

Inspection report for Leighswood Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	404539
Inspection dates	19–20 September 2012
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Centre leader	Sarah Barker
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Leighswood School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Leighswood Children's Centre Nursery EY307533

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 an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the local authority representatives, members of the governing sub-committee, centre staff, partner agencies and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's Performance, Achievement and Outcomes Review document, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

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Information about the centre

Leighswood Sure Start Children's Centre is located on the site of Leighswood School. The centre is managed by Serco, who is commissioned to provide childcare and education services on behalf of the local authority. The centre fulfils its core purpose through a range of integrated services relating to health, family support, adult training and childcare provision. The centre leader has been in post for only a matter of weeks and reports directly to the headteacher of the co-located primary school. The centre's governing sub-committee and membership is drawn from a range of partners, including health services, together with centre users and Leighswood School. The centre engages with other local schools via the Children's Area Partnership. Parents are represented on the governing sub-committee. The centre's staff team consists of a centre manager, a leadership team, family support and outreach workers, early years practitioners/childcare workers and an administration team.

Leighswood was designated as a phase two children's centre as part of the Sure Start Local Programme in March 2007. It is one of 18 centres in the Walsall area. It serves an extensive urban population but families attend from across the whole borough. The centre has been purposely designed to offer multi-agency office and community development space and includes a 48 place nursery. Much of the centre's

provision is planned collaboratively with community partners to maximise services for families.

The proportions of families who claim benefits or are workless are below the national average at 7%. Parts of the reach area are ranked within the top 10% and 30% of the most socially and economically disadvantaged areas in the country. The large majority of families living in the reach area are White British. Approximately 10% of families are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A small number of families are new to speaking English.

Within the reach area, there are 1007 children who are under five years of age. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills, knowledge and abilities that are slightly below the national levels expected for their age.

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

Leighswood is a good centre. It is highly inclusive, accessible and welcoming. The appointment of the new leadership team has captured the enthusiasm of staff, partners and families using the centre. The ambitions for the continued success of the centre are shared equally with the governing sub-committee, which provides high levels of challenge and support to the centre. Governance is robust, as are lines of accountability. However, governance and accountability are judged to be satisfactory overall, due to the reduced priority given to professional supervision arrangements over the last year. Leaders at all levels are aware of the strengths of the setting. They are at the early stages of taking steps to rectify identified weaknesses in the evaluation processes and use of data to assess impact, action planning, professional supervision arrangements, and the limited opportunities for parents to contribute to the centre's development and partake in voluntary work at the centre. It is too early to assess the effectiveness of these plans and leaders acknowledge further improvements are necessary to secure a higher inspection grade in respect of these matters.

Provision for children with disabilities and special needs is a particular strength of the

setting. This was confirmed by highly positive comments from parents and professionals. The headteacher of a local special school said: 'The centre has never shied away from delivering high quality services to children with very complex needs...and is always willing to modify, and to accept and accommodate children.' Staff identify and overcome barriers which could prevent children and families from accessing the centre and services. Parents who made their comments known spoke of their high regard for the centre and its staff. One parent said: 'The support my family receives from the centre is immense.'

There is a strong safeguarding culture within the centre. Children subject to child protection plans receive effective support as a result of the positive inter-agency working arrangements. Parents attend paediatric first-aid courses so that they are able to respond appropriately if their children are injured. Families made vulnerable by their circumstances receive good care, guidance and support from experienced staff. Parents and children say they feel safe at the centre. Parents say they are very happy and confident to leave their children in the care of the professional and reflective staff. The centre provides an exceptionally good outdoor learning environment, where children and families enjoy the activities on offer. The garden shared with the school is hugely popular with families and supports highly effective transition as children move from the centre nursery to the next phase of their education.

The Early Years Foundation Stage provision within the centre is outstanding. However, within the reach area, the vast majority of early years provision is good. As a result, children, including children with disabilities and special needs, make good or better progress in their learning and development. Nursery staff take great pride in providing a continuous, high quality learning environment within the centre. In 2012, 84% of children achieved 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage profile, which is significantly above the national average of 59%.

Staff effectively target those families considered vulnerable due to their circumstances, resulting in 89% of these families engaging with services in the reach. The centre's membership has increased significantly, from 18% in 2010 to 70% in 2012. This has contributed to the improved engagement with families and the significant improvements in health outcomes. Partnerships with other agencies and private, voluntary and independent providers are highly valued and support good and improving outcomes. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase parents contributions to the development of the centre by extending opportunities for them to shape services through a parent forum, (or similar), and through voluntary work.
- Improve further the effectiveness of the centre's leadership and management by:
 - developing the role of the governing sub-committee, parents and partners

- in the evaluation of the centre's effectiveness
- collating and using accurate and relevant data to provide evidence for improved outcomes for children and families
- improving the centre's action planning so that targets are clearly measurable and specific
- improving the effectiveness of professional supervision arrangements in the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

There is an increasingly positive picture of families' health with clear evidence of good or rapidly improving health outcomes. The centre provides a good range of activities to promote health and nutrition. For instance, 58% of all activities at the centre are designed to improve individuals' good health. The family 'Zumba' classes are fun keep-fit sessions introduced at the suggestion of parents. Breastfeeding take-up rates have almost doubled in the last year, although remain below the national average at 50%. In the last year, child obesity at the end of Reception has fallen by 2.7% to 7.2% and is below the national average, and the percentage of pregnant women who smoke at the time of delivery has fallen from 16% to 12%. Levels of immunisation are high at 96%.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. Leaders have impressive safeguarding credentials. Staff work effectively with key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children and families. Children subject to protection plans receive effective and timely support. Staff make good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to secure improved outcomes for children and families. Parents are very appreciative of the centre's focus on their families' safety. Risk assessments are thorough. First-aid training is available for parents and home-safety packs are provided to families help raise children's and families' awareness of risks and dangers in the home and their communities.

Within the reach area, when children start attending early years provision, many make rapid progress from their starting points. Over time, children make good progress during the Early Years Foundation Stage. The gap between the lowest and highest achieving 20% has decreased significantly year on year and is now on a par with that seen nationally. Attendance at the local school is above the national average and has improved over the last year. Children in receipt of the pupil premium make good or better progress as a result of targeted support and positive steps to address their individual learning needs. High quality speech and language support routinely provided at the centre to children at risk of possible communication and language delay ensures that they make outstanding progress by the end of Reception. Children's communication and language and personal and social development are also well supported as a result of the highly effective use of Makaton and 'Baby Sign'. Makaton training is offered to all parents; many have completed the training and a few have become Makaton trainers themselves.

The number of parents involved in learning activities reflects the low levels of unemployment in the area. There are very few volunteers at the centre but these are

provided with training opportunities and are well supported to develop their confidence and skills. The centre has limited data to show how the economic well-being of families is improving. The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), a much-valued partner, supports families to maximise their incomes by supporting them to claim benefits to which they are entitled. A total of 780 individuals attended appointments with the CAB during the last year. However, data are not available to show the impact of this work. Unemployment in the area is relatively low and there are fewer children living in homes dependent on workless benefits than seen nationally. The centre has a positive focus on learning and development and 290 adults in the reach have participated in adult education during the last year. Available data show how education and training activities have helped a few individuals to return to employment.

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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The engagement of families and the good outcomes for families is as a result of the positive range of good quality services and activities provided. Family support workers successfully reach out to families identified as in greatest need. The Hot House Centre delivers much needed services on behalf of the centre at the heart of the community. Activities to encourage healthy lifestyles feature strongly in the timetable of provision. Parents commented on the positive changes they have made to their families' nutrition, diet, and physical activities. Activities such as baby massage and 'baby ballet' help to secure strong attachment and the emotional well-being of parent and baby. Adult and family learning activities are popular, and parents regularly access accredited first aid training. The 'Pumpkin Party' was a successful outdoor family learning event which took place after dark. Forest School provision is a welcome addition to children's developing love of outdoor learning.

Care, guidance and support are good. Satisfaction surveys completed by parents and children provide evidence of high levels of satisfaction with centre services. High

quality case studies provide persuasive evidence of improved outcomes for families at times of difficulty, as a result of support from the centre. Home visits, speech and language support, and direct one-to-one support for children with disabilities and special needs are just some of the effective ways that staff support good outcomes for families. The centre successfully targets its support to those considered in greatest need and provides flexible, good quality services to meet their specific needs.

Families using the centre say they feel safe and their needs are met very well. The Common Assessment Framework and Early Years Foundation Stage assessments are very well embedded and effectively ensure that services and interventions are improving outcomes. Parents and children who are in receipt of intensive support are consistently encouraged and supported to contribute to the process of assessing and reviewing their achievements. For instance, children and parents are supported to contribute to learning journeys in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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 undergoing considerable regeneration under the new, ambitious leadership team. The clear links between strategic planning and service provision support good and improving outcomes. Governance and accountability arrangements are only satisfactory, despite the strong leadership, because professional supervision arrangements have not received sufficient priority during the last year. Improved supervision arrangements are being implemented. The new leadership team have quickly identified the centre's strengths and priority areas for development. They are enthusiastic and motivated to make improvements and are focusing their efforts on meeting the needs of children and families made vulnerable by their circumstances. The leaders have secured the commitment and support of the existing staff group and morale remains very good. Positive professional development opportunities are appreciated by staff and support their levels of enthusiasm and motivation.

The large majority of families (70%) living in the reach area are actively involved in services provided by or commissioned by the centre. Staff target families who are not engaging with the centre, and membership has increased significantly. Parents routinely contribute to the evaluation of activities and their comments are used to influence the development of some services. The centre's self-evaluation processes are adequate but they do not fully reflect contributions from parents or partnership

agencies. The limited data hinder the evaluation of certain aspects of the centre's work. There is also a lack of specific and measurable targets within action plans against which the centre can measure its success.

The welfare of children is foremost in all aspects of centre provision. All staff receive regular training in child protection and safeguarding procedures and demonstrate a thorough knowledge and understanding of their key roles in protecting children from harm. Recruitment processes are very robust. Impressively, parents played a significant role in the recruitment of the centre leader. All staff, including volunteers, undergo checks regarding their suitability on appointment. Criminal Record Bureau checks are completed every three years by the local authority.

The centre is very inclusive. The staff team is committed to developing and implementing professional practice which is inclusive and non-judgemental. Those families in greatest need are quickly identified and receive prompt and effective support and access to additional services. Diversity and difference are celebrated through the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, and routinely through sensitive and reflective practice by knowledgeable staff. For instance, same-sex couples and families new to English are well supported and case studies provide convincing evidence of how their involvement in the centre has been 'life changing'. Children with disabilities and special needs receive high-quality support at the centre but also at the various specialist services within the area. Partnerships between the centre, agencies such as health and social care and private, voluntary and independent providers are very effective. A colleague from a voluntary setting said: 'The centre provides a personal touch, reaching out to other services.' Another said: 'We are impressed with the centre's willingness to engage with us.'

The centre manages available resources very effectively and it has a positive impact, as reflected in the good outcomes and provision. 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	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	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

Leighswood Children's Centre Early Years Foundation Stage provision was inspected on 10 February 2012. The overall quality of the provision was judged outstanding.

Extract from inspection report: Children achieve very well in a bright, stimulating environment and benefit from mostly excellent, innovative resources that significantly stimulate their self-motivation for learning. Staff take into consideration their individual needs and interests and ensure they are fully included in interesting, well-organised activities. There are outstanding links with parents and carers, and information is shared very effectively with the host school and outside agencies. Children are exceptionally well-behaved and staff are very skilled at increasing their understanding of keeping healthy and safe. The manager and staff have a very clear understanding of the pre-school's strengths and areas for improvement, and there is an excellent record of continued improvement.

Leighswood School was also inspected in February 2012. Ofsted judged the overall effectiveness of the school to be good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Leighswood Sure Start Children's Centre on 19–20 September 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time to come in and meet with us and tell us about your centre. There are a great many positive aspects of the centre which those of you who made your comments known to us were keen to tell us about. Many of you said how safe and happy you and your children feel at the centre and that staff are always friendly and helpful. Parents told us that staff are very effective at meeting their needs and that their children are thriving in the high quality Early Years Foundation Stage provision. Children with disabilities and special needs make equally good progress because they are fully included in the wide range of activities and also receive additional support. Centre staff are very good at helping

you to keep your homes as safe as possible and we know several of you have received home-safety packs and many of you have attended paediatric first-aid courses.

The centre is providing you with important support in times of difficulty. It is good to know that a few of you are volunteering at the centre, and we are keen to see the volunteer programme expand even further. Those of you who attend the 'Stay and Play' sessions and family learning activities join in your children's play and develop your knowledge and understanding of how children learn.

We were impressed with the highly inclusive environment and the commitment of the centre staff to ensure all families are welcomed into the centre. Several of you told us how staff never judge anyone but are always welcoming and supportive. We saw how well the centre staff work with other partners, for example the local schools and other childcare providers to support children's transitions to school and to improve pupils' attendance. Parents told us that children really love the outdoor play area which they share with pupils at the school and helps them to prepare for school. The Forest School programme is a very welcome addition to the centre and the 'Pumpkin Party' activity is a great example of how families are enjoying the outdoor environment together.

The speech and language support available on site is helping children to make outstanding progress in their communication and language development. In addition, the great many activities provided to encourage and support children's and families' good health are very encouraging.

We have asked the centre leaders to make some improvements which we think will enhance the good work they are doing. We have asked them to improve the accuracy of data to support the effectiveness of their evaluations of the effectiveness of the centre. We have also asked that action plans have clear and specific targets which should be used to measure the centre's success and to involve parents and partners in evaluating the centre's success and developing plans for improvement. We have asked the centre leaders to ensure they provide parents with more opportunities to be involved in contributing to the development of the centre through parents' forums and voluntary work.

Thank you again for helping us with the inspection. It was good to meet you all and we wish you all the very best for the future.

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