

Inspection report for Leek and Rural Children's Centre

Local authority	Staffordshire
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Reporting inspector	Sue Pepper HMI

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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY386106 Beresford Children's Centre childcare.

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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, the management team, coordinators from the Families First Local Support team, health partners, a representative from Home Start, the family activities coordinator, the learning and development manager, the District Children's Commissioner, parents and a representative from the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Leek and Rural Children's Centre evolved from two previously separate children's centres which were both designated in 2006. The centre's merged to become a phase one centre in 2010. The centre continues to operate from two different sites. It is co-located with Beresford Memorial First School which is situated in Leek. The centre offers childcare and training sessions from this site. The centre's administrative base is at Manifold Primary School in the more rural area of Warslow where it also runs a breakfast club. The centre offers a range of universal and targeted services with the support of key partners and commissioned services on-site and at different designated locations to serve the extensive geographical area.

The centre covers the north of the market town of Leek and the rural wards of Dane, Hamps Valley, Manifold, Horton and Ipstones. Almost all of the population in the area served by the centre is of White British heritage. Leek North has significant areas of deprivation which are ranked amongst the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. Some of the rural areas also feature particular disadvantage, some of which is in relation to access to services. Recent figures show that the population of children under five years of age is 820 with almost half living in the Leek North area.

There are small minority of lone parents and a few families are living in households dependent on workless benefits.

The Early Years Foundation Stage provision is delivered through various settings and groups. Children generally enter childcare and early education with skills at expected levels for their age. On-site day care is provided for up to 57 children under eight years of age, and of these not more than nine may be under two years of age. Separate arrangements are in place to inspect this provision and reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The work of the centre is monitored by the local authority and an advisory board which consists of a range of professionals and partners. The centre is open from 8am until 6pm, Monday to Friday, 50 weeks of the year. They also open occasional evenings and weekends to meet user's needs.

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

Leek and Rural Children's Centre is a good centre. The leadership, management and provision of the centre are all good. Consequently, the majority of outcomes for children and their families are good.

Attention to promoting healthy lifestyles and safeguarding is high priority. The centre works extremely well with the 'Families First' locality support team which promotes an effective multi-agency approach. They provide excellent support for those children and families who are in particularly vulnerable situations. Effective early intervention helps prevent some health and social issues from accelerating. Outreach work is a real strength of the centre. Parent volunteers are sensitively matched to families, some of whom have first-hand experience of similar situations.

Inclusion of children and families is central to the centre's vision. Parents say they feel safe and welcome at the centre services. Users thoroughly enjoy the good range of services provided and as a result user satisfaction is high. Many parents described services as simply, 'brilliant.' One parent said she found the services to be, 'like a breath of fresh air.'

Good partnership working with key partners is vital due to many of the services being delivered outside the centre sites. The majority of targeted families are engaged with work of the centre. The number of families registered and engaging with the centre is increasing and further work to engage even more is on-going. Centre staff are not complacent and they acknowledge that there could be families within their reach area who would benefit from services and who are not accessing them. Services have been rolled out into the community across the diverse area, much of which is rural.

Engagement of parents is a clear priority. The centre actively encourages parents through successful informal methods to ensure their views are heard in order to shape services to meet their needs. However, no parents are involved in the more formal environment of the advisory board so they do not have a strategic oversight of the work of the centre.

The head of centre has led and managed its development well through a transitional period of change during which Staffordshire County Council has established locality children's centre partnerships with clear geographical boundaries. Self-evaluation is largely accurate. Plans have promoted continuous improvement and focus appropriately on well-identified areas for further improvement. However, the development plan lacks specific timescales and clear success targets which can easily be measured.

Several new initiatives were seen to be in place, although it was too early to judge the impact of some. The head of centre has quickly identified gaps in the provision and increased the numbers of families engaging. In addition she has managed to seamlessly merge two children's centres without causing disruption to the different communities. This demonstrates good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Provide more opportunities for parents to be engaged in the governance of the centre.
- Develop planning so that the centre can track precisely the progress made towards clearly measurable defined targets by using success criteria.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Effective partnerships with health partners ensure users' needs are identified at an early stage. Take-up of immunisation programmes is high and antenatal drop-ins are well attended. The centre successfully promotes breast feeding with the help of the 'Friendly About Breastfeeding' (FAB) mother's support group. A mother said

'Attendance at the group definitely made me feel more confident to feed in public.' Several parents told inspectors about the difference attending 'Baby Massage' had made to enhance their bonding with their baby. Some described this as a very valuable service which also, 'provided much needed time for me.' However, despite this good support, data suggests the percentage of mothers sustaining breastfeeding is slightly below the county average but this number is increasing year-on-year.

Initiatives like the 'Healthy Eating and Nutrition in the Really Young' (HENRY) courses promote a healthier diet through promoting recommended portion sizes and identifying the salt and sugar content of everyday foods to encourage healthier choices. These good activities are starting to educate users on the benefits of eating a healthy diet. However, the number of children who are obese when starting reception is slightly above the county average. The centre knows that there is more work to do to ensure that all children in the area start school at a healthy weight.

The 'team around the child' approach taken to apply the Common Assessment Framework is used particularly well to support those families who are experiencing a range of difficulties, such as, isolation, depression, domestic violence and substance misuse. Excellent liaison with social care and other partner agencies ensure the life chances and well-being of those on the child protection register is significantly improved through regular consultation.

Users develop a good understanding of how to keep their children and themselves safe through the good practice which staff model daily and the good safety advice which is given out routinely. Hot drinks are available at some family sessions due to carefully considered strategies which are put in place to minimise the risks to children. For instance, the inspectors observed cups which change colour when they are filled with hot liquid. Children enjoy challenging experiences, such as toasting marshmallows with good adult supervision. 'First Aid' training has helped to reassure parents as to what to do in an emergency. A typical comment was 'I now know the signs and symptoms of meningitis and how to resuscitate a child.'

A 'child centred' approach ensures children's views are listened to and activities support their individual interests. Staff understand the different ways boys and girls can learn and they use specific techniques well, particularly to promote boys early writing. Consequently, children's achievement is good. Early year's data now shows a slow but narrowing of the achievement gap between the lowest 20%.

A range of positive parenting courses have had a good impact on some families' lives, particularly in promoting personal development and a happy, healthy life style. Parents explore values which promote tolerance and understanding and they learn about the importance of play and praise to children's development and sense of well-being. As a result many parents have become more confident in their parenting skills. Typical comments from parents were, 'I feel much happier in myself now' and 'I am well and truly on the right path to move forward now.' While parents spoken to were keen to share their views with the inspectors, the centre has yet to encourage more users to take this one step further so that their voice is represented at a more

strategic level.

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	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	2

How good is the provision?

2

Both sites on which the centre operates have limited space to run services. The centre staff have been successful in securing suitable community venues across their large area to further meet the diverse needs of user's successfully and to overcome barriers to service delivery. A community bus also provides a successful toy-library service. The site in the town of Leek is ideally situated for families in the Haregate estate where many of the families live. The centre provides meetings and good quality childcare here. The site in Warslow is set in a remote rural area which has exceptional opportunities for families to learn outdoors. Staffordshire Wildlife Trust is used well to plan outings in this idyllic rural setting which families can enjoy.

The centre offers a good range of services such as the 'Breakfast Club' drop-ins which provide good care, advice and support. The 'Young Parents' group is under review to ensure it continues to meet users needs. The 'Soft Play' events and the new 'Twist and Shout' sessions are extremely popular. At these activities adults enjoy physical activities with their children. Parents described the services as, 'absolutely wonderful' saying, 'I can not praise the centre enough.' A few described the services as being a 'lifeline' in terms of facilitating the forging of good friendships particularly within their rural community which helps prevent feelings of isolation.

Support for families using the centre is good due to high-quality partnership working which in turn ensures assessment is robust. The 'Special Matters' support group provides specific time for families who have a child with a special educational need and/ or a disability to meet in a supportive environment. Through this group parents and their children have benefited from worthwhile day trips to places of interest. In addition the group also offers respite care for parents if it is required. The centre

recognises the important role fathers and grandfathers play in their child's development and they are welcome at all groups. A group for new fathers, 'Hit the Ground Crawling' runs periodically to meet their specific needs.

Children and adults have access to good-quality childcare and education. The uptake of the free entitlement to early year's places is high and firm plans are in place to extend this to two-year-olds. Family learning successfully promotes purposeful learning for many, especially when crèche places are provided. Achievements are recognised and well celebrated. The centre provides certificates following attendance on courses at follow up sessions which help the centre staff measure the impact of participant's attendance. The centre also rewards those families who engage with services with special incentives and events.

Leek College offers a wide range of accredited courses and opportunities, such as apprenticeships which improves adult's skills and knowledge. Up-take of courses is good. The majority of users of the centre are involved in adult learning which leads to some returning to work. The Citizens Advice Bureau regularly advises families on a range of issues such as benefits, debt management and housing advice. They have worked jointly with the centre to promote an innovative 'loan shark' campaign which raises awareness of this sensitive issue. Job vacancies are provided by the Jobcentre Plus but they provide no evidence of the impact of their work.

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

Governance of the centre is good. Clear line management responsibilities and accountability arrangements are in place for personal supervision and performance management. All partners understand their roles in developing integrated provision to meet users' needs, particularly target groups. The previously established management advisory committee, which held the centre to account for its work, has now been replaced by an advisory board which has yet to take on a more strategic role.

The head of centre is also the head of Staffordshire Moorlands Children Centre. She is an astute, reflective practitioner who knows the strengths of the centre and what needs to be done to secure further improvement. The centre managers have a clear vision for their future development and their work is subject to the scrutiny of the

local authority. Consultation regarding the merger of the two centres, the remodelling of the children’s centre services and the wider children’s services were finalised earlier this year so some new systems have yet to be fully embed.

The centre constantly strives to promote financial efficiencies and have successfully secured a new staff post due to submitting a robust business plan. Additional funds are sourced to support a number of activities. The electronic data base enables the centre to effectively scrutinise data to identify and monitor trends. Taking all of this into account the centre provides good value for money.

Good safeguarding practice is adopted across all areas of the centre’s work. Training for staff is up-to-date and risk assessments are of a good quality. All partner agencies understand the wider safeguarding agenda. Safeguarding arrangements comply with the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board requirements. Recruitment and checking of partners is robust. The Common Assessment Framework is used well to target specific support for families. Case studies evidence sensitive multi-agency work.

Equality and diversity are promoted well by the centre’s inclusive ethos and approach. Centre staff tackle any discrimination quickly and swiftly. Those who speak English as an additional language receive bespoke services tailored to meet their individual needs and as a result they are extremely positive about how much they feel valued in the centre and in the community.

The centre has tried unsuccessfully to develop a parent’s forum to provide further opportunities for families to become more involved in making a meaningful contribution to decision-making and governance of the centre. They are not deterred and continue to speak to users about the positive impact they can have on shaping services at the centre. Responses to ideas parents make via regular discussions and the well planned use of specific questions at all services are innovative ways the centre ensures parents are regularly consulted. The ‘You said, we did.’ system ensures parents are kept fully informed.

Due to the centre sites close proximity to schools the majority of children are familiar with where they will go for the next step in their education. The centre has firm plans in place to now formalise and improve their transition arrangements to further improve children’s and their family’s preparation for school.

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	2

groups	
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

EY386106 Beresford Children's Centre childcare was inspected in 2009 when it was judged good. This inspection has contributed to the children's centre report and judgements. The full report can be found on the Ofsted website.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Leek and Rural Children's Centre on 13 and 14 December 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

It was a pleasure to hear how much you value the well organised services the centre provides and how you feel welcome and safe. One parent described staff as, 'Like a best friend.' You told us that you particularly enjoyed the opportunity to meet one another, especially those of you that live in the more rural parts of the area.

Some of you have been provided with good support from the 'FAB' mother's support group which has helped you to successfully breast feed. We know many of you look forward to the 'Breakfast Club' drop-ins, 'Buzzabout' and the 'PEEP' groups. You enjoy supporting your child's development and joining in with singing and craft activities. Many of you were positive regarding adopting more healthy life styles following attending the 'HENRY' course. Some of you said you now expect your child to sit at the table to eat, you serve smaller portions and you know which cereals are the healthier options. The 'Soft Play' sessions now run more regularly due to popular demand. We understand many of you enjoyed the 'Baby Massage.' You were positive

about the benefits of using massage to improve your bonding with your baby. Parenting programmes have developed your self-awareness and confidence, enhancing your parenting skills. You have found good night time sleep routines useful in settling your child at bed time. You understand the importance of helping your children develop good speaking and listening skills because some of you have attended 'Story Telling and Rhymes' sessions or you have used the book bags which you can take away to extend your children's learning at home.

The multi-agency partners and workers commissioned by the centre all work well together to use their professional experience, knowledge and resources to meet your specific needs. They assess any difficult situations successfully and they know what support to provide you in a crisis. They have built trusting relationships with families they have worked closely with.

We have asked the centre to improve their planning so they can see how their work is improving outcomes for you and provide you with more detailed information on how it is helping you. We know some of you act as volunteers and are further strengthening the work of the centre as well as increasing your own skills which can lead to securing employment. We have asked the centre to increase opportunities for you to be involved in a more formal environment to help monitor the centre's progress. We hope that some of you will want to get involved in decision-making to support governance of the centre by joining the advisory board.

We would like to thank everyone who was willing to speak to us. We are very grateful for your help and wish you every success in the future.

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