

Inspection report for Lighthouse Children's Centre

Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	383730
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Linden Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Pebbles Nursery

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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. 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 the centre leader, the headteacher of Linden School, members of the school governing body that act as the centre's advisory board, front-line staff, representatives of partner organisations including health, education and social care, and families and volunteers who use the centre.

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

Information about the centre

The Lighthouse Children's Centre is a Phase 1 centre. It was designated in March 2006 and has been fully operational since October 2006. It serves a catchment area spanning three inner city wards. Of the overall catchment area, 40% falls within the top 10% most deprived areas in the country in terms of unemployment, education skills and training, health and deprivation, crime and disorder. Most families in the area are of White British heritage, with 11% from other minority ethnic backgrounds, more than half of which are Eastern European.

Most centre activities take place between 9.00am and 3.00pm, Monday to Friday, with staff available before and after for outreach work and one-to-one work with families. In addition, there are some evening and 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; and, children, adult and family learning; with an extensive programme of volunteering. The centre is located within the grounds of a primary school, with a day nursery managed by the children's centre, and is located in its own purpose-built setting. The

nursery was inspected on 16 November 2011 and this was judged to be good overall. The children’s centre provides a main office base and appropriate and welcoming facilities for the delivery of services by partner agencies, as well as individual and group work with families. Some activities are also delivered in alternative community venues including schools.

Governance of the centre has been delegated by the local authority to the school. The school governing body acts as the advisory board, with a sub committee providing regular oversight of the children’s centre and nursery activity. The centre manager has both a strategic and operational role, which means she is required to lead on joining up services across the city within localities as well as ensuring that strategic objectives are set and met within the geographical area. During the current financial year there has been significant restructuring activity to improve the long-term sustainability of the children’s centre and nursery. There is good evidence that children who have used the nursery and children’s centre have improved their performance from their starting points on entry to Reception.

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

The Lighthouse is a good centre. It successfully reaches the large majority of families in its catchment area, including those from its target groups. This includes those using the nursery and universal health services. The centre is welcoming and friendly with a good range of information available about the services and groups on offer. Support, advice and guidance from a knowledgeable staff group are effective. Parents and carers are very positive about the service they receive, and how this has helped to improve their parenting. One parent commented, ‘I have recognised the importance of listening to my children’s needs.’ A volunteer quoted her children’s pride in her achievements, telling his school friends, ‘My mum is a volunteer at a local children’s centre and I’m proud of her.’

The centre has a variety of ways of collecting the views of service users and of making changes to services where appropriate to meet needs. These range from

changing the timing of activities to responding to requests for a particular service such as modules delivered by further education colleagues on the volunteer training programme.

The centre knows its area and the population of service users well. A range of data is collected which assists the centre in understanding the numbers of families with particular needs such as mental ill health, those suffering domestic abuse and parents using substances. This information is used to research and plan relevant activities and to analyse performance. Continuous learning and development are at the heart of the centre's delivery, and improvements in evaluating impact and outcomes are beginning to be used. Current development plans accurately reflect priorities but self-evaluation has resulted in an awareness that outcome and impact information is not yet routinely collated in such a way that accurate and ambitious targets for improvement can be met. Staff are enthusiastic, skilled and committed, keen to innovate and develop. The staff group is stable, and well supported by an effective leadership team within the centre. Overall, the centre demonstrates good capacity to improve. However, the centre's advisory board does not include representatives of some partners in the local area, so planning and delivery of services are not fully coordinated and effective.

The centre's engagement of local health and education partners has enabled the delivery of programmes which are well attended and successful, including a rolling antenatal and postnatal programme that addresses smoking, health, breastfeeding and other relevant issues to both mothers and fathers. These universal services, including well supported stay and play sessions, encourage families to develop a relationship with centre staff and to access other services. However, the centre has correctly identified that, although some parents are engaged in adult learning, primarily through the very successful volunteer programme, the proportions are not high enough to promote better than satisfactory economic well-being overall. The range of information and advice available to parents about employment and training is limited so too few make the transition to work or study.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen the advisory board so that it more effectively meets the needs of all children and parents in the reach area by:
 - working with the local authority to ensure the engagement of key partner agencies, including Jobcentre Plus and local housing organisations, so that strategic planning is robust
 - setting ambitious targets to increase the engagement of those families who are most in need.
- Provide opportunities for parents to gain information and advice about employment and training so that the number of families dependent on workless benefits is reduced.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Good relationships with health partners and direct delivery of a number of services within the centre result in a high level of engagement within the community. The centre successfully promotes breastfeeding in close partnership with health visitors and through varied, popular and effective baby clinics and related activities. Breastfeeding rates are good. Some data is not available at a reach level, which means that information about those attending the centre is not directly comparable with other local and national figures. Obesity rates within Gloucestershire are increasing, and the centre has identified this as an area for development. The direct work commissioned by some schools on the personal, social and health education curriculum enables the centre to reach a wide range of age groups.

The centre prioritises the safety and protection of families using the centre, and its outreach services, through rigorous and consistently implemented safeguarding systems. Staff awareness of safeguarding issues is good and case files reviewed during the inspection reflect this.

Parents who spoke with inspectors say that they feel confident to share any concerns with staff. The centre demonstrates strong links with other key safeguarding agencies, including children's social care and the police, and is working with most of those families which have been identified as needing support in keeping children safe. Individual work, within the Common Assessment Framework, children in need or on child protection plans, demonstrates a thorough approach to assessment and intervention through the use of support plans. Children in the reach area are making good progress from their starting points, with the percentage of children who have accessed the centre reaching a good stage of development by the end of Early Years Foundation Stage, and above the national average. The centre is effectively narrowing the achievement gap between the lowest 20% of children and their peers, with the majority of those who attend nursery or children's centre programmes reaching 79 points at Reception stage.

The centre is aware that it needs to do more to ensure that those families most in need of support and intervention are assisted in meeting their educational or employment aspirations. For the few parents who are engaged in learning opportunities within the centre there is a high level of satisfaction, with the majority going on to further learning or entering the job market.

Families are frequently encouraged to express their views in a wide variety of formal and informal ways. These opportunities range from feeding back following courses or programmes, responding to questionnaires or talking to front-line staff who are approachable and express a receptiveness to ideas. Outcomes from these feedback activities are regularly published on notice boards around the centre.

Parents and carers do not fully contribute to service development and delivery at a strategic level. There has been an investment in activity to encourage them to be

involved in this aspect of the work, and a number have expressed an interest in becoming involved in the strategic planning of services by attending partnership board meetings.

Children's behaviour in the universal groups observed in the children's centre is good. Observations in the stay and play sessions confirmed children understood the boundaries and expectations and as a result their behaviour was good. A parent commented how centre staff had supported her with her son's behaviour where in other settings it had been considered disruptive.

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

The centre provides good quality advice, support and guidance, through both centre staff and local delivery partners, including health colleagues. This is effectively tailored to the needs of families accessing universal services, and supports their development and well-being across most outcome areas. In individual work with families who are identified as needing specific intervention, there is good evidence of persistence in both engaging families and in supporting families to access other relevant services. Case studies demonstrate the impact of the work on families who have specific needs, such as children or carers with disabilities.

In modelling the importance of males in early years settings, a male volunteer supports health staff at baby clinics, enabling male attendees to feel more comfortable in the centre. Several fathers were observed attending the centre during the course of the inspection.

Within the centre and attached nursery a number of families are benefiting from a recent pilot project for children with special educational needs. This runs in partnership with portage services and provides tailored sessions for children with

disabilities.

The centre is good at celebrating success, for example with an awards ceremony for volunteers, many of whom have achieved qualifications such as National Vocational Qualifications. These parents value highly the difference the centre makes to their lives. Parents have also recognised how the well-structured children’s sessions not only lead to good progress for children, but also enhance their own development well. One parent for whom English is a second language who had benefited from a parenting programme delivered in Polish commented that she knew that she needed to learn English to support her older children in school.

The centre is good at engaging other organisations at a community level to deliver relevant services, such as debt counselling, which has recently been established, to support families in managing on low incomes.

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 centre leader has had a difficult task in the current financial year to realise savings across the children’s centre. This has included implementing a redundancy process and managing to maintain staff morale in an environment of uncertainty and change. This has been sensitively managed to ensure that all involved understand the rationale for change. The staff team has been fully engaged by the senior leadership team within the centre, to help understand the necessity of targeting work further, demonstrating impact, and developing a sustainable service. Consequently, a strong sense of purpose is evident in the staff group, each of whom has a distinct role in leading on areas of delivery. The chair of the advisory board recognises that the governing body is on a ‘journey’ and is clear that it needs to develop more effective partnerships with some agencies and ensure that services are targeted towards those most vulnerable.

The changes that have been made have enabled the centre and nursery to be financially sustainable, with many skilled staff delivering good outcomes that are evidenced in individual cases. However, it is accepted by the centre’s leaders and managers that there is more work to be done to ensure that the centre has an impact on those most in need of intervention and support and that this can be evidenced. The centre has correctly identified that increased rigour will need to be

applied to the collation of outcome data in order to measure value for money effectively. Arrangements for governance through the school and the relationship with the local authority, although effective, are not well understood at different levels. Although there are very good links with partner agencies at a service delivery level, such as extended schools, these are not reflected in the governance. Services are not fully integrated to provide seamless support to all families in the reach area.

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. Staff have a good understanding of risk and vulnerability and are able both to support families individually and to refer appropriately when necessary.

Satisfaction survey results for the Lighthouse 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. There is good evidence of equality being promoted, with service statistics demonstrating links with the Polish community, with children and parents with disabilities, and in supporting the profile of fathers in children's lives. The centre, through its own data, is able to evidence those registered and attending services, but the lack of recent data in relation to the demographics of the reach area prevents it from identifying more accurately the proportion of those from different groups in the area accessing services.

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	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	3

meet its core purpose	
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 Lighthouse Children’s Centre on 17 and 18 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

As part of the inspection, we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre’s plans and documents, and talked with staff and representatives of the centre’s partners, including health and education professionals, members of the advisory board and parents.

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 we judged the centre to have good procedures and systems to keep you safe. The centre has a range of ways to help you and your family be healthy, such as Active Tots, and ideas for healthy food and snacks. Many activities help you. The centre provides good support to help you develop your parenting skills. Many of you told us how much you enjoyed particular activities, such as the volunteer training or parenting programmes. You and your children particularly enjoyed sessions such as stay and play. These activities are of good quality and support the learning and development of your children well.

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. Your contribution, in telling staff what you enjoy and what most helps you and your family, is very important. In the future you may choose to become more involved with the way the centre is run.

To help and support improvement, we have made some recommendations. First, we would like the advisory board and the local authority to ensure that all the professionals in your area work more closely together to make sure they are reaching people who really need the services. Secondly, we have asked the centre managers and leaders to work more closely with agencies that will support your learning, training and job opportunities so that there will be more of these opportunities in the future.

Please accept our thanks for the time you have taken to tell us about your experiences of Lighthouse Children's Centre. We couldn't meet everybody but have greatly enjoyed meeting those of you who were there with your families. We really appreciate the time you have spent with us. Speaking to parents and children is a really important part of the inspection and we couldn't do it without you. We are very grateful, and hope you will continue to support the work of the centre.

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