

Inspection report for The Lizard Peninsula Children's Centres

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| Local authority | Cornwall |
| Inspection number | 383511 |
| Inspection dates | 11–12 October 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Alex Baxter |

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| Centre leader | April Scott |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Centre address | The Lizard Peninsula Children's Centres, Bulwark Road, Helston, Cornwall TR13 8JF |
| Telephone number | 01326 560417 |
| Fax number | Not applicable |
| Email address | ascott@cornwall.gov.uk |

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| Linked school if applicable | Not applicable |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Not applicable |

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the centre's governing body, the local authority and the senior management and leadership teams. Employees of partnership agencies linking with and visiting the centre were consulted. Inspectors also spoke with centre staff and families using the centre.

The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre.

Information about the centre

The Lizard Peninsula Children's Centre was established on 1 September 2011 by the merging of Helston, St Elvan's and The Lizard Children's Centres to form one federated phase two local-authority-run Sure Start children's centre. There is in place

an advisory board made up of representatives of the community and partner groups and a parents’ forum. Through its various partnerships, the Lizard Peninsula Children’s Centre delivers the full core offer, which includes early intervention support for families in greatest need and services such as health, maternity, early years education and family support. In doing so, it serves as a hub for the local community.

The children’s centre reach area covers some 108 square miles. This very rural and, in places, isolated area of Cornwall, is made up of a number of small villages and hamlets, with Helston being the main town in the reach area. Overall, the children’s centre’s reach area accommodates 961 families and 2,070 children.

The mostly rural neighbourhoods that the children’s centre serves reflects a broadly average level of social and economic disadvantage, as seen in the average percentage of families with the main wage earner out of work. For example, approximately 9% of the children under five are members of families who depend on workless benefits. Children’s skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are generally below those expected for their age, especially in communication, language and literacy. The area served by the children’s centre is made up predominately of families from a White British background. The Ministry of Defence is a major employer in the area and there is a significant armed service presence.

The children’s centre offers its services from two children’s centre buildings, Helston Children’s Centre and St Elvan’s Children’s Centre. It also provides outreach services at several community venues within its reach area.

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 Lizard Peninsula Children’s Centre provides a satisfactory and improving quality of provision. Parents and their children feel safe at the centre and are settled and secure enough to play a full part in the variety of group activities. This was seen for example, during the ‘Baby Yoga’ and ‘Double Vision’ sessions at the Helston centre, where parents also showed a good understanding of how to keep their children safe.

Children are well supervised and consistently good procedures safeguard their welfare. The centre also has an inclusive ethos and provides equally good support for all the children and families utilising its services, as reflected in the good level of participants' confidence and enjoyment.

Over the course of the year strengthened partnerships with other providers, the local authority and health colleagues have improved the services offered. So far, improvement has been steady rather than good because new links have not been in place long enough to impact fully. Nevertheless, the early support to new mothers and their children from health workers, including midwives, and close teamwork with children's centre family support colleagues have already improved children's safety and well-being. Such improving collaborative work is also steadily increasing the number of families accessing children's centre services.

To reach out into the community more effectively, centre leaders make good use of the mobile toy library and, in response to parents' views, use other venues, such as St Martin's Village Hall and Mawgan Recreation Hall to deliver the services on offer. However, the centre is aware that it is not yet fully reaching all groups of potential families. While partners regularly signpost the centre's services to new parents, centre staff are aware of the need to combat misperceptions about who is welcome to use its services and to be more pro-active in encouraging families to register and enrol in its activities. However, the services provided, and strengthened multi-disciplinary partnerships, are increasingly making a real difference to the lives of some of the more vulnerable families.

Staff at the children's centre link well with schools and with the specialist staff of the local authority. This helps children with special educational needs and/or disabilities to make good progress in their personal development. Overall, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make sound progress in their learning and development. Data from the local authority show that the work of the centre is contributing to a steady rise in children's basic skills, enabling them to achieve closer to what is expected nationally. However, communication and language skills remain below expectations. Observations of parents and their children deriving great enjoyment while attending services such as the 'Toddler Zone' at St Elvan's and the very popular 'Mother and Toddler' swimming sessions also show a generally sound focus on developing children's speech. However, at times, opportunities are not always taken to extend children's communication skills or to enhance parents' ability to help with this aspect of children's development.

The centre manager, advisory board and local authority colleagues monitor the work of the centre, and collect data about the local area. Currently, for example, they can show positive outcomes in the uptake of breast feeding and in reducing teenage conceptions. However, managers admit that they are not yet using data to fully engage with all vulnerable groups in the community and evaluate their work. Nevertheless, managers know the area well and have identified what needs to be improved, and there is a definite trend of improvement in the centre's overall performance. All of this shows that there is a satisfactory capacity for sustain current

outcomes and provision and to further improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Raise children's communication and language skills by ensuring that they are given consistently strong emphasis across the range of children's centre activities.
- Extend the reach of the centre so that it engages with, and meets the needs of, all of its most vulnerable families.
- Develop the use of data to demonstrate the impact of its services on different groups of users.

How good are outcomes for families?

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Parents and carers appreciate the services that are provided and the good quality of the staff's care. As a result, all parents, carers and children accessing the centre's services enjoy the activities and make good gains in developing self-esteem and in bonding as a family. As one parent typically commented, 'I am so grateful, not only have staff helped me to make friends, they have also helped me to enjoy my baby.'

Currently the centre's role in the life of the community is satisfactory and outcomes are improving. Refreshed partnerships, for example with midwifery and health teams, have strengthened the focus on vulnerable groups. These families include those affected by domestic violence, and the reach to these groups is satisfactory and improving. Some of the data available to the centre, for example, on the increased number of mothers breastfeeding their children, accurately reflect the positive work of the centre. However, other data, especially that on the impact of the centre's services, are less clear and show that the centre is only just beginning to use this form of information to make sure that all needy families are fully supported.

All children who access the centre's services behave well and, as do their parents, develop positive relationships. Parents are well represented on the advisory board and contribute supportively to the governance of the centre. The centre staff also collect parents' views regularly at the end of group sessions and respond well to their ideas, for example, in supporting the activities, which take place during the 'Bulwark Association's Holiday Play Events'.

Close links with health visitors extend the reach to potentially vulnerable families and, alongside feeding advice at the centre's 'Bumps and Babes' and Caterpillar Café, have a positive impact in promoting healthy eating. Regular 'Parent and Toddler' swimming sessions and outdoor learning at Helston and St Elvan's provide fresh air and healthy exercise for families using the centre's services. However, limited data of impact across the reach area and an increased number of children being overweight reflect only satisfactory health outcomes at this stage.

The centre's good safeguarding procedures, now complemented by significantly improved safe practice across the range of local authority partners, help children and their parents feel safe as they participate in children's centre activities. For example, guidance during a 'Bumps and Babes' session also included the need to carefully check play equipment to secure children's safety. Evidence shows that improved early home visiting of new birth families to give advice about child care and to monitor children's health, for example, by health visitors and family support staff is helping to keep children safe and ensure that their needs are met effectively. Such early intervention and support also provides evidence of improved health and learning outcomes for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and those considered at risk, including those on child protection plans and involved with Common Assessment Framework processes and looked-after children. Although there is some way to go, there is clear evidence that improved partnership working with local authority specialists and with other early years providers is lifting children's language skills and is closing the achievement gap.

Discussions with parents and carers and with Jobcentre Plus and Platform 51 staff who promote parenting, training and employment skills show that families are helped to make satisfactory progress in developing their economic well-being. Some parents, including volunteers, talk appreciatively about the good gains they have made in developing the confidence to access benefits and training. Observations of some groups though, for example, Platform 51 Young Parents Group, show a mixed picture of attendance, in some instances limiting the progress made.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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| 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 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 | 2 |
| 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?

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The centre is effective at assessing the needs of the children and families who use its services. New partnership structures now form a sound and more cohesive approach to providing services and are providing a clearer picture of the specific needs of the community. Alongside good feedback from parents who use the services or sit on the advisory board, managers are using this knowledge productively to develop their services to more effectively meet the needs of the most vulnerable families in the area. This includes, for example, increasing the number of 'Stay and Play' outreach venues, most recently at Mullion.

Centre staff and outreach workers develop good relationships with families and generally use their good knowledge of the needs of the community to reach out to new families. Interviews with parents and carers and an examination of case studies provide clear examples of how some previously vulnerable families have been helped to access training and future employment. Activities for fathers as well as mothers provided at the centre's fixed facilities, such as 'Bumps and Babes' feeding advice for babies at St Elvan's and 'Baby Yoga' and the Caterpillar Café facilities at Helston, develop good social experiences and promote the self-esteem of families. The variety of outreach activities, supported well by the mobile toy library, located at other venues across the Lizard area also provide enjoyable learning experiences for children and promote parents' social and parenting skills.

However, despite these efforts and the increasing signposting of its services by partner groups, and even after initial home visits from health workers, the centre is acutely aware that some families remain 'hard to reach' and may not be accessing services. While outreach staff work diligently to reach out to families, gaps in data about the impact of services across the community mean that some vulnerable families may be missing out on provision that could improve their lives.

Even so, all the children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their parents who use the centre, benefit from a safe and well-resourced learning environment. The guidance and support given to individual families and those attending the small group activities, including for example, 'Here's Looking at You Bump' for expectant mothers, is well planned and of good quality. Consistently good care underpins the good progress that users make in their personal, social and emotional development. The centre manager and staff, effectively supported by local authority partners, have identified accurate next steps to improve provision in their action plans. However, much is relatively new and, for example, initiatives such as the 'Every Child a Talker' approach have not been embedded long enough to impact fully to secure good learning and development, particularly to raise children's communication and language skill levels.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| 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 | 2 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

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Centre managers and partners share a determination to adapt and improve services so that they are more responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable. Already, improved lines of communication, for example, between health, social work and centre staff, are underpinning children's safety and welfare. The experienced and capable centre manager, aided by senior local authority colleagues and advisory board members, directly hold the centre to account for its work, and partnership working is increasing the amount of information about the community's needs and underpins a satisfactory level of self-evaluation.

Although the parents' forum is currently being re-structured, parents are well represented on the advisory board and are able contribute to satisfactory governance. Feedback from families indicates a high level of satisfaction and influences change and improvements to services that reflect the altering changing needs of the local community. However, managers are not yet making best use of data to reach and tackle the needs of all families in need of support, including, for example, some service families, who may be initially reluctant to seek assistance. Even so, staff provide good levels of care, are targeting the right priorities and have a beneficial impact on those parents and children who access the centre's services; therefore value for money is satisfactory.

Staff are fully trained, including in respecting and sustaining equality and diversity. They are diligent in organising activities and resources and in providing an increasing number of outreach venues, for example at Parc Eglos swimming pool, which include parents and their children equally, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the few from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Good safeguarding procedures and checks secure the children's welfare. For example, staff know how to keep children safe, are well trained in child protection procedures and have a good understanding of what they need to do should they have a concern about a child. They are supported by a suitable policy which underpins this work. Secure systems ensure that all staff directly employed by the centre are suitably and effectively vetted and that robust agreements with partner agencies ensure that equally rigorous checks cover visiting specialist staff.

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 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

This inspection took account of the children's skills in the Early Years Foundation Stage obtained from the inspection findings of the Section 5 inspection of Nansloe Community Primary School, which took place on 10–11 October 2011, and from data of the children's attainments across the range of primary schools in the area served by the children centre. This inspection also took account of the centre's partnership arrangements with other primary schools and pre-school settings across its reach area.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Lizard Peninsula Children's Centre on 11–12 October 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. It is an improving centre because staff are steadily using strengthened links with other service providers to extend and develop

the range of activities that it provides. Partners now share a clear determination to adapt services to meet the needs of the families that need most support.

Those of you who use the centre expressed the view that the good relationships between staff and parents and children promote confidence and enjoyment. Because of this those of you who access the centre's services develop the confidence to seek advice or guidance and derive benefit from the range of services that are on offer. We agree with you that your newly federated children's centre is a welcoming place where dedicated staff willingly offer their professional support. Given its early stage of development we find that parents and children are enabled to make sound progress.

The centre is good at keeping you and your children safe, and safeguarding children is given the highest priority. We found that all the staff are properly checked before they work at the centre and that the various premises used by centre are also safe, with staff implementing effective risk assessments and security arrangements. All the parents, including several fathers, who use the centre were appreciative of the good care that they and their children received and the few parents from minority ethnic backgrounds were similarly appreciative of the centre's inclusive ethos.

Staff are also diligent in making sure that your views and ideas are respected and acted upon to improve services, as seen, for example, in the outreach 'stay and play' activities now being held at several places across the Lizard area. Staff also work hard to help you and your children to live healthily and although some children in the area are overweight, more parents are now breastfeeding and promoting the good health of their children.

However, not all groups of parents, including perhaps some who would benefit most from the support provided, register and take part in the centre's activities. This may be because they have misperceptions of its purpose or because they lack confidence or are reluctant to access its services. As a result, we have asked the staff to use data to more specifically identify those families needing most support and to encourage them to access the support services provided.

You told us that children enjoy their learning at the centre. By working more closely with colleagues, the centre staff are beginning to raise children's skill levels. However, while most children make good progress in their personal development, some are still not reaching expected levels in communication and language. As a result, we have asked the staff to emphasise the development of these skills more consistently across all its activities and to also help parents to do the same.

We are grateful to those of you who willingly gave up your time to speak to us. You spoke very positively about the support and guidance given by the centre and we hope that in the future even more parents will take the opportunity to benefit from the services they provide.

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