

Inspection report for Great Lever Children's Centre

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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY374367 Great Lever 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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, senior leaders, front-line staff and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were also held with members of the advisory board, a wide range of partners, parents and service users. The inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Great Lever Children's Centre is a phase one centre located in the Great Lever ward in south Bolton. All super output areas served by the centre are economically and socially disadvantaged, being ranked as in the top 20% of the most deprived areas in the country. The children's centre derived from a Sure Start Local Programme and received designation in 2005. Governance arrangements are through an advisory board reporting to the local authority.

The proportion of children aged under-four who are living in households where no one is working is 30% with only 12% of families benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. The large majority of local families are from an Asian Pakistani or Asian Indian heritage with 29% from a White British or other minority ethnic groups.

Families in the area experience significant issues relating to long-term unemployment, substance misuse and low levels of literacy and numeracy. Most children enter early years provision with skills and knowledge lower than that usually expected, particularly in their personal and social development and speech and language skills.

The centre provides a range of services which meet the core purpose. The head of centre and family support team work across two other children's centres. Great Lever Nursery Ltd

provides the affiliated childcare. Separate arrangements are in place to inspect this provision and their reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

Great Lever Children's Centre achieves satisfactory outcomes for children and families who use their provision. This established children's centre has not made the best possible progress over time given that it has been prominent within the community for several years. For example, the levels of family engagement with the centre are low and systems to demonstrate the full impact of the centre's work in improving lives and chances of employment are not well developed. In addition, the centre has been subject to a long review and imminent restructure to a 'Children and Families Support Service' which continues to impact on the rate of progress the centre has, and continues to make.

The head of centre and her team are stretched to capacity due to a reduction in staffing but they work hard to provide correctly targeted services which represent local needs. Improvement plans are sound and confirm that the leadership team have a secure understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for future improvement. However, these are over complex and not grounded in precise targets to measure progress over time. Consequently, the overall effectiveness of the centre and their capacity for future improvement are both satisfactory.

Health outcomes are satisfactory overall and the centre are beginning to address low breastfeeding rates, childhood obesity and some factors associated with low birth weight babies. Partnerships with health professionals and health and maternal provision within the centre are secure, resulting in good levels of attendance at baby clinics, health visitor sessions and baby groups. However, attendance at breastfeeding buddies has dropped and sessions, such as 'Big Cook, Little Cook' have not run for some time so the centre know they cannot be complacent if they are going to sustain further improvements.

Children in the Early Years Foundations Stage make good strides in their learning and development. Good outcomes are embedded in strong provision and professional input from the children's centre teacher alongside a good range of family learning programmes, which are successful in raising parents' knowledge of child development and how to nurture this. 'Structure, routine and taking a step back is so important when children are playing and learning' states one parent reflecting the views of others.

Well-targeted support, links with paediatric health professionals and individual learning plans which parents and staff devise, ensure children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities equally make good progress. However, more formal learning and development and volunteer opportunities for parents are less well developed. The centre is able to confirm that some parents do access local education providers for accredited and non-accredited courses. However, data relating to retention, achievements and long term progression is not routinely collated.

Safeguarding procedures are robust. The implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) alongside secure referral pathways and cohesive multi-agency support underpins the safety, well being and protection of families resulting in good outcomes in times of crisis. Furthermore, parents and carers report that they feel 'exceptionally safe and willing to seek support from the centre without hesitation'.

Staff are proactive in providing an inclusive and welcoming environment where respect for one another is evident. The building has a good range of meetings rooms, clinical space and playrooms and is extremely welcoming to all. The community cafe is the 'hub' of the centre and provides a friendly and casual meeting place as well as good healthy food.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes for families by:
 - ensuring improvements within breastfeeding and obesity rates are sustained and further improved
 - improving pathways into training in order to increase parents' and carers' knowledge, skills and opportunities to gain future employment, consider in particular, the availability of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and literacy training
 - devising and implementing a volunteering programme which includes a range of work based experiences.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management in order to improve outcomes for all users by:
 - working closely with the local authority and children's centre partners, to improve the collation and analysis of data and information particularly about target groups, to inform the evaluation of outcomes more systematically

- re-evaluating improvement plans to ensure they are sharply focused and grounded in robust and challenging targets to secure the rapid and sustainable development of future services
- working with the local authority to ensure the implementation of the 'Children and Families Support Service' including the roles of family support and outreach services, are thoroughly monitored and evaluated to successfully increase engagement and best meet the needs of the wider community.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Great Lever Children's Centre has effected some secure change, improving outcomes for some of its local parents and children. 'Without the support from the children's centre I would not be on the road to recovery' stated one single father, whilst many others commented on how much their confidence and self-esteem had grown as a direct result of their involvement with the centre. The centre has developed a satisfactory range of health services and related activities and as a result, smoking amongst adults has reduced and parents state their children eat more fruit and vegetables.

Information about weaning has given parents and carers a better understanding of providing a healthy diet for their babies. The recent establishment of a local community garden provides an opportunity for families to grow their own vegetables, with some of this produce being used in the community café. The centre has a renewed focus on improving breastfeeding rates and reducing the incidence of smoking in mothers at delivery. Whilst clear pathways for support have been identified, breastfeeding rates still remain too low with only 35% of mothers choosing to sustain breastfeeding beyond six weeks following birth.

Work associated with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) has resulted in a three year reduction in the number of accidents and admissions to hospital. Centre staff use home visits to offer practical advice about potential dangers in the home and inform parents of how to minimise these. The centre has been proactive in ensuring that children subject to a child protection plan or the CAF processes receive interventions which improve their home life. In addition, the authority's Multi-Agency Referral Panel (MARF) facilitates effective partnership working, ensuring improved outcomes particularly for those children on child protection plans.

Effective tracking confirms that children achieve expected or above, levels of development for their age, despite their low starting points, contributing to a narrowing of the achievement gap. This is also the case within family activities where WOW books confirm good progress by children and adults engaged in targeted group activities such as ESOL Child and Parent Group. The provision to help children learn, develop and gain skills for the future is good and consistent. As a result, speech and language interventions, such as Every Child a Talker, have resulted in a reduction in the number of children likely to be at risk of speech delay and parents continue to sustain positive strategies they have learnt to promote language interaction with their babies. Equally, Webster Stratton courses provide parents

with positive parenting techniques which enable difficult behaviour to be managed more effectively. One parent stated that without the support of the centre she would have 'struggled to manage my child's temper tantrums.'

Whilst the successful partnership with Jobcentre Plus has helped some parents into training and employment, there are not enough accredited courses for improving basic skills, including ESOL to meet the full needs of families.

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	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	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	3
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?

3

Provision is satisfactory overall because there are currently not enough family support staff and outreach community workers to meet the needs of all target groups due to service changes. Although the range of provision meets the needs of families attending, parents report their concern about the future of the centre and the reduction in aspects of the provision. Participation rates across services are variable, although the centre has begun to engage more fathers, lone parents and asylum seeking families. In addition, some young parents are effectively signposted to the Under 19's Group alongside support from the outreach midwife and family support.

Family support is effectively led by MARP and includes a thorough assessment of need, which ultimately leads to increased social independence and improved safety and well-being for children and stronger parenting skills. Care, guidance and support are good and a strength of the centre. The range of specialist provision, such as Mother's Overcoming Substance, Asian Women's Group and Sole to Sole for lone parents confirms the priority placed on supporting families and individuals who need it most. Furthermore, a number of families are collected and returned home by mini-bus enabling their participation where this may otherwise, not be possible. 'I couldn't get here without the transport' was the general consensus of these groups. The wealth of information displayed around the centre heightens parents' awareness of safe sleeping, child protection and how to tackle issues,

such as bullying. Parents consistently report, 'I didn't know the centre could help with so many of my problems' and 'Staff provide such positive support... it's changed my life'.

Some parents are supported to improve their educational and personal development. For example, two parents set up their own on-line fashion business after attending a business workshop. This achievement is used to promote entrepreneurial behaviour amongst other parents, encouraging others to consider potential careers and the pathways they will need to access to realise their aspirations. However, opportunities to pursue these pathways are limited. In addition, the centre has limited evidence available to demonstrate how it has enabled adults to progress to further education or training and ultimately employment, as it does not routinely track their long-term progress.

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	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?

3

The day-to-day management of the centre is satisfactory and the head of centre, ably supported by her team and advisory board, continue to drive the vision to improve lives and secure a stronger future for children.

A three-year comprehensive business plan is rightly focused on continuous improvements associated with the health, well-being and education for families. For example, action plans focus on increasing registrations across the wider and potentially more vulnerable community. However, plans are not embedded in rigorous targets across all aspects preventing rapid and sustained improvement. Furthermore, the information management systems do not always provide accurate and meaningful data for the head of centre to work with and the quality of evaluations across activities and between children's centre partners is inconsistent. This hinders the centres ability to demonstrate the full impact on family outcomes. As a result, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Equality and inclusion is central to the centres work ensuring everybody feels welcome and respected. Joint celebration arrangements for Eid and Christmas and the value placed on promoting culture diversity through a range of information displayed in locally spoken languages, ensures all parents and carers are kept well informed about matters which might concern them.

The centre promotes the protection and welfare of families well due to a progression of job specific training for staff, cohesive partnerships with key agencies and effective referral pathways to support. The centre provides well coordinated support to families at risk of domestic violence including referral to specialist activities, such as the Freedom project. There are robust procedures for vetting the suitability of staff, including those of partner organisations, are suitable to work with children.

The centre benefits from some good partnerships, such as those established with health professionals, Jobcentre Plus and social care. Senior leaders and partners meet regularly to discuss provision and service delivery and many provide on site services which make their services more accessible. In the same way, parents are valued as partners and make an active contribution to the running of the centre through the advisory board and 'Parents' Power'.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures 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	3
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

The affiliated childcare provision is provided by Great Lever Nursery. The provision was last inspected in 2008 and judged to be good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Great Lever Children's Centre on 7 - 8 December 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

During our inspection, we were pleased to find that you had lots of positive things to say about the children's centre. You told us that attendance on Webster Stratton behaviour management courses had really help you to improve your children's eating and sleeping routines and deal with their temper tantrums in a calm and positive way. Parent's comments such as 'I focus on the good behaviour and not the bad' and 'Tempers are over as quickly as they start now, I don't get stressed with it' confirm this. You also told us that courses, such as Make a Difference and Big Kid's Club had helped you how your children develop and how to support their play and build on their particular interests when playing with them at home.

We found that you are taking some steps to improve yours' and your children's health and safety. Many of you have installed home safety equipment, you have learnt about the dangers of smoking pipes and you are encouraging your children to eat healthier foods. As a result, the number of accidents is reducing and more children are at a healthy weight. Furthermore, more mothers are breastfeeding for longer periods of time, which is good for their babies. However, the centre knows that they must make sure these things continue to improve.

A small number of people are regular volunteers in the centre which helps them to get practical work experience and this has helped them to choose a career path, and encouraged them to complete qualifications so they can get a job in the future. In fact, building your confidence and raising your self-esteem and willingness to make positive changes in your lives is a strength of the centre. We also know that Jobcentre Plus work closely with the centre and this has helped more of you get good advice about benefits, training and employment. However, the centre do not really know how many parents have accessed training provided by places such as Bolton College or the Great Lever Family Centre, so they do not know the personal progress adults make over time. Furthermore, volunteering opportunities are limited despite many of you being willing to volunteer.

We found that children attending the Great Lever Nursery and the children's centre activities make good progress in their learning and development and this is confirmed by the evidence the centre provided. This is especially so in their language and speech development, their confidence and social skills. We found that this is also the case for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who receive good care and support enabling them too, to make good strides in their learning. Good arrangements to support your children when moving onto school alongside good provision for their learning ensures they are ready for their move to school. Your comments, such as 'my child is confident, can listen and play well with other children', confirmed this.

We found some parents and carers are involved in Parent Power and the advisory board and these people listen to the views of others very carefully and report their findings to the centre so leaders know if you are happy and that services meet your needs. We also found that the centre ask you to fill in evaluations after your activities so they can assess how well each group worked and determine if they need to make changes in the future. However, the centre does not yet have a suitable system to make sure everybody they work with does the same. Therefore, they do not always know the difference some of their activities make to your lives.

You told us that you enjoy lots of activities, such as Baby Group, Chatterplay and sensory play provided through the Little Footsteps Pathway. We found that the centre have provided some specialist groups which help families who are vulnerable or experiencing crisis. We found the family support team work really hard to get to know you, understand your needs and put action plans in place to support you. However, as you told us, they are currently a very small team with a big workload and although they have reorganised some sessions so activities can be run in groups, this means fewer people in your community get their support. In addition, we found that there are lots of families in the area still to benefit from the centre. You shared your concerns that recent cuts in funding have resulted in fewer crèche's and reduced activity programmes and you want more flexible sessions which all the family can attend more frequently.

We were pleased to hear that you find staff to approachable and supportive and value how hard they work in trying to help you. We found this too. However, we found that the centre is experiencing financial constraints and a local authority restructure. Due to your concerns and our inspection findings, we have asked the local authority to carefully monitor this restructure to make sure the centre is able to improve its services quickly and able to reach more families, particularly those who may need family support the most. We have also asked them to review their action plans, set targets in these, and make sure the centre's progress can be supported, measured and reviewed over time.

Thank you so much for talking with us and sharing your experiences about the centre. We wish you and your families every success for the future.

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