

Inspection report for Littleport Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Cambridgeshire |
| Inspection number | 365693 |
| Inspection dates | 14–15 June 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Daniel Grant AI |

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| Centre governance | The local authority |
| Centre leader | Heidi Welch |
| Date of previous inspection | N/A |
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| Linked school | Littleport Community Primary School 110637 |
| Linked early years and childcare | Littleport Pre-School 221721 |

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 primary school 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, other senior leaders and staff, and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were also held with members of the advisory board, parents and carers and service users. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Littleport Children's Centre opened in 2007 as part of a local Sure Start programme and is situated in the north-east of Cambridgeshire. The centre serves several communities across a mainly rural area, which includes the small town of Littleport and several small villages.

The governance of the centre is through the local authority and an advisory board which advises all centres in the cluster. The advisory board has parental and community representation and is led by a volunteer.

Littleport Children's Centre is a phase two centre and provides the full core offer including family support, child and family health services and links with Jobcentre

Plus. The Centre serves families who live in 3 wards, two of which are in the 10% to 30% most deprived in the County.

Almost all of the local families are of White British heritage with very few from minority ethnic groups. The area has a mix of housing types with approximately one quarter of the families living in social housing. Unemployment rates and the number of families on benefits are higher than elsewhere in the region.

The proportion of children with disabilities is about average for the region. In parts of the area served by the centre, the rate of recorded crime, including domestic violence is high for the region, as is anti-social behaviour. A large number of children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with a lower range of skills than expected for their age.

The children’s centre team works with other professionals including health visitors, midwives and speech and language therapists to deliver services to users of the centre.

Other organisations based at the site are Littleport Community Primary School and Littleport Pre-school. The centre provides additional childcare through its crèche facilities for parents attending activities and training at the centre. The centre manager’s post is currently vacant. A deputy manager employed by the local authority manages all aspects of the provision.

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

Littleport Children’s Centre meets the needs of users satisfactorily. Users of the centre value the way staff understand and give priority to meeting the needs of each individual child and their families. They appreciate the welcoming, stimulating environment that it offers which underpins the good learning and development it provides. All of the centre’s users appreciate the approachable staff who form trusted working relationships with families. This is helping to establish a positive image of

the centre within the community which contributes to satisfactory and increasing attendance rates of local families.

The centre's deputy manager is currently leading the centre because the manager's post is vacant. She has used her experience at the centre well to establish effective arrangements for the continued delivery of integrated services which improve lives in the local area. The advisory board is becoming increasingly effective and staff work hard to provide and improve the centre's work. The centre provides effective and enjoyable activities for children and families. Morale is high and relationships between staff and users are strong.

Partnerships are becoming more effective and generally lead to positive outcomes for the centre's users. The centre provides a range of services that are increasing the knowledge of parents and carers about ways to promote learning, childcare and development through play. Users transfer ideas and experience from what they do at the centre to their family life at home. This promotes healthy lifestyles well, reinforces good learning and development and helps keep their children safe. Outcomes for users are generally satisfactory. Partnership arrangements to support centre users seeking to improve their employment prospects through learning and training are underdeveloped, and access to support from Jobcentre Plus is not sufficiently promoted.

The integration of services is improving and the transfer of information between key partners is usually prompt and effective to the benefit of families and individuals. Partnership arrangements to improve speech and language development, and with health providers are well developed. The centre is an inclusive setting and promotes equality sufficiently. Provision is expanding to meet the needs of the community and this is having a positive impact for many users, but there is a need to do more to identify and meet the needs of the most vulnerable and those who are hard to reach. The team works well to provide outreach services where it can assess and meet the needs of parents.

The centre is working hard to keep users engaged and increase the numbers of parents who are taking advantage of the range of opportunities, but not enough is done to encourage a greater number of families, including the most vulnerable to use the centre. Assessments are very thorough; as a result, staff identify users' needs correctly. Staff and other adults give appropriate attention to safeguarding users and their families. The centre is a safe place to be, and recent changes to the way visitors enter and exit the building have increased the effectiveness of how staff control the centre to help keep users safe. Risk assessments are conducted regularly to ensure the building and equipment are safe to use. These have helped identify concerns over the height of the perimeter fence and prompted a more detailed risk assessment, which is to be kept under review.

Senior leaders and the centre staff have a good understanding of the strengths in provision and how the centre could improve. Actions taken have had a discernible impact. For instance, an increased focus on supporting teenage parents has been

particularly successful, with growing numbers of users identified and improved outcomes for these users. Action planning and evaluation arrangements for this area of work are very detailed and effective. However, not all written action plans are detailed enough to fully support staff in other areas of work. For example, they are well aware that further work is required to reach more families in the area served by the centre, but have not yet established a thorough enough written plan which describes how this will be achieved. There have been increased efforts to establish more accurate use of data to better understand the needs of the communities served by the centre. However, this is at an early stage and there is a need to further develop the collection and analysis of data to more accurately target the centre's work.

Staff are becoming increasingly effective in measuring success and good efforts are underway to refine and further develop systems to do this. The centre is increasing its success in improving outcomes for users. The staff team is well established, has good experience and works effectively with users. The centre's management team is particularly effective and the local authority is providing increasingly strong leadership, useful quality-assurance processes and advice, which contribute to the centre's capacity to build on these successes in the future and further improve outcomes for families and children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the effectiveness of action planning by providing more detail about how targets are to be reached.
- Increase users' participation at the centre by identifying and encouraging more families to attend, particularly those from vulnerable groups.
- Further develop the arrangements to collect and analyse local data to more accurately understand the needs of the community and better target vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups.
- Develop further and promote effective partnerships to provide support for users who wish to improve their education, receive training or seek employment.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the new security arrangements regularly to control entry to and exit from the building, and review the risk assessment of the perimeter fence.

How good are outcomes for users?

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Outcomes for many users are improving because Littleport Children's Centre provides an increasing range of activities that are developed in partnership with other agencies and families. Strong arrangements have been established with the

midwifery team and a lactation consultant, who work very closely with centre staff to provide expert support for new and expectant mothers. This is well targeted and very effective. As a result, breastfeeding rates have improved in the past year. Users at the centre receive good advice to make healthier lifestyle choices through a series of interesting and fun activities. The staff team and nursery nurse ensure that children and their parents are well supported to recognise the importance of balanced food choices. Participation in many of the health-related activities is improving for groups that are potentially vulnerable. Specialist information and services such as immunisations, breastfeeding advice, dental care and smoking cessation are readily available to all centre users. Evaluations and discussions with parents clearly identify the positive impact of these programmes. One parent commented, 'There is always something new to learn at the centre, which we try out at home. Sometimes, very simple things make a big difference.

The centre's good relationships with families and their children allow staff to identify any safety concerns within families and intervene quickly. Case studies and interviews with parents show how staff promote home safety and awareness of road safety effectively. Parents learn to improve safety in their homes and for their children by watching and listening to staff. In addition, access to parenting programmes improves relationships and behaviour, which supports successful transition to school. The well-trained and experienced staff ensure that work undertaken with children who are subject to child protection plans and those who are looked after is well coordinated and sensitive to concerns. The centre is also working well with the local authority's children's social care service to deliver the Step-Down process, supporting families as they progress and become less involved with statutory services. The centre staff are aware of an increase in the reporting of domestic violence from within the reach area and, together with partners, have prioritised this work. The Common Assessment Framework has only recently been introduced in the locality and is already providing a useful approach to the already successful assessment practices.

Children at the centre access a stimulating and diverse range of activities which includes outdoor provision that promotes physical health, allowing them to take and manage risks. Children are interested and engaged in their environment and try new activities with confidence. Good attention is given to ensuring all children achieve well and develop good personal and social skills. Parents', carers' and children's enjoyment is evident through the increasing attendance at the Family Club and other outreach activities. Users are not sufficiently involved in the running of the centre, but their suggestions are valued and used to shape the sessions offered. Children's behaviour is good as are relationships between adults and children across all settings. Transitions are particularly well managed.

Staff engage with partners to ensure users receive accessible advice and information to help them make important decisions, such as how to access specialist counselling or seek protection from violence. However, there is insufficient advice and guidance available for issues such as drug dependency or alcohol misuse. Generous support is given to parents by the staff who have high aspirations for all centre users. The few

users who attend the adult education classes have made satisfactory progress and most achieve their qualifications, but they do not have a progression plan for the next stage in their learning. Opportunities for adults to increase their employability are underdeveloped and, although a good partnership arrangement with Jobcentre Plus has been developed, it is not promoted well enough to users.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

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| 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 | 3 |
| 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?

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A range of very effective assessment processes is used to identify the needs of children and their families. In most cases, assessment of needs is undertaken at an early stage and is used to ensure progress can be measured. Assessments undertaken by specialists in midwifery, child development and speech and language assessments are used particularly well. The Common Assessment Framework has brought increased value to the way the centre works to ensure full integration of services. Assessments are accurate and precisely identify needs because staff and their partners are experienced. Assessment practice is effective and helps staff focus their efforts on meeting the needs of users.

The centre provides an increasing range of services to meet the needs of families in the area. Sessions are well planned and effective in engaging users in interesting activities such as groups to encourage children to improve their speaking and listening skills and helping parents to enjoy and better understand parenthood. Crèche facilities are very good and provide parents with good opportunities to make friends and support each other. Staff and leaders constantly seek ways to identify the needs of specific groups and then adapt services to meet their needs and increase attendance. Fathers have the opportunity to attend a group specifically for them and an increasing number of fathers do attend other sessions, particularly the Family Club.

The centre recognises even more could be done to engage the hardest-to-reach families, and they are working with partners to ensure that all those who want to, can access services. Satisfactory progress is being made working with partners to gain the information needed to better target families in most need of the centre's support.

The quality of individual support for families is generally satisfactory and sometimes good, and in many cases is available for as long as needed. Strategies are in place to ensure parents receive personalised support for their individual circumstances. This gives parents the confidence to attend the centre where positive relationships encourage them to take part in memorable and purposeful activities such as 'Cook and Eat' sessions. This is reflected by one parent who commented, 'The staff have helped me a lot. They have helped me cope and increased my self-confidence.' The care, guidance and support offered by the centre are becoming more accurately targeted at children and families who are the hardest to reach or most in need.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| 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 | 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?

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Leadership of Littleport Children's Centre is becoming more effective as the local authority establishes written agreements with all partnership agencies, provides more accessible and accurate data and supports the centre with advice on how to improve. The centre's management team is working with staff, users and partners to develop a clear vision for the centre. The staff team is well motivated and enthusiastic. Staff work hard to make a difference to children and families in the local area.

Inclusion is given priority in the centre and is used in planning all activities and programmes to ensure families can benefit from attending the centre. Users at the centre view staff positively, which helps to establish trust, and builds their confidence quickly when learning new skills. The centre is determined to make a difference for all groups, particularly those who may be subject to discrimination. Children with disabilities benefit from well-targeted support with transport provided to help them attend specialised support groups. The centre promotes equal opportunities, and

diversity is celebrated. Robust procedures are followed by a range of professional agencies to monitor children’s welfare and to provide appropriate support where necessary.

Attention is given to ensuring that staff are suitable and safe to work with children. Clear protocols are implemented by staff and other agencies with regard to reporting any concerns relating to children’s welfare or possible abuse. Staff are well trained to identify and deal swiftly with concerns relating to safety and emotional well-being and have good levels of experience and knowledge. Processes for Criminal Records Bureau and recruitment checks are in place and comply with the local authority’s requirements.

The centre has a satisfactory and improving approach to evaluating its effectiveness. Careful consideration is given to adopting and developing services for families which can be evaluated. Sessions are thoroughly evaluated by staff and users, and careful analysis is used to shape further work. The centre’s development plan links broadly to area-wide priorities in order to improve the provision and outcomes for its users. However, not all targets are based on a strong analysis of the data because the centre and its partners are at an early stage in developing processes to do this. Sharing of information to help establish targets has improved in recent months, but the centre recognises more should be done to develop the use of local information and data. Senior leaders have identified appropriate priorities, such as support for teenage parents, but written plans lack sufficient detail about specific actions. The self-evaluation process is used effectively, and correctly identifies most of the areas requiring improvement. However, staff and users are not directly involved in the self-evaluation process. Governance of the centre is satisfactory; the advisory board was only recently formed and is not yet involved in planning and reviewing performance targets.

In most areas of the centre’s work, partnership working is effective but arrangements to support users who seek to improve their training, education or employability are underdeveloped. Good use is made of shared resources to develop services where needs are identified. The centre’s management team deploys staff and resources well across the setting to provide flexible and responsive provision and ensure that the centre is increasingly used well. As a result, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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| 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 |

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| 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 | 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

Discussions were held with the inspectors of Littleport Community Primary School on the final day of the concurrent inspection and their findings to that point have been taken into account in this report.

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 Littleport Children's Centre on 14–15 June 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We thank those of you who helped us with our work. Your information is very important to us. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you, your children, members of staff and other professionals who work with the centre. We also received a letter from a parent who was unable to meet us.

The children's centre provides a satisfactory range of services that are helping children and families in Littleport and the surrounding area. Throughout the inspection, children, families and other users were keen to tell us how the centre had helped them. We were particularly impressed by the case studies that showed the

difference that the centre is making. We really enjoyed speaking to some of you about the ways that things you do at the centre have changed some of the ways you do things at home.

We found the centre to have several strengths, including the actions taken to support you and your children's health and the enjoyment you have in learning new ways to help your children develop. The centre is working very closely with many organisations, such as schools and health and social care professionals, to improve the range of services that are available to you. You gave us good examples of how the centre has helped you.

The centre offers an increasing range of programmes and activities, including those aimed at improving the health of people in your local communities. It is very good at helping new mothers who choose to breastfeed their babies. It tells them about the help available on breastfeeding. The centre is also good at helping you to encourage your children to develop their speech and language.

The centre's management team has satisfactory procedures to make sure staff and volunteers are suitable and well trained to work with your children. Some of you explained just how important the centre is in your families' lives. You told us that staff listen and help to get you the right help and support. The support is provided quickly and professionals and others work closely together to support families and children. This includes teenage parents and parents of children with disabilities.

Children make good progress because they engage well in a range of interesting activities. This helps them to be ready for their move to school. The centre staff make sure they check whether you have enjoyed any courses or sessions in the centre and they respond by making changes based on your comments. We saw that a few of you take advantage of courses to improve literacy and numeracy, but opportunities to gain experience and qualifications that will help those of you looking for paid work are very limited and we have asked the centre to increase them.

The centre's management team knows that to make the centre even better they need to make sure that they have better information about the things most needed by families and the difference that the centre is making in your lives. The centre's management team want to use this to make more detailed plans for more activities and also to ensure that even more people can use the good things that it is providing. Staff are very keen to ensure the centre is as safe as it can be for you and your children and have decided that the fence around the outdoor play area will be checked to make sure it is suitable to keep your children safe. They have also decided that all visitors to the centre will use the main entrance. This is to make sure that they have more control over who enters and leaves the building.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to speak to us, we are very grateful and wish you every success for the future.

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