

Inspection report for LEO Cubs Children's Centre

Local authority	Luton
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Leo Cubs (Linking Early Opportunities) URN EY267246

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.

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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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and other staff, parents, representatives from the local authority, managers of other services, including health and the voluntary sector, and members of the management board.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation information, its plan for improvement, health and safety records, case studies and data.

Information about the centre

Leo Cubs Children's Centre, based in one small family room, comprises a phase one Surestart children's centre providing the full core offer including education, care and family services. Its reach area is one of high deprivation and unemployment within the 10% most disadvantaged areas in the country. Cases of child poverty and the proportions of families on benefits and/or living in unsuitable or overcrowded housing are extremely high. The children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are well below expectations. The area is a long-established multi-cultural community with the highest proportion of families from Asian heritages. A mixed-migrant population, relatively new to the area, is bringing steadily increasing numbers of new arrivals from countries in Eastern Europe, refugees and asylum seekers. Trustees of Leo Cubs charity manage the centre on behalf of the local authority and sit on the management board that governs the centre. The local authority is restructuring its children's centres from March 2012; proposals are currently at the consultation stage.

The centre provides registered childcare for children aged from birth to four years. This provision was inspected separately in October 2007.

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 families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Leo Cubs is a satisfactory children's centre. It is a calm, inclusive, welcoming place. Staff promote equality strongly and tackle discrimination earnestly. They are very knowledgeable and well-informed of the different religious and cultural traditions, beliefs and protocols existing within the centre's extremely diverse community. These are taken into account fully, winning the trust and confidence of families they support. Parents and their children enjoy coming to this safe environment, with effective practice in safeguarding evident in all respects, where they develop a good understanding of dangers and how to keep themselves safe. They receive good-quality, individualised provision to help their children learn and develop satisfactorily coupled with good care, guidance and support. Families play, have fun and learn together happily. Children make good progress towards the early learning goals from their starting points by the end of Nursery. Good information, advice and guidance for parents on child development improve their understanding. Parents know how to keep themselves healthy and how to improve their children's emotional well-being, diet and dental health. Adults make rapid progress in learning to speak English which helps them to advance their educational and personal development. Some have subsequently achieved qualifications and moved on to find suitable employment.

Good-quality provision was evident in all observations of activities held at the centre and the centre's outreach work. However, the centre has not kept accurate records of the impact of its work. Inspectors were unable to secure unequivocal evidence that families have achieved good outcomes over time. This is why inspectors judged that outcomes are satisfactory yet provision is good.

The centre acknowledges its weakness in evaluating the impact of its provision on outcomes for families. Its systems for collecting and analysing data are too haphazard. Data are difficult to access, interpret and use to inform future planning and to set challenging targets for improvement. The centre has only just begun to gather information on whether parents are in or out of work so that it can gauge the number of children in workless households accessing activities. Even so, the centre knows its community well and those identified as in most need of intervention and

support. For example, it recognises that too few fathers participate in activities. It has been too complacent about documenting evidence to show how participation and contact rates have improved over time. An effective system for monitoring children's progress towards the early learning goals has been developed for implementation imminently. Effective tracking is already in place in the nursery to show that children make good progress from their starting points. The centre is able to demonstrate a satisfactory track record of helping adults to reach health and education services, particularly those for whom English is a barrier and those who lack understanding of how systems work, what their entitlements are and how to access them.

The centre's governance has changed in the recent past to a management board made up of trustees, parents, a local authority representative and centre staff. Some members are new and do not yet understand fully the accountability arrangements because they have not received training. The board contributes to strategic planning which is informed by the centre's self-evaluation, the accuracy of which is variable. The centre's lack of focus on measuring the impact of its work on outcomes for families has resulted in some overly-generous judgements. Even so, as a result of its self-evaluation, the centre realised that it needed to change direction and concentrate on its outreach and partnerships work to engage with more families. The local authority has responded well, supporting the centre with additional staffing to accommodate this move. Numbers are now steadily rising as a direct result of targeted, good-quality outreach work. There is a trend of improvement especially in the last six months despite a few remaining weaknesses. The centre demonstrates satisfactory capacity to enable this improvement to continue.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the proportions of the most excluded and potentially vulnerable groups engaging and participating in activities, especially fathers and children in workless households.
- Develop robust systems for collecting and analysing data to inform strategic planning and service provision ensuring that:
 - all in-reach and out-of-reach figures are included as well as signposting and referrals to other centres or agencies
 - the centre works closely with the local authority in developing its database and setting quantifiable targets for improvement
 - analysis of data shows the centre's engagement with its target groups and how contact and participation rates improve over time.
- Provide training for members of the management board to develop consistent understanding of arrangements for governance and accountability.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Parents and carers are developing their understanding of healthy lifestyles satisfactorily by attending activities such as baby massage sessions. Here babies

engage well with their parents and enjoy a sense of calm. Parents bond very closely with their children and learn techniques quickly to relax their babies and promote their well-being. One mother commented that the sessions have helped to reduce colic. The numbers of families accessing dental health service is rising steadily and their oral hygiene is improving rapidly as a result. Parents learn the importance of a healthy diet for all the family through the healthy under-fives programme, open days attended by a dietician. Some families are purchasing vitamins at the centre to improve their children's health.

Children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others and they make satisfactory progress in their personal development. Children in the nursery make good progress in developing their skills to help them when they start school. Uptake is high for courses offered in parenting skills where parents learn new strategies to manage their children's behaviour so that it improves. Parents' awareness and understanding of how to keep their children safe from potential hazards in the centre and at home are good. They are confident in sharing concerns with staff. Those attending the 'Changing Lives' programme reported that they felt safe and secure physically and emotionally; they were able to avoid their situations spiralling into mental health issues and family life had improved. Some participants gained so much confidence that they were able to return to studying or working thus improving their economic stability and independence.

Families express their views confidently about the activities they attend through discussions with staff and representatives on the parents' forum. In sessions, parents from different cultures and backgrounds demonstrate respect and tolerance towards each other contributing to cohesion in the community.

Adults and children who speak English as an additional language and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well by bilingual staff ensuring that they progress satisfactorily in developing skills for their future lives. They progress quickly in English classes for speakers of other languages.

A few parents have progressed to becoming volunteers in the centre to develop skills and enhance opportunities for their future employment. A very few adults using the centre are engaged in its governance or contribute through the recently-formed parents' forum.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target 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 children and parents, including those from	3

target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families. It is particularly effective in promoting health and safety. The centre's small, yet welcoming family room is used well and is particularly inviting for individual consultations. Families benefit from programmes and activities that are tailored well to meet their individual needs and circumstances. They are encouraged to attend training that is matched carefully to their starting points and builds their confidence steadily. The centre celebrates their achievements; parents confirm that this has boosted their self-esteem and spurred them on to learn more. For example, some parents attending parenting classes have now become facilitators themselves. Parents commented that they appreciate this good confidential guidance and support which makes a discernable difference to their lives. The centre responds instantly at times of crisis often going the extra mile to ensure families' safety and well-being. One parent said: 'I know I can come here anytime. These are kind and charming people. Their doors are always open. They have been brilliant.' The centre's long-term support package directed her to adult learning and she is now in work. Her current goal is 'to become even more educated'. Families using the centre confirm the positive impact that services, they access, targeted to meet individual needs, have on their life and the resulting improvement in coping with issues that arise as part of day-to-day family life. Provision to help children to learn and develop is good. In its last inspection the quality of childcare was judged good in all respects. Where there is space, the nursery provides crèche facilities to enable parents to participate in sessions who would not otherwise be able to attend.

Staff at the centre run 'stay and play' and other activities in a wide range of locations. At the same time they provide good information on what Leo Cubs and other services in the area are able to offer. Outreach work is of good-quality and effective. Individual home visits enable families' needs to be assessed carefully. The centre's emphasis on outreach in recent months has had a notable impact on improving the numbers of families it engages with. Door knocking on every home in the centre's reach has enabled staff to make contact with many new families especially those most vulnerable and in need of support. The centre's proactive approach in advertising its services through, for example, recruitment drives at the local supermarket are proving successful in boosting numbers. In one three-hour session during the inspection, twenty-nine new families left contact details prior to their registration. The range of services, activities and opportunities for users is

satisfactory and improving steadily as the centre raises its profile in the community. The centre has been particularly successful in engaging with a group of very vulnerable young women at a local refuge who are increasingly showing interest in participating in activities and the offer of free childcare. Staff, parents and staff in other agencies confirm that the centre directs families to other services whenever appropriate. However, the centre does not keep careful records of this aspect of its work.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre manager is supported by a skilful, cohesive team who are passionate about their work and deeply committed to serving the community well. The centre's priorities and targets for improvement currently focus on what is provided rather than on the difference it is making. Success criteria are not precise enough to be measurable and demonstrate that the centre's performance is improving. The centre meets the statutory requirements that apply to it. The centre's safeguarding arrangements and procedures for vetting staff and volunteers are good. The centre responds swiftly and effectively to support. If necessary, it takes action to support parents and their children experiencing domestic violence or young men and women living in fear of forced marriages. Staff are trained and up to date with safeguarding requirements. Good arrangements ensure that staff are safe when working in the building and out in the community. All partners and organisations are aware of the centre's expectations and policy. Leaders and managers ensure that the centre is accessible and accommodating to all, including family members with special educational needs and/or disabilities, especially those suffering from mental health issues. Diversity is celebrated, valued and represented in the staffing profile. The centre makes a valuable contribution to community cohesion. The management board lacks confidence and relies too much on the centre manager for guidance in decision-making. The board has not received training so that it understands fully its role and responsibilities and the contribution it should be making in holding the centre to account as well as in supporting it. The relationship between the centre and the local authority has been strained at times over the years but the centre's leaders and managers understand the urgency for a stronger partnership to be developed to assist them in shaping the centre's future success. Provision or services are used well by a satisfactory range of families within the reach area. Numbers are rising steadily as a direct result of effective outreach work. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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

Outcomes of the inspection of Leo Cubs (Linking Early Opportunities) 31 October 2007.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the LEO Cubs Children's Centre on 27–28 September 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Like you, we were greeted with a warm welcome when we arrived at the centre and found staff very friendly and helpful. The centre promotes equality and diversity well. Everyone is included, treated with the utmost respect and able to access all that the centre provides in a safe setting. The centre always puts your safety first and that of

your children and makes sure that the staff are always safe too. We were pleased to hear that you are very satisfied with the service you receive. We were particularly impressed by how well the centre staff work together to ensure that you receive the right support and advice quickly. The quality of care, guidance and support that you benefit from is good. Some of you talked about the 'Changing Lives' programme which has had a huge impact in improving your health and well-being. You told us that it has also improved your enjoyment of family life and, in some cases, it helped to boost your confidence to attend other courses or find employment. Others told us about times when the centre staff have stepped in to assist you in times of crisis. We found that that very few fathers are using the centre, and that not enough is done to encourage families, where both parents are not working, to come along and join in. The space in the centre is small (but comfortable) and we think the centre is right to have changed the emphasis of its work so that staff now go out into the community to reach more families.

Despite the good quality of provision available to you, the centre does not do itself justice in showing that the work it does makes a difference to your lives and those of your children. This is because it does not have suitable systems in place to record the numbers of families it reaches and the different groups within the community that are engaging with the centre. We have asked the local authority to help the centre to develop a good database for the future. We also found that leadership and management are too dependent upon the centre manager and we have asked that the management board receives training to improve its effectiveness.

It was such a pleasure to meet you during the inspection. Those of you we spoke with were full of praise for the centre staff and we can see why. They are very dedicated people. We hope that you, your children and many more parents and carers who live locally will continue to enjoy and benefit from all of the services available to you in the future. Thank you for contributing to the inspection.

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