

Inspection report for Leftwich Children's Centre

Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	365690
Inspection dates	12-13 May
Reporting inspector	Jean Webb

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Heather Baron
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Leftwich Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Smallworld Pre-School and Club Link Ltd

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 registered early years provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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 on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, representatives of the local authority, members of the advisory board, health professionals, and personnel from statutory and voluntary partner organisations, parents and carers.

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

Information about the centre

Leftwich Children's Centre is located in the south of Northwich and was designated in February 2008 and operational from September 2008 as a phase two children's centre. It shares a site with a primary school and nursery. It is one of a cluster of four centres with a hub of provision in the centre of Northwich. Leftwich Children's Centre is based on a large estate of social housing with a high level of worklessness. Other areas in the catchment area of the centre are more affluent. The area is mainly White British, although there are small numbers of families of Polish origin. The incidence of pregnancy to those aged under twenty are slightly below national average. The incidence of lone parents, worklessness and dependence on benefits varies significantly between the most deprived and most affluent areas. Lone parents in affluent areas are much more likely to be in work. The proportion of children living

in poverty is over 30% in the most deprived area and between zero and eight percent in other areas. Children with disabilities are more evenly spread but lower in the most deprived area. The most recent figures show that the proportion of children who are obese or overweight is not significantly different from the rest of England but that it is increasing. Age-appropriate skills are much higher for those entering school in the more affluent areas than those entering school in the most deprived area. Services and activities are delivered at the centre and also at the hub centre in Northwich. The centre is governed by the local authority.

There are five members of staff employed directly by the centre and the manager and the early years worker are shared with 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The outcomes for users of the centre are good, except the extent to which children and their families have a healthy lifestyle, which is satisfactory. The activities and sessions provided are particularly effective in engaging users and who gain a great deal of enjoyment from them. They also help parents and carers to develop a good understanding of their children’s needs and interests. Children develop their personal and social skills very well by taking part in stimulating and creative activities that are well planned to cover the full range of development in the early years. Parents and carers grow noticeably in their confidence and ability to voice their opinions, and this leads to many positive contributions made by them within the centre and the wider community. Children and their families develop a good range of skills that help them to become more independent and in the case of adults to enable them to go onto accredited learning and further and higher education. Although a healthy lifestyle is promoted and supported at the centre, more could be done to help mothers continue with breastfeeding and to support families in reducing the number of overweight and obese children. Smoking cessation could also be more strongly promoted.

The provision at the centre is of good quality and quality checks are made across all services, whoever is delivering them, and this ensures this quality is maintained.

Children are encouraged to be curious and take part in active learning and staff leading sessions are very good role models for parents and carers to develop their skills. Parents and carers very much appreciate the quality of teaching and how well they are included and respected within the sessions. In the main, the centre meets the needs of its diverse user groups well and the provision is very effective in breaking down barriers and bringing different social and ethnic groups together. The one-off events and trips organised are attended very well and spaces are always reserved for the families they have identified as the most vulnerable. Care and support for families in times of crisis are exceptional and have been perceived by parents and carers as life savers. The centre promotes well the good information and advice available. The assessment of users' needs is now completed satisfactorily after a period of time when the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process was not fully embedded. The impact of the recent improvements is evident, for example, through appropriate early intervention using the CAF assessment tool.

The governance arrangements of the centre by the local authority have undergone many changes in the last two years, and this has had an impact on the strategic planning and management of the children's centre. Resources were reduced and key staff were not replaced. Improvements have been made more recently and roles and responsibilities are clearer, but there are no clear and challenging targets set through governance. Resources have now increased and there is better training and support for staff. There are a few training courses that are not yet available, but these are not required until members of staff have been in place for a while. Overall, governance is satisfactory.

Managers and staff are focussed on improvements and addressing the areas for development, although the use of data to demonstrate the longer term impact of the good work undertaken at the centre is underdeveloped. The manager and staff understand the needs of users and meet their needs well. There are further changes to come in governance and systems are well enough established to ensure that the capacity for further and sustained improvement is satisfactory.

There is good communication and effective work with partners and voluntary groups that contribute well to the integration of services and to the centre providing good value for money. This is particularly true for how well the staff are deployed and how well their skills are used. There is good engagement of users and the use of their views to develop provision. The centre is closing the gap between lower achieving children in the more deprived areas and those in the more affluent areas. High priority is given to safeguarding. The centre's good and very well embedded safeguarding practices are evident throughout.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the range of actions and services to promote healthy lifestyles by:
 - developing breastfeeding sessions and support groups to help tackle the fall-off rate in breastfeeding, and recruiting breastfeeding champions in

- the centre
- working alongside health professionals to develop activities to target those families whose children are overweight or obese in order to support them to adopt a healthier lifestyle
- ensuring that there are clear messages about smoking cessation throughout the centre and setting up support groups for those users who are trying to stop smoking.
- Improve the self-evaluation process by:
 - developing the use of data to demonstrate the longer term impact of actions and activities
- Strengthen governance by:
 - setting central targets that provide guidance to the centre about what needs improving and that hold it to account for its long-term impact on the community it serves
 - providing more accurate and up-to-date data that will enable the centre to compare the impact of its work with similar centres locally and nationally.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Families learn about healthy food options by the snacks and food provided at the centre. The antenatal and postnatal services are well used, as are services, such as 'stay and weigh' that check children's progress and health. Parents report that the baby-massage sessions help the mental well-being and security of their babies. Good identification and support is given to families where there are mental health problems, such as postnatal depression. Targeted support in the form of specialist courses offered to those children identified as needing help with speech and language have only been recently resourced and it is too early to show impact. Children with disabilities are given specialist support and activities and this has helped a parent to work towards the integration of their child into mainstream education. Activities and exercise are encouraged during sessions but there are no specific actions to address the small but growing percentage of children categorised as overweight or obese. There is great deal of information and support that is offered to encourage breastfeeding and mums are given the space and time to do this at centre. However, there is still a large decrease in breastfeeding at the six to eight week stage. The promotion of smoking cessation lacks some rigour.

Children are well protected and the centre reflects a safe, welcoming and friendly environment. Children are confident and relaxed in the centre and parents and carers feel that they and their children are very safe both in the centre and when taking part in any of the trips or activities. Parents and carers are happy to voice any concerns and know the procedures to do this. There is a good uptake of paediatric first aid by parents and carers and this is helping them to develop their understanding and skills to improve the health and safety of their families. Any opportunities to promote health and safety are taken by the centre, such as a guide

on fireworks for bonfire night.

Some activities encourage children to make a great deal of mess in their play which would not always be possible in their home environment. Parents and carers are increasing their understanding of their children's development and learning and very much value how this helps them in their parenting skills, including in communication. 'I don't know what I would have done if the children's centre wasn't there.' Since the centre has been open there has been a narrowing of the gap in achievement of children entering the school in the deprived area and the more affluent area by 11%. However, more needs to be done to ensure that children from the most deprived area are at the age appropriate level when they enter school.

Parents and carers take part in adult learning and this is having an enormous impact on their confidence and ability to contribute to the running of the centre. There is a very popular and well-attended confidence building course. Parents and carers learn craft skills, such as card and jewellery making, and use these skills to make products that they are able to sell. Families make good use of the story sacks, learning packs and of DVDs on such topics as Makaton sign language for use at home. Many parents and carers go onto accredited learning, including first aid, literacy and numeracy up to level two. Some parents and carers then become volunteers or move on to further or higher education.

Children behave well and are interested in the activities when at sessions. They show that they are making positive relationships and increasing their social skills during activities by sharing and listening to others. Parents and carers have a strong voice by way of the parents' forum and their representation on the advisory board. They take on voluntary activities to help at sessions and there is now a community learning champion that has recently qualified and been recognised for her contributions. Users show a great deal of respect for each other and support each other and this has had a positive impact on community cohesion. There has been a reduction in criminal activity during school holidays.

Adults take up training and job opportunities and although they no longer have the opportunity to receive advice and guidance directly from Jobcentre Plus at the centre, they still make good use of the '10 top jobs list' that is promoted each week.

These are the grades for outcomes of 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	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 assessment of users' needs is now being completed satisfactorily at all levels and used effectively to identify appropriate support. This has been achieved through good staff training and regular quality checks. In the last three months, the data has shown the impact of this improvement in that there are fewer instances of assessment required for more serious levels of intervention. These assessments are enabling better coordination of support services. However, further training for some health workers (who are not directly managed through the centre) is required to help them to use the CAF.

There is good planning for learning that ensures full coverage of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. Adult community learning is well planned and structured in a way that engages learners by starting with activities that are fun and non-threatening. Progression is encouraged, with opportunities to take more demanding accredited courses but only when users are ready for such a challenge. The learning sessions are very good quality and adults are particularly well engaged as a result of these sessions, 'The best teaching I have ever had' is a typical comment. This is further enhanced by the inclusive approach to teaching adults and the support they are given. There is a need for better data collection in order to track adults in their learning and this would improve the evaluation and planning for future education and learning opportunities.

There is a good range of services to meet the diverse needs of the centre's reach area. The centre knows its users very well and so they are able to give them services that meet their needs. They get this information from all the national data about such things as number of lone parents. Registration is at nearly 80% for the most deprived area and at nearly 50% and at 60% for the two most affluent areas. The overall uptake of services has steadily increased over the last three years. For the very hard-to-reach families special arrangements are made, such as the supported play sessions that the early years worker delivers with the early intervention family support worker in the family home.

Users strongly confirm how well the centre supports them in times of crisis, such as the breakdown of relationships, bereavement, disabilities within families, debt and housing problems, premature births and social isolation. One user stated that 'I don't know what I would have done without these people. One parent described the centre as my extended family.' Family support workers are allocated through a central system in Northwich to make sure the most appropriate, locally based

support worker is used. Staff are experienced in providing the wealth of good information and advice available. There is a directory of intervention and support services, produced by the Education Improvement Partnership that is well used by the centre and its partners and partners describe how much difference this has made to how effectively they can help and support families. For all booked sessions, trips and special events, a percentage of places are always kept back to give to targeted families in most need. The welfare needs of all children are identified well and any action taken to address them. Safety checks are made in the home and families are supported with any requirements for safety equipment. Information and advice about domestic violence is promoted well. Centre-based health and family support workers encourage families to disclose any concerns they may have. Staff also use information about domestic violence incidents, provided by centre partners, to target and support the families involved. The centre uses the information they have very well to target the potentially most vulnerable families, who are not necessarily in the 'most excluded' groups or in the most disadvantaged areas. This ensures that the safety and welfare of families in most need are not missed because they may be in a more affluent area. All children with a child protection plan are known to the centre.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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	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 and accountability arrangements by the local authority are satisfactory overall. It has been an unsettling time with many changes taking place that have impacted on resources and clarity of roles and responsibilities. More recently, improvements are evident and have resulted in partners working together more effectively to ensure the safeguarding and support of children and families, and also better trained staff. Resources have also increased after a period of understaffing and managers assuming multiple responsibilities. For example, the manager now has responsibility for two instead of three centres. The use of data is to be developed further so that accurate and comparable evaluations can be made against national indicators and the composition of the children's reach area. There are currently no central targets set by the local authority against national indicators. The professional supervision of staff is good at the centre.

Although aspects of improvement are initiated and implemented well, the fact that the local authority has yet to set centrally based targets means that the extent to

which ambitious targets drive improvement is no better than satisfactory. The centre manager has a good focus on seeking constant improvement to outcomes and provision and encourages the staff to achieve this. Self-evaluation identifies the main strengths and areas for development soundly, but as yet there is little data that demonstrates long term impact. The centre seeks users' evaluations of its provision but in insufficient detail to fully measure impact against targets.

Effective use is made of resources and secures good value for money. In spite of staff shortages and resources the centre has managed very well to deliver good outcomes and provision. The centre is well presented and some good quality training and learning resources are shared between centres. The cluster arrangement makes good use of resources. The deployment of staff and their associated training and development is making an impact particularly with regard to professional development and key management skills. This means that staff skills can be used very effectively and avoids duplication. An analysis has been completed of how well family support workers are achieving outcomes and this is potentially particularly useful.

The centre promotes equality of opportunity well; it celebrates diversity and has been very effective in bringing groups together that show mutual respect and understanding of each other's needs. The environment is very welcoming and friendly. Parents and carers self-refer for help and support showing the trust and respect they have for staff. Partners work very well together to respond to the different groups. Children with disabilities are supported well. Crèches are available to parents and carers attending sessions or appointments.

Safeguarding of children is well prioritised and good systems and practices are well embedded in the centre. Recruitment checks cover all staff, including external providers and volunteers. There is good communication with social care services, as a result of the reorganisation within the local authority. Appropriate risk assessments are completed to protect children, parents and carers and staff. All partners follow safeguarding practice and share information very effectively to protect children and families. Training and continuous development for staff in safeguarding is well planned and structured so that specialist training for staff who have particular roles is increasingly relevant.

The centre works closely with partnerships and other agencies to deliver services and to support children and their families. The two primary schools in the reach area are extremely complimentary about the quality of communication and information from the centre and this has a positive impact on the efficiency of service and agency use for families that use both the centre and the schools. Good use is made of school premises and resources to deliver family learning. Charities, such as Home Start and Action for Children, not only contribute to a family's support package but also train and develop volunteers from the centre. Adult community learning also works very effectively with the centre to plan and deliver learning across the children's centre cluster and also helps to support the development of community learning champions. Health services work well within the referral system to ensure potentially vulnerable

families are known to the centre.

There is a strong partnership with the local authority Education Improvement Partnership, which is improving training for staff and developing their expertise in, for example, Access to Autism, Child and Mental Health Services, first aid, speech and language. The centre manager sits on the steering group which ensures the needs of the community are at the forefront of development plans. Links with the local police have been developed well to share relevant information in order to target support. Recently there has not been a childminder coordinator which has lessened the impact on how well the centre can develop and assure the quality of childminder practice.

Parents and carers are engaged very well in services. They are well represented on the advisory board and make an impact on services. Parents feel empowered and feel they have ownership of their centre. Feedback from users shows high levels of satisfaction with services. Parents and carers are proactive in raising funds to contribute to the centre. The manager and staff are very effective at reaching out to engage all users of the centre. More is now being done to ensure they have the voice of children by the use of CAF cards that allow children to talk freely about their concerns and aspirations but these are not yet used to their full potential.

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	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	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	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	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

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 Leftwich Children's Centre on 12-13 May 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit we evaluated the centre's work and the quality of its resources, as well as its plans and documents. We talked to a number of you and the professionals that work with you. We found the centre to be a very welcoming environment with a great deal of good information and advice readily available. Staff are always on hand to help and support you and you feel very comfortable about talking to staff and disclosing any concerns you may have about your own family or the centre. We saw that the centre asks you regularly for your feedback after sessions and always acts upon this feedback to improve the services they offer to you. You feel part of the centre and have a well-established parents' forum and a presence on the advisory board that helps you to voice your opinions and interests. Some of you raise funds for the centre to improve the resources. Everyone was willing to share their experiences with us and your experiences are extremely positive especially with regard to how much your confidence has improved and how well you are engaged in further learning – in some cases to achieve accredited qualifications. You told us that through the centre you have a better understanding of how your children learn and develop and get a lot of guidance and support on how to manage challenging behaviour and make the most of learning with your children.

Your children are developing their personal and social skills well and are getting extra help when needed for their speech and language. There is a difference between in the areas covered by the children's centre in your children's level of learning when they enter school. This difference is gradually getting less as the centre helps to improve the communication and language of all children. You feel very safe in the centre and have had help and support to ensure your safety in the home. You appreciate the first aid courses that help you develop the skills and understanding to keep your family safe.

You also told us how much you enjoy the activities and have great fun and make new friends. The services have stopped some of you from feeling isolated. You particularly enjoy the trips and seasonal events arranged for you. There's a good range of activities for you to choose from at this centre and other local children's centres to meet your needs. You learn more about healthy lifestyles at the centre but more could be done to encourage and support you to continue with breastfeeding, and also to reduce the number of children who are overweight or obese, and to stop smoking. You feel very well supported by the centre, particularly in times of crisis and the centre is good at signposting you to others who can support you. The centre is good at working with partners in health, education and the community to make sure that they assess your needs properly and arrange a personalised plan of support.

The people in charge of running the centre are doing a good job. The manager has worked hard to make sure that everything the children's centre does for you will make a difference to you and your families and the area in which you live. Staff ensure services continue to improve. They work well with the centre's partners and for the benefit of all families – particularly those of you who are most vulnerable. They need to make sure that staff have clear targets to work towards and be more effective at evaluating the impact services are having on you and your children. There are good resources for learning at the centre and for use in the home. The manager makes the most of the skills of centre staff as well as encouraging you to contribute by volunteering to use the skills you have. Safeguarding of children is a high priority and staff are well trained in this aspect. Managers produce guidance for you at all times to keep your family safe.

There have been many changes and improvements as the local authority has changed their structure and management of children's centres. Although there are more changes to come there is a clear focus of continuing to improve the centre's services. The local authority needs to use the data it collects more effectively so that more challenging targets can be set in order to measure the extent to which services are making a real difference.

The centre effectively includes everyone and is good at promoting equality and celebrating the diversity of the users. There is good community cohesion, as a result of the services and activities and school holiday activities has had a positive effect on reducing crime locally. All of you show respect for other users and support each other very well. The centre staff look at data carefully to help them understand better who is using the centre and they then use this data to make changes and improvements.

We have asked the manager, her senior staff and the local authority to look at how they can make things even better.

The most important things to do are:

- to make sure that healthy lifestyles are promoted better to increase breast feeding, lower obesity rates and help support the cessation of smoking
- to improve self-evaluation and develop a plan of action for the centre that is based on the targets set by the local authority
- to make good use of national data that reflects how well the community is improving its health, learning skills for the future, safety of users and economic stability
- to strengthen governance by setting central targets that provide guidance to the centre about what needs improving and that hold it to account for its long-term impact on the community it serves.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We are very grateful and wish you every success in the future.

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