

Inspection report for Westside Children's Centre

Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	384213
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Centre leader	Lesley Bird
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	None

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, representatives of the local authority, members of the partnership board that acts as the centre's advisory board, front-line staff, representatives of partner organisations including health and the manager of the co-located privately owned pre-school, and families who use the centre.

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

Information about the centre

Westside Children's Centre is a phase two centre. It opened in April 2009 and was fully designated in February 2010. It serves a diverse catchment area with significant variations between wards in the levels of deprivation, proportions of families in receipt of benefits and children living in households dependent on workless benefits. The range between wards of these indicators is often from almost no families to very nearly half. Most families in the area are of White British heritage, with less than 10% from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with a narrower range of skills and abilities than those typically expected for their age.

Most centre activities take place between 9.00am and 3.00pm, Monday to Friday, with staff available before and after these hours for 48 weeks per year. In addition, there are occasional weekend activities. The centre offers services either directly, or through signposting and links with partner agencies. Services include health and family advice and support services; children, adult and family learning; and Jobcentre Plus. The centre is accommodated within an extensively and diversely used community centre, alongside a privately owned pre-school, inspected separately in 2009. The children's centre has a main office base and reception, and the use, on a

regular basis, of a multipurpose room in the community centre. It also has use of a large room in another building close to the community centre.

The centre governance structure includes the local authority, a partnership board, which acts as the centre's advisory board, a practitioner forum and a parents' forum. Two of the three members of staff employed directly by the centre have been appointed in the previous five months, including the centre leader, who took up post in May 2011. The local authority is currently engaged in a tendering process to find another organisation or organisations to manage all of the children's centres in the area, including Westside.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Westside is a good centre. It successfully reaches the large majority of families in its notional catchment area, including those from its target groups. From the moment parents and children step into the centre, very approachable and friendly staff ensure they feel welcome, and begin to secure their good engagement. As one parent told inspectors, 'Nothing is too much trouble – you are made to feel valued when you arrive.' Effective use of parents' views, combined with good assessment systems, ensures families receive the right support, and helps achieve good outcomes. Families value highly the difference Westside makes to their lives, particularly those that readily turn to the centre in times of crisis. 'I don't know what I'd have done without the centre,' was how one parent summed it up.

Well supported by the local authority, the new centre leader has quickly secured an accurate view of the centre's performance. Recent improvements to the centre's data and self-evaluation systems are providing it with good and increasingly secure evidence about the impact of its services. The centre has correctly identified that, at present, the centre's self-evaluation, though accurate and supported by evidence of impact, is not always sharp or sophisticated enough to support setting of more precise targets for improvement. That said, improvement plans set out clear, ambitious actions aimed at key priority areas. Despite the uncertainty the centre faces due to the current tendering process, the centre leader has successfully

galvanised the enthusiasm of a small but very dedicated team of staff to drive improvements. Put simply by one staff member, 'We want to be the best we can be.' Taking all of this into account, the centre is demonstrating a good capacity to improve.

The centre's successful promotion of healthy lifestyles, identified as one of its key priorities, ensures that the large majority of families who are using the centre are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy. Well-attended and effective smoking cessation sessions have resulted in the majority of participants successfully giving up smoking. Most families using the centre express their views to inform decision making, strongly encouraged by the centre. Many spoke warmly of recent changes and improvements to the centre's activities, particularly the more-structured 'Stay and Play'. Strong links with Jobcentre Plus have secured very positive outcomes for the small but significant minority of parents engaged with this process. However, the centre has correctly identified that, though some families are engaged in training or adult learning, the proportions are not high enough to promote better than satisfactory economic well-being overall. The centre has good plans to use information gathered and interest secured during a very well-attended taster day, 'Learning is Fun', to target services and engage more families in adult or family learning, either directly or through effective signposting.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Implement plans to develop adult and family learning opportunities so that the majority of families are improving their economic stability by for example, engaging more in training or adult learning.
- Use the centre's recently improved systems for monitoring the impact of its services on outcomes for families to refine and sharpen self-evaluation and future planning, and increase the precision of its target setting.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

A large majority of families engage in activities specifically targeting the promotion of healthy lifestyles, leading to good outcomes. After individual support sessions, health-related activities are the most popular amongst the centre's target groups, including teenage or lone parents. Obesity rates in Reception ear in the locality have fluctuated, but most recent figures have dipped below the national average. The centre successfully promotes breastfeeding in close partnership with health visitors and through varied, popular and effective baby clinics and related activities, and higher-than-average percentages of children in the area are breastfed at six to eight weeks.

The centre prioritises the safety and protection of families using the centre, or its outreach services, through rigorous and consistently implemented safeguarding systems. Families feel safe in the centre and some commented how the centre's promotion of safe conduct amongst parents and children accessing services

enhances this. Most families demonstrate or state that they feel confident to share any concerns with staff. As a result of strong links with other agencies, including social services, the centre is reaching and engaging an increasing proportion of families identified as most in need, such as those subject to child protection or Common Assessment Framework procedures. Though some cases are at the earliest stages of Westside's involvement, careful tracking means the centre can demonstrate that the majority of children on child protection plans show improved outcomes resulting from effective intervention and support.

Activities at the centre, including 'Stay and Play' and 'Craft', encourage positive interactions between parent and child, and build confidence and self-esteem for children and adults. The new centre leader has introduced a clear and effective structure to these sessions to promote good learning, linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage framework, which has been well received by parents. Observations and assessments of the progress and personal development of both children and adults demonstrate secure improvements for most. Children in the reach area are making good progress from their starting to points, with the percentage of children reaching a good stage of development by the end of Early Years Foundation Stage above the national average. Most of the adults engaged with Jobcentre Plus leading to job interviews attend these appointments and secure a labour market outcome. The many families that attended the 'Learning is Fun' taster day received certificates and passports to learning, and were encouraged to share information about their needs and aspirations.

Families are frequently encouraged to express their views in a wide variety of formal and informal ways. The good opportunities range from talking to highly approachable front-line staff to putting ideas into the suggestion box, or from answering surveys to being a parent representative on the partnership board. However, while the parents' forum makes an important contribution to the governance of the centre, this group is not fully involved with the design, set-up and evaluation of services. Views of those identified as in most need of support, such as those suffering the effects of domestic violence, are successfully gathered through the centre's outreach. One parent observed gratefully on a feedback sheet, 'When I felt unable to leave my house, centre staff came and saw me.' Effective links with community partners secures the centre's good contribution to the life of the community; Westside is currently involved in working with other local organisations to produce a pantomime.

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	2
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	2

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?

2

Good-quality care and guidance, effectively tailored to the needs of families accessing universal services, supports their good development and well-being across most outcome areas. Support is particularly effectively personalised for those families identified as most in need, or that turn to the centre in times of crisis. Such parents value highly the difference the centre makes to their lives. One identified how staff had helped her 'start to realise that I was a good mum, something I had doubted for a long time.'

The centre works closely with the centre's partners to share appropriate information to support its drive to improve outcomes for the large majority of families. Newly introduced procedures increasingly supplement this with pertinent individual observations and assessments of those accessing services used to tailor support, resulting in good development for children and adults. It is too soon for the centre to have analysed and evaluated the data and information for it to be more strategically used to fully tailor the range of services offered, but the centre leader has a clear timetable for this. That said, action already taken has ensured that the centre's activities increasingly reach those identified as most in need, rather than merely focusing on the total reach numbers.

Parents have recognised how the well-structured children's sessions not only lead to good progress for children, but also enhance their own development well. Families are starting to build individual learning journals or 'memory books' with their children, which engages parents in understanding their child's developmental stages. One parent's view, reflective of many others, was, 'There is so much more for us to do with the children; before it was just children playing and mums chatting.' Well-located activities across the community, such as sessions provided in 'The Joshua Tree' (accommodation for supported living) and local refuge for victims of domestic violence, ensures they reach those identified as most in need of support. The centre has good links with neighbouring centres that have designated provision for those with disabilities, or with greater capacity to deliver weekend activities specifically targeted at fathers, effectively enhancing the centre's reach to these target groups. The centre celebrates the achievements of those accessing its own activities well, including awarding certificates, though it does not fully track the progression of adults accessing courses or services in neighbouring centres or through partner organisations.

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	2
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?

2

The new centre leader has quickly won the confidence and support of families, staff and partners. Care to ensure that everyone, including parents, understands the rationale for change has helped secure strong commitment to it. As one frontline worker felt, 'The job has become so much more meaningful.' All groups are currently involved in reviewing and simplifying the centre's vision statement. The chair of the partnership board reflected the shared determination to improve when she said, 'We do a good job, we provide a good service, but we can always do better.' Good resource management is securing good outcomes for the majority of families and consequently, the centre provides good value for money. However, the centre recognises that, without the increased rigour with which the centre is now monitoring outcomes, current evaluations of value for money are not incisive enough.

Clearly established structures and arrangements for governance and staff are well understood at different levels. Regular and effective support and challenge from the local authority has helped the centre evidence the extent of its impact beyond individual case studies. The increasingly useful and pertinent information provided by the centre leader to the partnership board ensures that their capacity to challenge and support the centre to develop further is good and improving. Professional supervision and management systems align well, and quality assurance systems are effective and used well to secure improvements to provision. Good links with partner agencies, exemplified by the good range of partners engaged with the practitioner forum, ensure that services are well integrated.

The centre has a comprehensive range of effective and well-followed systems, policies and procedures that safeguard families using the centre or outreach services well. All staff receive training relevant to their respective roles, including in safer recruitment, and the centre has established and maintains a single central register. Record keeping is detailed and thorough. The centre is extremely proactive in its links with other professionals to protect children, including regular attendance at child protection conferences to offer services and engage vulnerable families.

Satisfaction survey results for Westside are very high with almost all families expressing positive views about the service they receive. The centre continually seeks and uses their views to inform decisions about services. Its success in reaching out to those correctly identified as most in need of support, based on good

knowledge of the community the centre serves, is reflective of the central drive to break down barriers and promote equality. This is enhanced by good links with neighbouring facilities that have designated provision for those with disabilities. The growing proportions of those identified as most in need that are accessing services and showing improved outcomes, such as children on child protection plans or those suffering the effects of domestic violence, ensures that gaps are closing. In recent years, the gap between the lowest attaining 20% and the rest at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage in the area has fallen at a quicker rate than that seen nationally. However, while the centre is able to identify and target remaining gaps, current monitoring systems are not sophisticated enough to fully analyse improving outcomes for different groups across all areas.

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	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
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	2

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Westside Children's Centre on 26–27 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During the inspection, we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents, and talked with staff, the local authority, representatives of the centre's partners, members of the partnership board and some of you.

The centre serves you and your community well. Many of you were keen to speak to us to emphasise the difference the centre makes for you and your families. You told us how well the centre listens to you and how approachable and helpful the staff are. As a result, the centre cares for you and meets your needs well. You told us you feel safe when using the centre, and the centre has good procedures and systems to make sure that this is so. We were pleased to see that, where relevant, you are able to access children's centre services at 'The Joshua Tree' or refuge.

Various activities at the centre are helping you to develop healthier lifestyles for you and your families. Congratulations to all those of you who have attended one of the 'Quit4life' clinics and managed to give up smoking. We really enjoyed seeing the baby clinics and other baby activities in action. It is reassuring to see how many of you are making good use of these. We were also delighted to see how well those of you who make use of the Jobcentre Plus service have done, and are doing, in moving towards employment.

Many of you told us that you thought things had got better at the centre since the new centre leader started. You particularly like the improvements to sessions such as 'Stay and Play'. These activities are of good quality and support the learning and development of your children well, as well as your understanding of this. It was encouraging to see how many of you were enjoying the 'Learning is Fun' taster day at the Russell Howard centre while we were visiting. We hope that many more of you will take up some of the adult and family learning opportunities on offer now as well as any new opportunities in the future.

We found that those involved with running the centre are keen to make it the best it possibly can be and they have good systems to achieve this. As parents, many of you make an important contribution, either by completing surveys, or through the parents' forum and partnership board. To help and support improvement, we have made a couple of recommendations. First, we would like the centre to put in place its plans to involve more of you in adult or family learning, either at Westside, or through one of its partners. We would also like the centre to use new systems it is developing to be certain where it is having the most and least success in making a difference for you, and use this information to be really precise about how to improve services and activities.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak to us and share your thoughts and views. We really valued your contributions and they were an important part of our inspection. We hope you will continue to support the centre.

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