

Inspection report for Loughborough West Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Leicestershire
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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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 centre staff, members of the local partnership group, representatives of the local authority, and the statutory, community and voluntary organisations working in partnership with the centre. They also talked informally to parents, carers and users of the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Loughborough West Children's Centre is one of seven centres in Charnwood. It has operated as a phase two centre since 2009 and serves a reach area of 3.9 square miles. While the very large majority of families are of White British heritage, a significant proportion, around 14.5%, come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest groups being Indian and Bangladeshi. The centre's reach area serves an overall population of around 900 children aged five years or under, which represents some 3.5% of the local population.

Deprivation in education, skills and training is a prominent form of disadvantage in the area. Some 19% of the 16–74 population have no qualifications. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage provision across the area with skills and abilities which are in line with those expected for their age. Some 16.5 % of children are eligible for free school meals compared to a county average of 8.9%. About 22% of children aged under four live in income-deprived households.

The local authority governs the centre and has commissioned inter-agency partnerships to deliver the services and activities on its behalf. Representatives from these partner providers oversee the projects for which they are responsible. A locality partnership coordinator provides strategic coordination and support to the

locality while a children's centre co-ordinator, who also oversees the other six children's centres in Charnwood, coordinates the day-to-day running of the centre.

The centre operates on a locality-organised model. The centre's family outreach workers focus on the most hard-to-reach groups in different communities. Some sessions for parents are delivered at the centre. However, the centre's main focus is on outreach work with families vulnerable due to their circumstances. Partner agencies provide a range of health, social care, and education and family support services at the centre's premises. The centre does not provide childcare on-site.

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

This centre provides a satisfactory service for children and families in Loughborough West. Outcomes are also satisfactory. Outreach workers have good local knowledge of the community that the centre serves. They work well with families to enable them to access the range of services available from statutory and voluntary agencies. Many parents have been supported well by the Citizens' Advice Bureau, with which the centre has formed productive links. Outreach workers signpost parents and users to appropriate services and work particularly effectively with some of the most hard-to-reach families.

The centre has carried out some good work to promote health and well-being. It has worked effectively to stabilise childhood obesity rates and run successful programmes at the centre in healthy eating and cooking with children. A smoking cessation programme was particularly effective in reducing the number of women smoking during pregnancy. However, the proportion of fathers who participate in health-related sessions is low.

Though parents report that they enjoy the learning sessions at the centre, staff have had to cancel some sessions because not enough parents attend. Centre leaders recognise that they have not done enough to publicise these courses to parents and users.

The centre's contribution to economic and social well-being is satisfactory. Children in two wards served by the centre have lower levels of speech and language development than other children when they first enter school. The centre has begun to work with families and schools to support these children. A learning programme run in conjunction with a local college helped to support a small number of teenage mothers to progress into further studies in literacy and numeracy. The centre's partnerships with the council's adult learning service and with Jobcentre Plus are less well established.

The extent to which parents and users make a contribution to the running of the centre and determining the range of provision offered is low. The centre recently established a parents' forum, which has met twice in 2011. However, the local partnership group does not currently have any representation from parents. Though a few parents have progressed into volunteer work as a result of their involvement with the centre, this proportion is low. The centre has not been able to establish itself as the heart of the community, in part due to its location, which is further away from its core target area of Thorpe Acre than it would like.

Managers have developed effective partnerships with a range of appropriate agencies to deliver its core services. Outreach work is especially effective in supporting the most vulnerable groups. Provision is satisfactory because despite the centre's priority aim of delivering services through outreach activity rather than centre-based activities, the centre is under-used and does not do enough to provide services either directly delivered at the centre or through one or more of its partners.

Outreach workers have a good understanding of families' needs. They achieve this because they carry out detailed assessment of parents' needs and receive early notification of any pregnancies. On the basis of their assessments, they provide successful early intervention strategies and are particularly successful in reaching vulnerable families.

Parents value the courses provided for adults to develop basic skills such as literacy, numeracy and childcare. Nevertheless, take-up is very low. The centre recognises that it has not done enough to develop further its relationship with the council's adult learning service to provide a coherent and structured range of programmes for centre users.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff are supported well. The family outreach workers are particularly clear about their role in relation to the families with whom they work. But, the very recent appointment of some senior staff means that it is too soon to judge the impact of their appointment on service users. The centre promotes equalities satisfactorily and is a welcoming and friendly place for parents and children.

The local partnership group is effective in providing an appropriate degree of challenge and direction for the centre. A number of well-represented subgroups focus on each of the partnership groups' priorities for the Charnwood district. The

partnership groups contribute well to the satisfactory self-evaluation and to the targets in the improvement plan.

Safeguarding procedures are thorough and meet current requirements. The centre is very secure. It places a high priority on safeguarding users. Staff training is thorough. Staff know what to do if a safeguarding concern is raised. Procedures for dealing with a disclosure are clear. All staff receive an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check, which the centre renews every three years. There is useful information at the centre about sexual health and domestic violence.

The quality of data available to the centre is generally good. Some gaps in this data exist, but staff are aware of these and are working well with their counterparts in the council to produce comprehensive and accurate data. The centre manages its resources efficiently and provides satisfactory value for money. The centre's strong links with key partners and the effective work carried out by the outreach workers mean that there is satisfactory capacity to make further improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Establish the means by which parents, carers and the community can contribute to the development and future direction of the centre, including to an advisory board.
- Raise participation levels further by identifying and assessing the needs of the most vulnerable people more accurately. The centre should also provide parents and their children with good opportunities to secure their future economic stability, for example, by attending sessions at the centre.
- Set clear and measurable targets for all outcome areas as part of the strategic development planning process so that the centre can evaluate the impact of its work more rigorously.
- Improve outcomes for economic well-being by:
 - gaining a better understanding of the impact that partner agencies have on parents who have been referred to them for training and employment and use that information to plan services.
 - increase the number of users who participate in adult learning programmes and monitor their subsequent progression.
- Strengthen the speech and language support arrangements for children from the most vulnerable families to help prepare them for their first year at school.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes for families are satisfactory. The centre's healthy weight pathways programme has been successful in stabilising obesity levels in the reach area. An appropriate range of healthy eating courses, such as menu preparation and cooking with children, has been well received by parents. The centre has coordinated smoking cessation programmes in seven locations in Loughborough West with the positive outcome that 50 pregnant women gave up smoking between April and December this year. However, few fathers participate in health sessions. Effective systems provide early notification of pregnancy which means that services can be signposted early and multi-agency support put in place where appropriate.

Children on child protection plans and their families are supported well. Outreach workers liaise effectively with social workers and health visitors, attending child protection case conferences and inter-agency meetings where necessary. The centre made seven referrals to social care in the last year. Case studies show that the centre has contributed to reducing the level of risk to children in this category and to reducing the number of families requiring a high level of monitoring.

Parents enjoy learning sessions at the centre. However, the centre sometimes struggles to run courses because not enough parents are able to attend. A programme run in partnership with a local further education college for teenage mothers was successful in that six of the 10 participants progressed to a level 1 course in English and mathematics, thereby contributing to their future economic and social well-being. However, the proportion of parents who have taken on an adult education programme is low. Though the centre has links with Jobcentre Plus, very few parents have accessed their services.

The centre recognises that it does not engage sufficiently with parents and users in decision making. A parents' forum was set up recently, but it has only met twice. There is no parent or user representation on the local partnership group. Few parents who spoke to inspectors said that they played an active role in contributing to the centre's services or to the range of activities offered. Though a few parents have progressed into volunteer work as a result of initiatives carried out by the centre, staff recognise that this number is low.

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	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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	4

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

The centre provides an appropriate range of services and satisfactory care, guidance and support through its outreach support and home visits. As a phase two centre, managers have prioritised outreach and outreach-based rather than centre-based activities. Consequently, the centre offers few sessions for parents at its premises. Outreach workers have developed good relationships with parents which help them to have sufficient confidence to seek advice and support. Staff have a good level of expertise and professional knowledge which enables them to help families improve their health, well-being and achievement.

Outreach workers know the community well and are aware of the needs and demand for services. They are particularly effective in removing parents' barriers to access to services. For example, many parents have benefited from attending Citizens' Advice Bureau sessions to help them deal with housing and benefits issues.

The centre does not have enough influence in determining the range and type of adult provision that are available. Its relationship with the council's adult learning service, while satisfactory, is insufficiently well established. The centre's links with Jobcentre Plus are weak. Very few parents have benefited from any intervention or support from the Job Centre.

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

3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

There are very clear lines of responsibility from the local authority to centre staff. Staff feel well supported and expectations are high. Relationships are respectful and people say they feel valued. However, there is insufficient celebration of cultural diversity by means of posters and displays at the centre.

The advisory board and staff share their aspirations and are motivated and proactive in taking services out to the hard-to-reach and vulnerable. Several subgroups focus on each of the centre's key priority areas. The advisory board has good representation from partner agencies, but no parent representation. Board members have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and weaknesses and of ways in

which they might extend their role of challenging the centre. Together with centre leaders, they set appropriate targets based on a satisfactory self-evaluation process and good data. There is detailed action-planning and clear prioritisation. However, some outcomes areas do not currently have targets and there are some gaps in the centre's data on particular vulnerable groups.

Procedures for safeguarding families and users are thorough. The centre is very secure. Staff have received good training in safeguarding and some have received training to the highest levels. Safeguarding procedures meet current requirements and staff know with whom and where to share concerns. Information about how to protect vulnerable adults and children from harm is visible at the centre. In addition, useful information about domestic violence and sexual health is on display around the centre. The centre has developed an appropriate range of good-quality partnerships to support its work and a rigorous and well-tested commissioning process for partner agencies. The partnership with health services is particularly well integrated. The major resource the centre has is its staff. They are proving very effective and resilient.

The quality of data available to the centre has improved considerably and the centre leader is now using these data to inform provision. However, some data on the reach area is still missing so it remains difficult for the centre to measure its impact against all the local indicators. The centre manages staff resources efficiently. However, the building is currently under-used with an occupancy rate by user groups that is too low. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

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 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	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
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	3

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Not applicable

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Loughborough West Sure Start Children's Centre on 20 and 21 December 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you and the professionals who work with you. Many of you told us that staff are friendly, hard working and support you well. We agree with you. We found the centre to be welcoming to families and children. The staff have a high level of expertise and offer a range of practical and emotional support to families who need it. The professionals from the different agencies work well together to make sure you receive the right advice and support. Families who are facing complex or difficult times receive satisfactory support.

You told us that you feel safe at the centre. This reflects the work the centre does to promote safety and welfare and the thorough safeguarding arrangements.

The centre has worked well with other agencies and with you to tackle local health-related problems such as obesity and in reducing the number of mothers who smoke during pregnancy. Many of you told us that you learned a lot about eating healthily and staying safe in the home after attending sessions run by the centre. However, the centre sometimes has to cancel classes because not enough parents come to them. We think the centre can do more to ensure that more of you know about the activities that take place. Though a few of you have attended adult education classes to improve your basic skills and to help you prepare for employment, the centre needs to do more to promote adult learning for parents who are registered with the centre.

Though a few of you have helped to make decisions about the activities that the centre runs, not enough parents have become sufficiently well involved with the life of the centre. The local partnership group provides very helpful advice to the centre's managers and board members often ask managers challenging questions about how the centre works. However, there is currently no parent representation on this important group, which means that centre managers do not always take parents' views sufficiently into account when the board makes key decisions about the centre.

The centre's family outreach workers provide a very effective service through their home visits. They have developed good relationships with the parents they visit and helped them to become more confident to use the centre's services as well as those of other agencies. Outreach workers are particularly diligent in carrying out accurate assessments of parents' needs and aspirations so that they gain the most from the services that go on to support them. Many of you told us how much you value the work of these professionals.

The centre has satisfactory leadership and management. Some senior staff have been appointed quite recently so it is too soon to judge how effectively they have been able to support the centre's activities. However, they have already developed a parental participation strategy though the impact of this strategy is yet to be seen. The centre is friendly and welcoming to parents and visitors. We feel that that it could do more to celebrate different types of families and cultures through its wall and poster displays. Centre staff have an appropriate understanding of the centre's main strengths and weaknesses and they work hard to secure their knowledge and understanding of the area that they serve.

There are a few things that we have asked centre leaders to work on in the immediate future.

They should find more effective ways for you to contribute to the development and future direction of the centre, perhaps by including some of you on the centre's advisory board. The centre also needs to increase the number of parents who use the centre's services by identifying and assessing the needs of the most vulnerable people more accurately and providing you with good opportunities to extend your prospects of future employment.

The centre should also set clear and measurable targets for all areas of its work as part of its overall planning so that the centre can evaluate rigorously the impact of its work. We also think that the centre should have a better understanding of how users benefit from the work of the centre's various partners so that it can use this information to improve the service. The centre should also encourage more of you to attend adult learning programmes. Finally, inspectors have told centre leaders that they should improve the speech and language support services for children from the most vulnerable families, so that they are better prepared for the first year at school.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and sampling the centre's work. We wish you every success in the future.

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