

Inspection report for Little Coppice Children's Centre

Local authority	Hampshire
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Linked early years and childcare, if 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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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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, the headteacher and a representative of the governing body of Wyvern Technology College, the chair of the partnership board, the local authority, partnership agencies, members of staff and families using the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre and the wider community.

Information about the centre

Little Coppice Children's Centre is a Phase Two children's centre. It was designated in 2008, but only began operating in June 2009. It offers a range of services, including health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes and outreach services. Activities are provided at the children's centre and in other venues around the community. The centre is located in an area of relative affluence; some areas within its catchment area are more socially disadvantaged and one falls within the 35% most disadvantaged areas in the country. The proportion of young children who live in workless households is below that typically seen, but it has increased significantly in recent years.

The children's centre is managed by the governing body of Wyvern Technology College on behalf of the local authority. The centre works closely with other children's centres in Eastleigh. The population is mostly White British, with smaller percentages of other ethnic groups, some of whom speak English as an additional language. Children's skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are broadly average overall, but with significant variation across the catchment 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Little Coppice Children’s Centre provides good support to children and families in its reach area and, as a result, outcomes for families are good. Although some of the families living nearby initially had concerns about the centre’s location, staff have done much to forge positive relationships with all parts of the community. As a result, the centre is popular and well used by families across the reach area.

Much has been achieved in the past two years and the centre is well placed to continue its improvement. The centre leader has a good understanding of the service’s strengths and weaknesses. She successfully balances the need to offer services for everyone with the need to target many services more specifically. Good plans are being developed to enable the centre to maintain services in the face of potential budget cuts. Staff make use of a range of useful data to review and evaluate their work. However, they do not always make full use of precise information about the impact their work has on families’ outcomes when they review the success of particular activities.

Recognising that the many of the families with most needs are located some distance from the centre, there has rightly been a strong focus on outreach work. Many activities are run at locations around the catchment area by the three outreach workers, who also offer intensive support to families who need it. As a result, the centre already reaches a large proportion of local families across the reach area, with particular rises last year in the number of families from the most disadvantaged areas.

The centre’s work has contributed to a rise in children’s skills at the end of Reception. The support that the centre provides for families’ economic and social well-being is less well developed. Some adults are helped to seek employment or undergo training, but more could be done. Opportunities for family learning are limited, although many parents and carers have benefited from valuable courses in parenting.

The centre's partnerships with key agencies are good. There are particularly close links with health professionals, who do much of their work in the centre and liaise closely with centre staff to ensure that their work is coordinated rather than duplicated.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Make greater use of precise evidence about impact on families' outcomes when evaluating the success of particular activities.
- Increase the centre's contribution to families' economic and social well-being by:
 - extending the range of family learning opportunities offered
 - increasing the support available to adults to help them to undergo training or enter employment.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Parents and carers are helped to gain a good understanding of how to promote a healthy lifestyle for their families. Healthy eating and good hygiene are taught well in the first-time parents' group, and good use is made of the sessions to promote the benefits of breastfeeding. The centre engaged enthusiastically with the borough council's scheme for parents and carers to pledge to make their homes smoke free and, as a result, approximately 70 families signed up.

As school-age parents are able to meet health professionals at the children's centre, they can attend clinics without missing lessons, avoiding disruption to their education. This helped to ensure that most school-age parents were able to complete their education successfully last year.

Parents and carers say that the support they receive from staff helps them to manage their children's behaviour. Many have benefited from valuable parenting training courses. The intensive support provided by outreach workers makes a good contribution to ensuring that children who are potentially at risk are kept safe and secure. Their approachability and credibility in the community mean that people feel confident in sharing concerns with them.

Staff promote the development of children's language and communication skills through good quality activities within groups. They work closely with the area's pre-schools. This work contributed to an improvement in children's skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage last year. Particular improvements were made in the most disadvantaged part of the reach area, and the gap between the bottom 20% of children and others narrowed. Children's attainment in reading, however, fell

slightly and centre staff have recognised that many pre-school children have significant weaknesses in their speaking and listening skills.

The number of workless families in the area has increased in recent years. Some families have improved their economic position as a result of the centre's work; for example, local jobs are regularly advertised, both within the centre and at other venues. A small number of people have worked as volunteers at the centre and progressed to paid employment. Others have benefited from support from outreach workers in seeking employment or training. However, more could be done to help adults to gain access to training and to progress to employment.

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

Families are provided with good care, guidance and support. Centre staff understand the local community and its families well. Thoughtful and well-considered decisions are made about which groups and activities to set up. Changes are made quickly when groups are not meeting families' needs or not reaching target groups adequately. As a result, the proportions of people that the centre works with are in line with or above local figures for most of the key target groups.

Good liaison between centre staff and professionals from other agencies ensures that families who would benefit from more intensive support from outreach workers are identified well. These families are provided with extensive and valuable support. Good partnership work with a local charity helps target additional support for families with financial difficulties.

The centre offers useful learning and development opportunities for children through a number of its sessions and through its work with the pre-schools. Learning and

development opportunities for families in general, and adults in particular, are more limited. Opportunities are missed to support adults who would benefit from learning and training opportunities.

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	3
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 centre leader provides good leadership and a clear direction for the centre's work. Everyone understands the centre's core purpose and aims, and staff work hard to provide a high-quality service. There are clear lines of accountability for staff, who have access to good professional supervision and guidance. The centre is well supported by the school, its governing body and by the partnership board, which brings together representation from a range of stakeholders. The school's headteacher provides useful line management to the centre leader, but the local authority's good arrangements for accountability and professional supervision also ensure that staff are supported and challenged. The outreach workers are managed and supervised well, although the targets set for them focus more on provision and reach than on the intended impact of their work with families.

Centre staff work hard to ensure that their services are as inclusive as possible. Many parents and carers talked about their friendly and welcoming approach. Staff work very hard to ensure that new families are welcomed and made to feel at home. As one parent put it, 'There are no cliques here.' The large majority of families from minority ethnic groups attend sessions at the centre. Many of the centre's activities take place at venues around the reach area, ensuring that everyone can gain easy access. Staff recognise that it is easier for some families in the catchment area to attend sessions at the children's centre in the town centre, so they also track attendance at other children's centres in the area. This tracking shows that over 90% of families are accessing services somewhere.

Good procedures are in place for safeguarding. Staff are trained regularly. Relevant policies are in place and reviewed regularly. Effective liaison with other agencies ensures that concerns are effectively monitored and that any issues are followed up. Robust procedures are in place to ensure that those who work with the children and their families are suitable to do so. Families are confident that centre staff will deal effectively and sensitively with any concerns that they raise.

Centre staff seek and draw on users' views on the quality of the services they engage in and users report high levels of satisfaction about the services they receive. Parents and carers can point to a range of changes made in centre provision as a result of their suggestions and ideas. A parents' forum is in place and parents and carers are well represented on the partnership board.

The centre provides good value for money. A good range of universal services are offered, but there is a strong focus on ensuring that services meet the needs of, and are fully accessible to, families in the greatest need of support.

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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Little Coppice Centre on 9 and 10 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. Much has been achieved in the past two years.

Staff show a very strong commitment to improving the lives of families in the area. They have developed strong partnerships with other professionals and organisations so that they can offer you very helpful support, advice and guidance. Much has been done to forge close relationships with families. As a result, the centre is popular and the services that it offers are well used by families across the area.

Many of you have benefited from the groups that the centre runs, or from more intensive support from one of the outreach workers. You told us how much you value the support and how this has made a difference to your lives. Staff recognise that many of you live some way from the centre, so many activities are run at different locations.

The centre's work contributes to a range of improvements for children and families. It has, for example, contributed to a rise in the attainment of five-year-old children. The centre provides good support across most areas. However, we have asked staff to do more to provide family learning opportunities and to help adults to gain employment and training.

Staff have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve services further. They use the information given to them by the local authority to enable them to understand how they can help and support you all, including those who do not yet come to the centre. We have asked staff to do more to measure the precise benefit that particular activities have for the families involved.

Staff do all they can to make sure that you and your children remain safe. They are well trained in how to protect children. The centre leader has done the checks necessary to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable. Staff help you when you are worried about a child in your community. You told us that you feel confident that they will do the right thing with the information.

You have good opportunities to share your views with staff about the services that they offer. They listen to your views carefully when reviewing services or thinking about activities for the future.

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