

Inspection report for West St Leonard's Children's Centre

Local authority	East Sussex
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	T.O.T.S Crèche: EY383243

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre area coordinator, centre staff, a range of partners, centre advisory group members, local authority representatives, parents and grandparents. They also observed the centre's work, visited outreach services and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the self-evaluation form and business plan 2012–2013.

Information about the centre

The centre was designated as a phase two centre in 2009. It is open Monday to Friday from 9.00am to 3.30pm for 51 weeks of the year and provides a range of services that meet its full core purpose. The area it serves includes four super output areas; three of which are in the top 30% level of deprivation. The reach area includes a mix of owner-occupied, privately rented and social housing including three housing estates that accommodate families with assessed high levels of social and economic disadvantage.

There are 459 children under five years old living in the reach area, of which 35% live in workless households and 27% of families take up the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. The vast majority of families living within the reach area are from White British backgrounds. Children typically enter early education with a lower range of knowledge, skills and abilities than expected for their age.

The day-to-day management of the centre is the responsibility of the children's centre area coordinator who also oversees the running of eight other children's centres. A centre advisory group comprising a range of key partner organisations provides governance for the centre. The local authority is the accountable body.

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

2

Main findings

The centre's effectiveness in meeting the needs of local families is currently satisfactory but improving rapidly due to good leadership, robust governance and strong partnerships across the locality; these are helping the centre move forward.

The children's centre area coordinator and her team are passionate about doing the best they can for local families. They have an accurate view of the centre's strengths and weaknesses and a sensible number of priorities are being pursued that are bringing positive change. The rigorous analysis of data enables senior leaders to see exactly where improvement lies and to measure the impact of actions. These features result in good capacity for sustaining future improvement.

The centre has been successful in registering 84% of families and engaging with the majority living in the area since it opened three years ago. Well-focused work is on-going to engage with even more. People in all target groups have contact with centre services, although the proportion of lone parents and families from workless homes who attend activities is lower than other groups. Community development work over recent months has had significant impact on extending the centre's reach, as has the re-programming of sessions such as the weight check clinic run by health visitors alongside a 'baby drop in' session which is attracting much higher numbers than were seen previously.

Outcomes are satisfactory overall because of some areas of activity which are less successful but there is much that is good for the families that attend. There are good health and safety outcomes reflecting the good care, guidance and support provided, especially for some of the most vulnerable families. Parents have very positive views about the centre as summed up by the comments of one young mum: 'The centre is always there for you, sometimes you just want to ask a question or check something and staff are always happy to help.'

The good range of well-coordinated activities is raising families' awareness about how to help their children eat nutritionally, enjoy exercising and achieve healthy

weights. At just under 6% the level of obesity in the area is below the local average and reducing significantly. The centre is successful in its work to help increase the rate of sustained breastfeeding. The safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults is promoted effectively. There is compelling evidence in case studies to show that family outreach support is particularly effective in helping some families through times of personal crisis.

Well-planned learning opportunities support the good personal, social and emotional development of children and increasingly their communication, language and literacy skills, for example through language and play courses. However, the partnership with nurseries and schools is not yet fully effective in working together to continue to narrow the achievement gap.

The centre has a number of commissioned services, including a well-established accredited volunteer programme, which include training, ongoing supervision and support that helps participants build confidence and skills to move on to further training or employment. However, the number of parents from the area accessing or gaining further qualifications is relatively low. The centre has rightly identified that work to check the progress and destinations of adults is incomplete.

Parents say that they are confident to put forward their views, for example through 'Chatterbox', the revitalised parents' forum and say that someone always listens to their suggestions. Parents take part in decision-making, for example in making changes to the centre's external appearance and in the programmes and services provided, but none yet sit on the advisory group.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Extend the engagement of more local families, including lone parents and those from workless homes.
- Build stronger links with local schools to help improve the outcomes for young children and, in particular, work together to narrow the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest.
- Widen the learning and development opportunities for adults and track the progress they make in improving their economic well-being.
- Continue to utilise the positive strategies in place to involve parents even more in decision-making including a presence on the advisory group.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes are satisfactory overall because although there is much that is good for families that have contact with the centre, there are programmes that the centre is still developing in order to further improve the lives of more local families. The centre places a high priority on helping families keep safe and live healthier lives and this

underpins the good health and safety outcomes as indicated by the positive performance measures of low obesity rates; increased breastfeeding rates; and reduced emergency hospital admissions.

Families experience the value of regular exercise through activities such as 'Aquababes', which helps children learn to swim, and through 'Fun on Your Green' experiences. Babies are healthier as a result of the strong support for breastfeeding and good advice and support for new mothers. Experiences such as baby massage result in closer attachment between parents and their children and strengthen family bonds. Easily to access menu cards help families prepare nutritional meals with useful tips on food preparation and hygiene. Children's awareness of personal safety is good, for example during 'Messy Play' when they walk carefully so as not to slip on any spilled shaving foam which they have fun using.

The centre provides effective and timely support for families who are particularly vulnerable due to their circumstances. As a result, for example, sufferers of domestic abuse are empowered to take control of their situation. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively to ensure well-planned interventions and the good communication between key partners results in a secure safety net of support. There is good evidence of the centre's actions ensuring that children subject to a child protection plan, including looked after children, are well protected.

Data show that children who have had contact with children's centre services typically make better progress during their early years than their peers nationally. The achievement of girls is slightly better than boys with an average 58% of children scoring 78+ scale points by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, at 32% the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest has rightly been identified by the centre as a priority for improvement. Children's confidence and experiences are extended by the centre's well-planned learning activities. For example, the introduction of language checkers is a positive step in enabling the early assessment of children's specific needs such as speech and language problems. However, the longer-term impact of the centre's initiatives on raising achievement is proving difficult to evaluate, due to the underdeveloped partnership with local schools.

Parenting skills are well supported with parents identifying that their confidence is nurtured positively because of the centre's actions. Children using the centre behave well as demonstrated in their good personal development and positive relationships. Parents share their views about centre services through post-activity evaluations and the annual survey. They influence the centre's work and direction through the revitalised parents' forum. The current focus of the forum is on marketing the centre in the community and making it more appealing from the outside. Good links are in place between the parents' forum and centre advisory group. However, currently there are no parents who sit on the centre advisory group.

The work of partners is enabling some families who are experiencing debt to improve their financial stability. The centrally organised volunteer programme leads to a

recognised qualification and a small number of parents from the area have already completed the programme and gone on to further education or paid work. Some adults have accessed training courses such as first aid and food hygiene and the numbers are increasing but only a few are currently engaged in enhancing their academic achievements.

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	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	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre provides a satisfactory range of targeted activities for parents and children and is making considerable effort to encourage more families to engage with its services. There is already a good level of engagement with teenage parents, fathers and families from different ethnic backgrounds. The recent community development drive has had a significant impact on increasing wider engagement and work is in progress to target increased participation of lone parents and workless families where the current contact level has been low but is now improving.

The centre promotes the purposeful learning and development of children through activities such as 'In2Play' where music and singing are enjoyed together and drop-in sessions that involve children sharing experiences with their parents and having fun. Adults' personal, social and parenting skills are effectively fostered through courses such as 'Incredible Years', which a dad described as: 'Very informative, I learned a lot to help manage my child's behaviour more positively and it was reassuring to find that other parents are going through the same things.' Adults have adequate access to information, advice and guidance on training, benefits and work. Their involvement in further learning and skills development is a priority for further improvement.

Care, guidance and support are good and underpin the good health and safety outcomes. Parents identify that family outreach support workers understand their

needs well and that interventions have a positive impact on improving family life, particularly in times of crisis. One mum who is learning to speak English as an additional language told inspectors, 'I am so grateful for all the staff do, I feel they are like my friends who help me and now I am not alone.' The coordination of family support is well integrated and there is regular sharing of information between partners at locality group meetings that ensures provision is appropriately targeted. Families using the centre receive effective, tailored support that has a beneficial impact on their good well-being. Home visits undertaken jointly by family support and health professionals are a positive feature in building trusting partnerships with the community.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Since it became operational the centre has worked effectively to establish itself as a new service in a reach area with no previous history of integrated early childhood services. In partnership with the local authority, it has taken time to identify need, establish initial provision and now set itself a challenging programme of further improvement, the effects of which are beginning to show. The centre is now recognised as the hub of the community and strong partnerships have been forged that assist local families in improving their lives.

The children's centre area coordinator and her team are driving forward change positively. The needs of families across the area are being increasingly met well because of careful planning based on a thorough knowledge of the area, the effective use of data to set precise targets for improvement and regular reviews undertaken by service providers. These actions are underpinning the development of services for the most vulnerable families, and particularly for the significantly rising number of workless families. Leadership, management, parents and the advisory group are playing a critical role in helping the centre build securely for better future effectiveness and its capacity to sustain improvement is good.

Safeguarding is well prioritised and staff training, for example regarding child protection matters, is up-to-date. Staff vetting checks and risk assessments comply with requirements. Families are effectively made aware of how to keep safe and take control of aspects of their lives that might place them at risk. The purposeful cooperation among partners ensures that families most at risk are well protected.

Everyone at the centre is treated with high levels of respect and many families highlight the inclusive nature and how well those from all walks of life mix. Help with transport costs and home language translation services help break down the barriers some families experience, and enable them to access activities and courses such as English as an additional language. The centre provides a crèche so that parents can be confident that their children are being well looked after when they access courses. Bursaries are made available to help families overcome some of the worst effects of poor housing and occasionally free food is provided for those who are not having enough to eat.

Parents told inspectors that their views are listened to and that 'Chatterbox' and its influence on the advisory group is enabling a more formal process for them to contribute to the centre's decision-making and governance. Day-to-day management arrangements are clear and effective and the centre is an attractive place with good quality resources that families enjoy using. However, given that not all new developments have yet come to fruition, value for money is currently satisfactory rather than good.

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 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	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	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 West St Leonard's Children's Centre on 26 and 27 September 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall with some good features that are helping it build for greater future success.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the centre advisory group and the local authority linked to the centre. We looked at evaluations of the centre's work and a range of documents and very much enjoyed chatting to you during activities. Thank you for your contribution to the inspection. It was very helpful to hear how positive you all feel about the centre, especially the commitment and support of the staff and how well you and your children are cared for, safeguarded and supported in times of crisis.

It was super to see you and your young children enjoying activities such as the singing and rhyme session and how well you 'signed' the words and did the actions to familiar songs. Through such activities the centre is helping young children to build personal confidence and 'have a go' at new experiences. The centre is keen to give young children the very best start in life and we have asked it to extend its partnership with local schools so that they can work together to raise the achievement of those children who might be in danger of falling behind.

The centre is equally keen to support adults' further learning and wants to get more parents to enhance their skills. The volunteer programme is a really positive example of how some adults are being helped to achieve a recognised qualification as a result of their hard work and the good support of staff. Their work experience has resulted in raising confidence and building skills for the future and has been the starting point for further qualifications or paid work for some of you.

We have asked the centre to encourage even more families to use the centre, especially anyone on their own or currently out of work and to get involved in further learning courses. We enjoyed learning about the work of the parents' forum 'Chatterbox' and how it is involved in marketing centre services more widely and trying to make the exterior of the centre just as appealing as inside.

It was reassuring to hear from so many of you about the positive difference the centre and its partners have made in keeping you healthy and safe, especially when you are going through tough times. The increasing numbers of children with healthy

weights is a positive indicator that you are much more aware about a healthy diet and exercise because of your involvement in centre activities such as 'Play in the Park'. It was also good to learn that some mums are breastfeeding their babies and are keen to support others.

You told us that when you visit the centre the coordinator and family support staff make everyone feel welcome and included in activities. It was lovely to hear you speak so warmly about the respect you have for one another and how this helps the wider community to live cohesively.

The children's centre area coordinator and her team are working hard to make sure that your centre goes from strength to strength. Since it opened the focus has been on getting to grips with the complex nature of the different communities that make up the area it serves and building strong partnerships that are enabling services to come together and make sure they meet the needs of local families. The centre has a sensible number of priorities that are being pursued to bring about positive change. Some of these have not yet had time to have a positive impact and as such outcomes overall are currently satisfactory rather than good.

Once again, many thanks for sharing your views with us and best wishes for the future.

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