

Inspection report for Linthorpe Children's Centre

Local authority	Middlesbrough
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Linked school if applicable	Linthorpe Community Primary School URN:134259
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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 covers the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

An inspection of the co-located primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers, centre staff, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including; health, education and children's social care professionals. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Linthorpe Children's Centre is a phase two, purpose-built centre situated within the grounds of Linthorpe Community Primary School in Middlesbrough and was designated in November 2007. It offers a range of services which include health, social care, family play sessions, parenting programmes, adult education, family outreach and crèche facilities. The centre's reach area includes Gresham, Linthorpe, Middlehaven and Park. There are four very distinct communities within the reach with different social and economic circumstances. There are 946 children aged from birth to five years in the reach area with 59% accessing services in the centre. Within the reach of the centre there are significant issues surrounding mental health, isolation, unemployment, domestic violence, youth crime, substance misuse and low levels of literacy and numeracy skills. There is a diverse mix of residents and a significant Black and Minority Ethnic community, many of whom speak English as an additional language. This is also a community in transition with a high turnover of occupants, including students, many of whom occupy the large number of privately rented properties; up to 50% in some areas. Levels of unemployment are high with 22.3% of children living in households dependent upon workless benefits and many of the existing jobs are low paid. Most children enter early years provision with knowledge and skills that are slightly below expectations for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development. Governance of the centre is provided by Middlesbrough Local

Authority, which is currently undergoing a restructure, in conjunction with an advisory board that comprises of providers, delivery partners, members of the local community and users who attend the centre.

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

Linthorpe Children’s Centre achieves good outcomes for children and families within the reach area. Parents feel valued and the good relationships with staff enable them to talk confidently about many issues that worry them. One commented, ‘I always know I can talk to them about anything. I get lots of help, support and reassurance.’ The attractive and safe environment is highly valued by parents. The commitment of the staff to the well-being of families is strong and the support and guidance provided are much appreciated by users of the centre. ‘Staff and everyone are brilliant, they have really helped me and my children’ is a typical view expressed by parents.

The centre has successfully secured a good understanding among parents of how they can ensure their family’s safety and healthy development. Parents are well supported in developing parenting skills by the good services provided in the centre and through home visits, where appropriate. The centre’s arrangements for safeguarding children are robust and all staff have received appropriate and recent training. All necessary policies and procedures are thorough, properly implemented and understood well by parents. Centre staff go to considerable lengths to ensure that families with circumstances which make them particularly vulnerable are supported well. As a result, confidence and self-esteem improve and families often make good progress in overcoming difficulties.

Parents contribute well to the development of the centre through the ‘Parent Forum’ and staff frequently seek their views. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress from their starting points. There are many successful opportunities for parents and their children to play and learn together, for example through ‘Jolly Jingles’ and ‘Stay and Play’ sessions. As a result, enjoyment and achievement are good. Effective partnerships have been established with a wide range of agencies and organisations and these make a good contribution to identifying the needs of target groups. However, the centre recognises

that too few fathers engage with the centre. Families benefit greatly from the activities provided in partnership with health visitors and midwives, such as the 'Development Checks' clinic.

Parents take advantage of many of the learning opportunities the centre provides and there is a sense of enjoyment in all activities. They have access to a good range of courses which help develop their basic knowledge and skills such as English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL), 'Fun with Numbers' and other early literacy and numeracy courses. However, there is limited participation on adult learning programmes and progression into further education and employment.

The centre benefits from the committed leadership of managers and senior workers. They are dedicated and largely effective in continuing to improve provision, build on its strengths and reach families whose circumstances mean they are most in need of support. Managers and staff have a good knowledge of the reach area and as a result they know the centre's major strengths and areas for development, including who their target groups are, and the factors influencing outcomes. However, self-evaluation and development planning do not yet make full use of all available data to set specific targets that help the centre to demonstrate the full impact of its work on improving outcomes. As a result, this limits the advisory board's ability to provide effective support and challenge. Nonetheless, effective leadership and management, good outcomes for users and quality provision ensure a good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve self-evaluation and development planning further by:
 - working with the local authority to make full use of all available data to set specific targets to measure and demonstrate the impact of the centre's work on improving outcomes more precisely
 - enable the advisory board to use the resulting information to provide effective support and challenge to the centre's leadership.
- Increase participation rates on adult learning programmes, progression into further education and employment and further develop procedures to track and measure the centre's effectiveness in this area.
- Develop strategies to increase the engagement of fathers.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families benefit from a good range of activities to promote a healthy lifestyle. Displays around the centre promote the benefits of breastfeeding and advice and guidance is available at the 'Baby and Child Health Clinic'. As a result of this provision, the proportion of

mothers initiating breastfeeding in the reach area is above average at 63.8% compared to 52.8% for Middlesbrough. In addition data for 2011 show that 41.1% of mothers sustain breastfeeding at six to eight weeks which is much higher than the Middlesbrough figure of 26.3% and close to the national average of 45%. The centre offers a good range of activities to reduce the numbers of children at risk of obesity in Reception Year such as, weaning sessions and 'Weight Management' and 'Let's Get Healthy' courses. As a result the incidence of obesity among Reception Year children is low at 7.6% compared to the national average of 9.4%.

Families trust staff and most are confident to seek help, which is often provided on an individual basis. The centre makes good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), when appropriate, to establish levels of need. The centre works closely with a range of agencies, for example through regular 'Team Around the Family' (TAF) meetings, to ensure that effective provision is made. Families with circumstances that make them vulnerable, including those subject to a child protection plan and looked after children, are well supported by the centre through home visits, one-to-one help and through other partnerships. Parents are supported in minimising risk in their homes through useful advice and guidance. Those who have attended the 'Family Safety' and 'First Aid Awareness' courses commented that; 'I am now much more confident and know I can handle pretty much anything'.

The centre is effective in helping to narrow achievement gaps between different groups of users. Families enjoy the varied opportunities provided by the centre such as 'Rhyme Time' and 'Baby Massage'. Confidence in their parenting skills has improved, particularly their understanding of how children learn and develop and of appropriate activities to support this. The centre has good links with childcare providers and supports them in sharing ideas and good practice. As a result, the majority of children's progress and development of skills is good and improving with 72.3% achieving 78+ points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Scales in 2011, which is close to the national average at 74%. Children behave well and are developing useful skills for the future such as co-operation and independence and families have respect for each other.

Social development is strong and isolated parents, or parents new to the area, are well supported in establishing friendships. One mother commented that; 'Before coming to the centre I was really isolated and didn't know anyone'. Most parents make good use of the frequent opportunities to give their views on the events they attend. In addition there is a well attended parents' forum which is active in fundraising for the centre and organising trips and events. As a result, many parents have good opportunities to contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre.

The majority of adults, including those from target groups and the most vulnerable, are helped to access training and employment information and personal development courses. Parents are encouraged to volunteer at the centre and, although numbers are small, one has recently secured a job in a nearby children's centre and one has enrolled on a Level 3 course at the local college. This is effectively increasing their self-esteem and confidence and securing emotional stability. However, the promotion and tracking of accredited adult

learning programmes and progression into further education and employment are less well developed.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	2

How good is the provision?

2

Managers and staff at the centre know their families well. Centre staff also work very closely with other partner agencies, for example the local authority Early Years team, health professionals, children’s social care, speech and language services and ‘Families Forward’ substance misuse team. Information gleaned from home visits, working with families in particular activities, and from the good and improving data supplied by the local authority, provides the centre with a good knowledge of the needs of most target groups. These needs are increasingly being met through targeted events as well as through universal provision. As a result the care, guidance and support offered to families in the reach area is good. The centre’s effective efforts to seek the views of families also contribute strongly; the ‘Baby Massage’ session was recently split to create two smaller groups, due to high demand from parents.

Available accommodation is used flexibly to support a wide range of activities. The centre is particularly good at helping parents understand how their children learn. In addition children have access to good quality crèche facilities whilst their parents enjoy sessions such as ‘Family Learning’ and specific programmes for promoting parenting skills. The centre has strong links with the co-located primary school and understands the benefits of working together to support children’s smooth transition into the next step in their education. The centre is focused on providing services for families with the greatest need and is successful in working with its target groups such as workless families, teenage parents and those experiencing mental health issues and domestic violence. Participation by target groups is good overall, but, although some fathers attend sessions and express their enjoyment of the support they receive, data show that only 11% engage with the centre. Managers recognise the need to develop further strategies to increase their involvement.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management? **2**

The centre is led and managed well by skilled staff who are keen to develop the centre further to meet the needs of families in the reach area. The centre runs smoothly and day-to-day management is effective. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities well and are appropriately supervised. The advisory board has clear terms of reference with a good range of parent and community representation. As a result there is a strong local voice in the life of the centre and identified priorities link effectively to those of the wider area. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the key issues facing the centre. There are sound links between the centre’s evaluation of its services and the priorities set out in its service delivery plan because the managers and staff know the reach area well. However, currently only satisfactory use is made of available good data in the evaluation process to set specific targets. This limits the centre’s ability to demonstrate further the full impact of its work on improving outcomes and the ability of the advisory board to provide even more effective support and challenge. The centre effectively seeks and makes good use of feedback from users to develop and improve the range and quality of its provision.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. The centre has effective systems in place for recording information related to the vetting and recruitment of staff, including Criminal Records Bureau checks. Staff are very well trained and have access to high levels of support and training. They work very well with other agencies to protect children’s welfare and levels of care are good. For example, those experiencing domestic violence are supported through the centre’s good links with agencies such as ‘My Sister’s Place’ and ‘Harbour’. All activities, as well as the building and the grounds, are carefully assessed for any possible risks to families and staff. The centre places a high priority on including all families. Staff routinely provide additional support, for example assistance with transport, which enables target groups to engage with the work of the centre in meeting their needs. This includes families with disabled children and those with special educational needs who receive good assistance in gaining any extra support needed. The centre is very proactive in promoting equality and diversity. The wide range of families from minority ethnic communities are fully included and supported well through both individual support and universal provision. There is a strong culture of respect within the centre and inclusion is well promoted.

Outcomes for families are good and the centre is successful in ensuring that the majority of families from the reach area engage in its services, with clear priorities identified to increase this further. As a result the centre provides good 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	2
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	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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Linthorpe Children's Centre on 14 - 15 June 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Those of you who were available to meet us told us how friendly, helpful and welcoming the centre is. Activities are well planned to meet your varying needs and we saw much enjoyment in the sessions we visited, particularly the 'Rhyme Time' and 'Stay and Play'

sessions. Those who attend the 'Baby Massage' course told us about the benefits of using massage to improve your relationship with your baby. You are well supported in keeping your family safe and the centre's arrangements for protecting children's welfare are good. Staff work well to ensure that the centre is a safe place and that children have the services they need.

You are provided with valuable advice, sometimes through home visits and one-to-one support, as well as through different groups and activities. Staff also suggest other agencies you could contact, such as the Jobcentre, and the centre holds some helpful information for you, including guidance on keeping your family healthy. You are also often given opportunities to say what you think about what the centre does and make suggestions for improvement. Overall, the centre is working with adult education services well to give you good access to some courses to help improve your own education and future employment opportunities. We have asked the centre to find ways to increase the number of adults who gain qualifications, to help families go on to further training or employment and to become financially secure. We have also asked the centre to gather information on how much difference such courses make to improving outcomes for children and their families. The centre is successful at engaging with the majority of families who benefit from the support and we have asked the centre to ensure that more fathers participate in activities.

The arrangements for the leadership and management of the centre are good. Staff have a clear vision for future development and are strongly committed to developing the services available and engaging with even more families in the reach area. The centre collects lots of information from you, the local authority and its partners and uses this information to make the centre as good as it can be. We have, however, asked it to use this information more effectively so that it can more accurately show how the centre is making a difference to you and your families.

Partnerships with a wide range of other organisations and groups, such as health visitors, midwives and local childcare providers are good, and these effectively enhance the ways in which the centre supports you and your children.

We would like to thank those of you who were available to talk to us about the ways the centre has helped you. It is clear that you value the opportunities and care that the centre provides. We would like to wish you every success in the future.

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