

Inspection report for The Community Link

Local authority	Luton
Inspection number	383554
Inspection dates	9–10 November 2011
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Centre leader	Colette McGeough
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Leagrave Primary School 131851 Gill Blowers Nursery School 131175
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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 children's centre manager, the Family and Community Liaison Officer, the headteachers from Leagrave Primary School and Gill Blowers Nursery School, centre staff, health workers, the police community support officer, several partners including 'Active Luton' and 'Luton Adult Community Learning', many groups of parents and carers, three members of the advisory board and two representatives from the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

The Community Link is situated in a mixed neighbourhood with a few significant areas of disadvantage. This centre covers urban areas, attracting a diverse range of families to the centre. Families who live in the surrounding area are of White British heritages and some are from minority ethnic groups. A significant number of families are from Asian and African families or from Western and Eastern European groups. A few are at the early stages of learning to speak English. The area around the centre has considerable levels of unemployment, families in receipt of benefits and workless households.

The centre was designated in February 2008 and opened in March 2009. Since then, it has operated as an integrated centre. It is able to provide the full 'core' offer because it provides health services, early education and childcare. Most children enter early education with skills, knowledge and abilities that are below those expected for their age. The children's centre operates from a building on the Leagrave Primary School site and two rooms at Gill Blowers Nursery School.

The centre manager is also the assistant headteacher of Leagrave Primary School and the leadership team includes the Family and Community Liaison Officer from Gill

Blowers Nursery School. They are supported by the headteachers of Leagrave Primary and Gill Blowers Nursery School. The advisory board is comprised of representatives from the lead agency, parents, staff from the centre and a number of neighbourhood partners.

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 Community Link provides children and families with a good range of services and meets their needs well. It works successfully with families in the area and over three-quarters within the reach area engage with the centre. A significant strength is the way that very strong relationships have been built up between centre staff and users. This is because the staff care and support parents and carers outstandingly well. Users really appreciate the way that their personal needs are met through highly personalised guidance from staff. For example, several parents commented, 'You can ask the centre staff questions you could not ask anyone else.' Evidence from case studies shows that families have received extremely good support in times of crisis because of referrals made by staff. Parents and carers are kept safe successfully at the centre and they say it is a secure and clean environment for their children. This is because safeguarding is taken seriously. The centre meets its statutory responsibilities for the promotion of equality and diversity effectively. Users from different backgrounds are welcomed successfully into the centre. It has been effective in supporting children with additional needs and their parents and carers.

In a recent survey, the very large majority of users said that their families had benefitted from attending the centre because they had met new people and made friends in the area. The majority of users responded to the survey and many valued the confidence they had been given by attending the centre. One parent summed up their thoughts about the centre by saying, 'When you come here you join the centre family.' Users and their children enjoy taking part in many exciting activities such as 'Stay and Play' sessions. This is because staff successfully organise sessions which include art and messy activities.

The centre places a huge amount of importance on learning through practical

activities. Parents, carers and children take part effectively in 'Sing and Sign' sessions where they learn to communicate using words and sign language successfully. Baby sessions allow young children to investigate carefully how different materials, such as dry leaves, feel in their hands. Good behaviour is evident from all users at the centre. Effective partnerships between staff and other agencies mean that users receive excellent levels of guidance. Healthy lifestyles are adopted successfully and users' well-being is supported considerably because of staff expertise. Summer holiday projects allow children under five as well as older children to keep fit when for instance, they learn to play golf. Children are assessed suitably by staff. However, the recording of children's and adult users' achievements are not always noted down rigorously. This means that it is not easy to track the amount of progress that they make while attending the centre.

The centre manager, the Family and Community Liaison Officer and the advisory board are clear about the strengths and areas of development for the centre. Senior leaders and staff work enthusiastically as a team and use self-evaluation well to drive improvements. Recent developments include the provision of baby massage sessions where parents and carers learn to exercise with their child in a relaxing way. The centre has worked diligently to ensure that children transfer even more smoothly into school. One of the ways they achieved this was by ensuring that bilingual staff greeted parents and children regularly. The centre has created a good development plan with specific targets for improvement. Occasionally, it does not measure its impact in detail and so it is not totally clear about where it has the most success with users over time. Good provision and outcomes, together with effective developments demonstrate the centre's good capacity for continued improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that data is collected and used effectively so that the impact of the centre's work on users can be evaluated more thoroughly.
- Make sure that adult users and children's achievements are tracked in detail from their starting points so that the centre measures their progress more rigorously.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Children are eager to come to the centre and so they achieve well. They enjoy learning because they are involved effectively by many practical activities. For instance, they learn how to make pizzas adding vegetables successfully because of the good use of staff expertise in cookery. Children's basic skills in language, literacy and physical development are promoted well by staff. This means that they are prepared astutely for their next steps. They learn thoughtfully about what to do when they are near fireworks due to high expectations of staff and knowledge about everyday dangers. Many babies' gains in weight are watched rigorously at clinics held regularly at the centre by health specialists. Children's progress in key areas of

learning is not tracked consistently over the time while they attend the children's centre and so the centre does not rigorously record their achievement.

Parents and carers develop their skills to prepare them for work effectively. This means that some have gained employment after completing work experience at the centre. Knowledgeable staff help parents and carers claim the extra benefits to which they are entitled. The centre does not consistently collect information over several years about courses adult users have completed to gain extra qualifications, for example, in literacy and numeracy. This means that the centre does not record enough data to judge impact rigorously.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted successfully through a variety of methods; for example, users learn successfully about the importance of breast feeding because of specialist input and staff awareness. This means that, in this area, the proportion of young children who are breast fed for six to eight weeks is above average. Obesity levels in children in the Reception Year of school have reduced significantly this year. A considerable number of children have improved their confidence and skills in swimming because the centre organises regular trips to the local swimming pool. The proportion of young children with tooth decay is above national proportions but the centre has set itself challenging targets for the future to reduce this.

The centre leader and all staff place a high priority on users' safety, including those who are most vulnerable. As a result of high levels of commitment amongst staff, users' welfare inside and outside the centre is thoughtfully developed. A considerable number of parents and children have completed first aid courses at the centre. One parent said, 'The course gave me the confidence to calmly handle an incident where a child was choking.' Users are regularly involved in discussing risk assessments before they go out on trips for instance to the beach. Small numbers of children, including those who are looked after, are supported through child protection plans well because the centre works in partnership with other agencies effectively to support all their families. This ensures that few cases move on to the Common Assessment Framework or higher levels of support.

Adult users contribute their views effectively and are regularly encouraged to evaluate the sessions that they have attended. The centre uses this feedback well to improve its services and so for example, evening sessions were astutely added for the convenience of users.

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	2

and social development	
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre understands its users' needs well due to staff's local knowledge. It provides a good range of in-house and outreach services and activities, matched well to the needs of users in the local area. It is effectively engaging with its target groups. A high proportion of adult users and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities work with the centre regularly due to the positive approach of staff. Users, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, engage successfully with the centre because it runs toddler sessions for all several times a week. A 'Saturday Club' ensures that working parents, mums, dads and grandparents can enjoy active sessions at the centre with their children.

A few parents have completed English as a second language courses due to effective partnerships. The toy and book library allows users to borrow suitable materials and so learning activities are promoted thoughtfully. 'Stay and Play' sessions allow children to explore a wide variety of materials in well-equipped indoor areas. 'Baby Stay and Play' sessions allow younger children and babies to learn to socialise successfully with others. Occasionally, not all staff use national guidance of children's developmental stages to record the next steps clearly for individual children who attend the centre regularly.

All parents who spoke to the inspectors were exceptionally positive about the centre and the impact that it is having on their families. For example, one parent explained: 'You can cry on their shoulder if you need to.' Users who are fostering looked after children find it extremely valuable to be able to seek advice easily from staff. Those who have experienced domestic abuse have received exceptionally thoughtful support from the centre. A special evening was supported by the centre which meant that many local groups including the safety at home, road safety and the stop smoking teams could share their guidance with users. Many users said they had improved their home safety after they received a visit from a safety professional.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Astute leadership is provided by senior leaders. Strong teamwork and a shared commitment to improve the centre's impact on the community ensure that all staff with leadership responsibility give effective leadership. Resources are managed well. Good leadership and management with effective provision and good outcomes for users mean value for money is good.

Governance and accountability arrangements are effective. They are dedicated to improving outcomes for children and their families in the local area. Self-evaluation is used well by the centre to create an improvement plan with specific and challenging targets. Users' views are regularly sought and significantly influence service provision. The centre has already identified that it does not always gather evidence fully to show what impact it has on users. This is due to the fact that it does not record children's and adult users' achievements in detail over time.

Partnership working is a significant strength of the centre's work and is good. For example, some members of staff and adult users have completed training from specialist partners in how to use sign language. This means that the numbers of users who use this, as well as language, to enhance their communication skills has increased significantly. Multi-agency working is productive and partners carefully identify those families and children who are at considerable risk. Information is shared astutely because training has improved the use of documents to record concerns and staff utilise them diligently to help users. Parents and carers can find out about all the different opportunities for early education and schools through strong partnerships with providers in the area.

The centre's child protection policy and safeguarding arrangements are good. All staff have been trained at the appropriate level in child protection procedures. Many staff have first aid qualifications to assist children in the early years. The centre is well maintained and health and safety issues are dealt with efficiently. It keeps detailed records about staff which contain valuable information on, for example, their references from previous employers. Records indicate that all staff working at the centre have been subject to an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check.

The centre promotes equality and diversity and tackles discrimination well. Staff are committed to encouraging the inclusion of all families from the surrounding areas. The centre gathers information about the different groups and encourages their

engagement successfully. The centre thoughtfully develops children's and parents' awareness of their diverse community. Cookery sessions mean that users learn about foods from different cultures effectively. This means that adult and younger users learn successfully to respect each other's' backgrounds and lifestyles.

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

No linked schools or settings were inspected at the same time as the centre was inspected, nor were they inspected in the last 12 months.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the The Community Link on 9 and 10 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for helping us to find out about your children's centre. We enjoyed having the opportunity of talking to so many of you.

You told us that you and your children really value the centre. You said the staff are extremely approachable and that they form positive relationships with you. We heard that you like 'Stay and Play' and baby massage sessions where your children can explore all sorts of materials and activities, as well as learn how to socialise effectively. You all like trying healthy activities, such as active sessions during the school holidays because staff are well trained to provide enjoyable activities.

Your children make good progress in their learning and behave well at the centre. This helps to prepare your children successfully for the next stage of their education. 'Stay and Play' sessions for babies are well resourced and so, for example, your children learn to sing nursery rhymes effectively. You learn effectively about the benefits of breast feeding due to well informed staff who give you useful information and advice.

You told us that you and your children are cared for extremely thoughtfully by staff and the inspection evidence confirms your view. Several of you told us how staff guide you very well when you ask for advice on a wide range of topics such as weaning. The staff work closely with other agencies to make sure that you are put in contact with others who can give you the right help and support. The centre works well with other health and educational providers in the area and so you receive good levels of guidance for your own and family lives.

The centre welcomes people from all backgrounds and treats everyone equally and fairly. Your centre manager and staff have thoughtful ideas about ways to improve the centre. They carry out regular surveys to find out what you are happy with and where you are less pleased. The centre responds well to your requests and has given you, for example, access to 'Baby Stay and Play' sessions for children under two years of age.

We have asked the centre manager and senior staff to look at how they can make things even better. One of our recommendations is for staff to record your achievements and those of your children even more carefully than they do now. In this way, the centre can show how effective it has been in supporting you and your families. It can also improve by collecting more information and data about its success with you to assess its impact on the community.

It was a pleasure to meet you and your children. We hope that you continue to flourish and enjoy your time at the Community Link Children's Centre.

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