

Inspection report for The Lawns Children's Centre

Local authority	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Inspection number	383559
Inspection dates	28–29 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Kubiak HMI

Centre leader	Sarah Cottle and Carolyn Blackwell
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	The Lawns Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Star Pre Nursery EY339401

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.

Report published: October 2011



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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.

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the children's 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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, users of the centre, representatives from partner organisations, the advisory board and the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The Lawns Children's Centre is a Phase 2 centre which was designated in 2008. Also on the site is the Lawns Nursery School, the Stars Pre Nursery and the Family Friends organisation. Space at the centre includes a reception area, training room, health room, large hall, office, hot desk room, kitchen and toilets. The building is wheelchair-accessible throughout and there is a lift between floors. There is a small outdoor area to which the children have access. The centre opens weekdays, from 9.00am to 3.30pm, for 48 weeks of the year. It also opens some Saturday mornings.

The responsibility of head of the children's centre is currently shared between the executive head and the acting headteacher of the school. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the centre manager. A children's centre sub-committee, which is part of, and reports to, the school governing body is responsible for the work of the centre.

There is a small staff team, with many working across the children's centre and nursery school. Staff are employed by the local authority. The centre runs services directly on the premises. In addition, it commissions some services from local private and voluntary organisations.

The centre's catchment area is mixed in terms of deprivation. The number of children under five living in workless households is slightly below the national average, with the number of families in receipt of Working Family Tax Credit approximately seven per cent. The local population is mostly White British, with a small but growing percentage of ethnic minority families including of Eastern European origin. Some armed-services families are housed within the centre's catchment area. Most children enter early years provision with a narrower range of skills and abilities than those typically expected for their age.

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

The Lawn's Children's Centre is making a satisfactory contribution to improving outcomes for users. It offers a friendly, accessible environment and the safeguarding of all who use the centre is a priority. Procedures, including risk assessments and accident reporting, ensure that the centre provides a safe environment for children and their parents and carers. The security of the building is good and users report that they feel safe at the centre. Safer recruitment procedures are robust. The outreach work commissioned through 'Family Friends' is having a good impact on those families who receive it. The outreach team also supports some users in engaging in the work of the centre, in close liaison with centre staff.

Links with The Lawns Nursery School, the Stars Pre-Nursery and 'Family Friends', which are based on the centre site, are good. The quality of the links with other organisations is variable. The centre offers a range of universal services. Groups are run at the centre, mainly by centre staff. Some groups which operate at the centre are run by private providers, for which users are charged. Groups are well attended and, as a result, parents often arrive early and queue. Parenting programmes are effective in supporting the centre's target groups and those families most in need of intervention and support. However not all groups are yet sufficiently focused. Many users spoke very highly about the work of the centre and the benefits they obtain from attending. As one parent commented, 'it's a great opportunity to socialise with others, there is lots to do.' Staff encourage feedback from users through the

suggestions box and through written and verbal feedback at the end of sessions. Opportunities for parents to contribute to the work of the centre, and to be involved in shaping services and governance, are limited.

The leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory. Staff have an understanding of the individual needs of the users who attend the centre and there is a commitment to improve outcomes for users in the reach area. They have identified some of their target groups, and are able to demonstrate where their work, particularly in relation to outreach services, is having an impact on improving outcomes. The centre's is aware of areas for development however these are not always well linked to their service delivery plan.

Although the centre welcomes all parts of the community this is not promoted and reflected consistently in resources, literature and displays. Activities such as the 'Hello' song introduce children and their parents to different languages but centre information is only available in English.

Limited data is available from the local authority although some has recently become available at centre level, for example on obesity levels. The lack of sufficient data from the local authority specific to the reach area restricts the centre's ability to effectively target resources, measure its success and plan future services. The centre's service delivery plan lacks some details of specific measures and is not consistently linked to the centre's self-evaluation. The centre is becoming more proactive in using all of its own data, along with other information including feedback from users, case studies and knowledge of the community to effectively plan services. As a result, its capacity to improve is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop systems to:
 - provide a more effective range of services which will provide greater support to target groups and those most in need of intervention and support
 - monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these services and be able to show the impact of these services on improving outcomes.
- Improve user's engagement in the work of the centre, including shaping services and governance.
- Strengthen equality and diversity across the centre, ensuring that it is reflective of the reach area and the wider community, inclusive of all groups, and integral to the work of the centre.
- The local authority should improve the quality of data available to enable the centre to more accurately identify target groups and those most in need of intervention.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre has limited evidence to demonstrate the impact of its work. However, information including case studies and the data available demonstrate the positive contributions the centre is making to improve outcomes for its users through the services it provides. Most parents and carers using the centre develop a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Activities such as music, singing and movement sessions enable children to develop their physical skills through participation in exercise. The recently developed secure outdoor play space also encourages children to exercise, supporting their health and well-being well. Weekly breastfeeding support sessions at the centre are offered to mothers who benefit from the guidance available. The centre requests data on breastfeeding rates on registration forms although this is not collated.

Staff are committed to promoting safety at the centre and as a result most children and families feel safe when accessing the centre. There is a shared entrance with the nursery school and private nursery provider and entry phone systems ensure that the facilities are secure. Staff act as good role models and children behave very well at the centre. Users are well informed about safeguarding as they are given information regarding the centre's safeguarding policy and procedure with their registration pack. There is evidence of improved outcomes for most families who receive support from the Family Friends outreach service.

Children enjoy and actively engage in the activities at the centre. The centre teacher also works in the nursery school and as a result there are close links. The planning of groups such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Snack and Chat' are linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage and resources are shared between the school and the centre. The planning is linked to topics and parents and carers are given information about activities they can do with their children at home. However, there are missed opportunities to individualise the planning to meet the needs of the range of children attending the groups, especially the younger children. Parents and carers enjoy the opportunity to play alongside their children and receive support and guidance where necessary. One parent commented that the centre is a '...great place to come and find out how to develop babies.' Children benefit when moving between the services due to the effective transition arrangements and close working, particularly between the on-site early years provision. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage around 63% of children achieve at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage, which is lower than average, with communication, language and literacy and creative development the weaker areas.

The centre has developed a good volunteer scheme which includes a detailed induction process. There is some evidence of volunteers going on to future training and to paid employment. Data available demonstrates that the achievement gap between children is narrowing. The centre has been successful in engaging male carers. The group runs on a Saturday to enable worker fathers to attend. As the centre has identified this as one of its target groups they are looking at how to

improve on participation rates at the centre, for example by providing a new group for expectant fathers.

Parents and carers are encouraged to feed back on the sessions they attend. They are also involved in satisfaction surveys and questionnaires about the centre's work. Parents and carers have some opportunities to be involved in the shaping of services and the decision-making of the centre. Some decisions are made without thorough careful consideration about where changes will bring about the most impact. The centre has identified the need to involve parents and carers more in their work as a priority and has begun to look at how it can effectively do this.

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	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and 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?

3

The centre currently provides a range of activities that satisfactorily meet the needs of those users who currently access it. Groups such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Snack and Chat' are well attended and, on occasions, users are unable to be accommodated as groups are over-subscribed. Groups such as 'Strictly for Dads' have been effective in engaging male carers more effectively and the centre has seen a fifty per cent increase in this area. The recently established 'Dads to be' is designed to engage more male carers at an earlier stage at the centre. To date, services have been developed based on staff's knowledge of the local community; the centre recognises the need to allocate resources more specifically for target groups and those most in need of intervention. Available data and information demonstrates that targeted services are having an impact and the centre is keen to develop these areas further. For example, the positive impact of the outreach service is clearly demonstrated through case studies of their interventions with families most in need of support.

The outreach service helps to identify some of those families who are not accessing the centre. Parents and carers who feel nervous or anxious about attending the

centre are supported at their initial visit, and if required, subsequent visits. Centre staff ensure that they are available to greet families. They use referral forms to record information from parents and carers and to identify action they have taken to support them. They have been trained in using the Common Assessment Framework for individual users to assist in signposting to appropriate services; however, they have not yet instigated it with any families.

Parents and carers highly value the care, guidance and support they receive at the centre. They commented to inspectors that 'Staff are always helpful' and that one of the reasons they attend the centre is because of the '...warm and friendly staff'. Established links with some partner organisations ensure that staff effectively signpost users to other services such as Family Friends, midwives and health visitors. Where links are not so well established, for example with social services or adult education, this impacts on centre users.

Parents and carers are encouraged to feed back during all groups at the centre and staff review these in order to make improvements. Parents and carers also contribute to satisfaction surveys. Analysis of feedback is not always sufficiently focused on improving the provision. Changes as a result of feedback from parents are not clearly communicated back to users and others within the reach area.

Information is available throughout the centre about the services and activities, both at the centre and provided in the wider community. Basic information is available on the centre's website.

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	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre has very recently been through changes within the senior leadership team and these are not yet fully embedded. The advisory committee, which is a subgroup of the school governing body, is established and is beginning to hold the centre's leaders to account. Centre staff are committed and enthusiastic about their work. Those involved with the centre at all levels are keen to develop services further, although sometimes they lack focus on identifying where their support will have the most impact on improving outcomes. The centre's service delivery plan lacks specific performance measures and does not fully identify all of the centre's priority groups. The limited range of specific performance measures and centre

specific data, are impacting on the centre’s ability to effectively target services and become more effective.

The premises are well maintained and secure. Staff are vigilant in maintaining a safe environment and safety information is clearly displayed around the centre. Rigorous recruitment procedures for staff ensure that all are appropriately checked and cleared to work with children. The centre ensures that staff who use the centre from partner agencies and commissioned service staff have been suitably checked. Safeguarding arrangements are in place and are understood by staff. The centre’s safeguarding policy is not explicit in relation to procedures should an allegation be made against a member of staff.

Overall, aspects of equality and diversity are promoted at the centre, although there are some variations. The centre has been proactive in promoting male carers, disability and some aspects of culture through its displays, resources and themed activities. Disadvantaged groups such as older people, travellers and lesbian and gay people are not consistently reflected in the resources and displays at the centre. Children from armed services families are also not reflected. There is some limited information for children in community languages and children’s books at the centre which reflect some aspects of society. Information about the centre for users is only available in English. Topic themes for the centre’s groups are not yet fully reflective of the rich diverse community and there are missed opportunities to learn about and celebrate a wide range of cultures. The centre is working hard to narrow the achievement gap between all groups and this is having some success. Also the work of the centre through the ‘Every Child a Talker’ programme is improving children’s communication, language and literacy.

The centre encourages feedback from parents and carers, users and partners. This information is sometimes used to make changes to services. Systems for obtaining feedback which contribute to shaping services are not yet in place. Opportunities for formal feedback and contribution to the centre’s self-evaluation are very limited. The centre has begun to collect and record its own data on the ‘e-start’ system. Data in relation to its key performance indicators is not always available or lacks details. Registration forms include some data and the centre is beginning to use this data when setting targets. Priorities for the centre, identified in its service delivery plan, are sometimes not sufficiently focused on their target groups and those in most need of intervention and support.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money. The facilities are well used and there are opportunities for private rental of some space to generate additional income. Available resources are of a high quality and well maintained. The centre is able to access some resources from the nursery school which extends what is available the centre.

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	3
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understood	
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	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 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

An inspection of The Lawns Nursery School was undertaken on 27–28 September. The overall judgement was outstanding.

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 Lawns Children's Centre on 28–29 September 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We found that the centre provides you and your children with a place where you can come and enjoy time together. Staff have established good links with The Lawns Nursery School, Stars Pre Nursery and the Family Friends organisation, all of which are based in the same building. As a result, transition arrangements for your children are good.

Staff work hard to make sure that you and your children remain safe. They act as good role models and you value the support they give you. One parent told inspectors that staff '...are very welcoming and we get the support we need'. This comment was echoed by all centre users that we spoke to.

The centre's activities are very popular and many of you attend a number of sessions. You told us that you feel welcome at the centre and that you find the staff very friendly and approachable and we agree with you. As one of you told us '...nothing is too much trouble'. The centre staff are keen to improve the outcomes for you and your children; however we have asked them to target services at those of you who would most benefit from their support.

The centre is limited in its success in promoting equality and diversity. They have identified an increase in families from Eastern Europe. However information about the centre is only available in English. We have asked the centre to look at how they can better promote all aspects of equality and diversity in their work and to enrich the opportunities for you and your children to learn about the wider world.

Those of you who regularly attend the centre will be familiar with the feedback and suggestions that staff encourage you to complete. The centre uses this information to improve the services it provides however there are many missed opportunities for you to contribute to the work of the centre. We have therefore asked the centre to look at how you can become more involved in their work and how you can be more involved in decision-making about future services, including obtaining the views of families who do not regularly attend or attend only once.

The senior staff have worked hard to establish the centre as part of the community. Although the centre has some data, this is limited and means that the centre cannot effectively target services where they will bring about the most change. We have asked the local authority to ensure that the centre is provided with data that is meaningful and that they can use to help them in planning this work.

The centre has close links with the Family Friends outreach service and has referred some of you to their services. Case studies show that you benefit from the support you and your families receive. Many of you go on to access services at the centre and are supported by the outreach workers and centre staff if you are nervous or anxious about attending groups.

Thank you to those of you who took the time to come and speak to us and to meet with us. We are very grateful to you all and wish you and your families every success for the future.

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