improve individual's prospects of employment.

Thank you to those of you who met with us to tell us your views. We wish you and your family well for the future. Thank you for contributing to the inspection. Your comments proved invaluable to inspectors.

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