

Inspection report for Leverhulme Children's Centre

Local authority	Bolton
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Centre leader	Charlotte Mitchell
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY315036 Leverhulme Park Community Kids Club

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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 parents, centre staff and representatives from professional partnerships, the advisory board and the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Leverhulme Children's Centre is a phase two centre located within the Leverhulme Leisure Centre in the Brightmet area of North Bolton. The centre provides services and activities to residents within Haulgh, Tonge, Fold, Darcy Lever and Burnden. The large majority of the catchment area is within the 30% most deprived in the country with 44% of children under 16 in the reach living in poverty and 26% of children under four years living in households dependent on workless benefits.

The large majority of families residing in the area are of White British heritage with an increasing number from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. Families in the area experience a range of social and economic difficulties associated with substance misuse, domestic violence and unemployment. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage often enter early years provision with below age related expectations in their development.

The centre received designation in 2008 and it provides the appropriate range of services to meet the core purpose. The strategic management of the centre is undertaken by the local authority alongside an advisory group. A recent restructure of services has seen children's centres, Social Care Family Support, the borough-wide Contact Team and Sponsored Childcare Service combining to become the 'Children & Families Support Service'.

The Children's Centre Network Manager is responsible for the day-to-day running of this centre alongside two other phase two centres within the north of Bolton. The assistant manager, Children and Family Support Services, provides line management to the family support team. Partner agencies include health professionals, the speech and language service, Family Information Service, Home Start and Urban Care and Neighbourhood team (UCAN). Leverhulme Park Community Kids Club provides out of school and holiday care and their last inspection report from January 2009 can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

Leverhulme Children's Centre provides satisfactory provision and outcomes for families. The centre has experienced a difficult journey since designation, due to a legacy of management changes and a local authority restructure. These factors have hindered the centres' rate of progress. However, stable management and staffing, alongside an increasingly secure analysis of the community and its needs, is promoting families sustained engagement and sense of value with the centre. Comments such as, 'This centre is just the best, we couldn't be without it', confirms this view.

The leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory. The day-to-day management is effectively undertaken by the Children's Centre Network Manager who holds a firm vision for the future and is able demonstrate a concerted difference to the development of provision since coming into post. The advisory board is generally well established and a range of partners are becoming more involved in strategic planning. The local authority provides support and some challenge through the annual conversation and more recently through 'Payment by Results' measures. However, the performance of the centre has not always been rigorously managed preventing a more stringent approach towards holding the centre to account for its work over time. Development plans drive improvement but performance targets and success criteria are not clearly defined or realistic. Line management and supervisory responsibilities are secure and staff attend good levels of training to support them in their roles. Consequently, the centre's overall effectiveness is satisfactory.

The centre are challenged by some significant health, social and economic issues within the community but increasing on-site provision and strategic planning alongside health professionals in particular, is helping to identify needs and target future provision. This coupled with a steadily increasing membership to the centre, developing outreach provision and the managers' ability to successfully network with wider community organisations, has secured the centres further capacity to improve.

Families enjoy a satisfactory range of provision although they report a reduction in services. The registration and engagement of families from all target groups is increasing, however, the centre are only just beginning to provide provision in areas where the majority of black and minority ethnic families reside. Priority is given to developing the quality and availability of early years play provision for all children, including disabled children and those with special educational needs. Consequently, centre data confirm an improvement in the number of children who achieve good Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores. However, the achievement gap in Leverhulme is not narrowing sufficiently, there has been a dip in the take-up of free nursery entitlement and some children still require additional support with their personal, emotional and physical skills on entry to school.

Parents confirm that have increasing opportunities to convey their views and leaders are steadfast in their commitment to engaging them in decision making processes as a result, the centre have secured the role of a parent as chair of the advisory board. However, parent's role and understanding of governance arrangements are limited. Nor is there a secure pathway to volunteering opportunities, preventing more parents gaining work based experience. Some partnerships with the Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB), Jobcentre and UCAN in particular, are beginning to provide a more secure route to training, debt advice and work related workshops. However, the centre are not able to demonstrate the impact of these partnerships due to the lack of systematic evaluation across services and partners work, nor have they undertake an analysis of need in relation to adult learning.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes for families by:
 - increasing the advice and guidance about the benefits of the Early Years Foundation Stage and take up of free nursery entitlement
 - raising parents' awareness of the links with children's personal social and emotional development and school readiness
 - developing opportunities for more parents to participate in formal decision making processes and governance
 - increasing adults' chances of future employment through access to training and qualifications based on their identified needs and interests and monitoring their effectiveness.

- Improve the provision and leadership and management of the centre by:
 - refining the collation and analysis of data and information, particularly about the engagement of target groups, to inform the evaluation of outcomes more meticulously and to expand the centre's reach into harder to reach communities
 - working with the local authority, governing body and centre partners, use data and information to set ambitious targets in the improvement plan and systematically monitor success towards these plans to sustain a rapid pace of improvement and hold the centre more rigorously to account.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Families engaging with Leverhulme Children's Centre make satisfactory strides towards improving their health, well-being and economic chances in life. 'I've never looked back since I found this place' reports one proud parent. Consistent safety messages and campaign's, well targeted to reduce the rise in emergency hospital admissions, is having a positive impact on minimising the risk of accidents and injuries. Parents report that good security arrangements and the staffs' sensitive approach to protecting them and their children during times of crisis are 'second to none'. This, coupled with established procedures for the implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and collaborative working with children's social care, ensures that looked after children, children in need and those subject to child protection plans benefit from increased family stability.

A concerted approach to reducing smoking levels is beginning to show some success and attendance at 'Happy Eaters' and 'Family Teas' are improving parents' knowledge of how to lead healthy life styles. Breastfeeding initiation rates are good and data confirm a steadily improving trend in breastfeeding prevalence at six-to-eight weeks although obesity levels remain slightly above national averages. Parents engaged with the 'Think Positive and Clear Aims' well-being programmes and the 'Women's Group', report gaining skills 'they never knew they had', alongside increased self-confidence. Consequently, parents have produced some wonderful pieces of creative writing. Parents feel they have a voice within the centre and some are playing a more active role in governance and the development of services by helping to run 'Parent Led Free Play' sessions, which they do very well. However, parents' awareness of governance matters is generally limited.

Increasingly secure collaboration with UCAN, CAB and HOOT credit union is beginning to enhance parent's ability to improve their own economic well-being. A good number of parents are recognising the importance of saving and safe borrowing therefore avoiding further debt. Debt management guidance alongside work club sessions and signposting to various training courses is providing parents with interview techniques, computer skills and help with job applications. However, the lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of this work prevents the centre from knowing the longer impact on outcomes for families.

Activities such as the 'Messy Play', 'Chatter Matters' and 'Smiley Faces' for children with Down Syndrome are thoroughly enjoyed and are having a good impact on children's early

development as well as parents understanding of how to support and nurture learning at home. Work is underway to prepare children for school through the 'Transition Project' and secure links have been established with local childcare providers to share and learn good early years practice. However, despite a three year rising trend in Early Years Foundation Profile Scores and targeted gap narrowing activities, the achievement gap between the lowest 20% of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage remains above the Bolton and national averages. In addition, the centre have yet to interrogate the reduction in take-up of free nursery places and an increase parents awareness of the links with children's self-help and independence skills with school readiness.

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	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 friendly and welcoming environment where families frequently drop into the cafe' and seek out a friendly face. 'We really look forward to coming' and 'my son gets so excited about coming, we talk about it all week', confirms that this centre is becoming a valued part of the community. The care, guidance and support families receive are good. The range of literature, array of safety displays and constant support for families during times of crisis ensures that, once engaged, they make positive strides in their health and personal well-being. Staff are astute and able to identify needs, gently nurturing harder to reach families into play and stimulation activities in the home and onto sensitive group activities such as 'Invited Families'.

Well-established inter-agency working between Children and Family Support Workers, health professionals and social care in particular, ensures tailored family support across all levels of need. Referral pathways are well established via the 'Multi-Agency Referral Panel' and effective information sharing protocols ensure outcomes for families most at risk are closely monitored and reviewed. Equally, secure arrangements for family contact visits and a child and family friendly environment ensure the experience is both safe and enjoyable for those concerned.

Following a slow start and recent cuts within services the centre has started to make some headway in the registration of families across all target groups, and data confirms families are sustaining contact. Developing provision is now firmly focused on meeting the needs of families with circumstances that make them vulnerable and there is an increasing use of local intelligence, data and collaborative partnership working to ensure priorities are led by the needs of the community. As a result, 'Mini Movers' has been established at Bolton Parish Primary School in Haulgh to build relationships with the wider Pakistani and Asian community. The centre is aware that approximately 50% of families are yet to fully engage with the centre and participation levels do vary. However, new partnerships with the Wildlife Trust and UCAN are enabling the centre to reach out to fathers and women in the most deprived areas who are eager to make changes in their lives and community. As a result, some fathers are attending the 'Urban Adventures and Bush Crafts' and a thriving 'Women's Group' is firmly embedding.

The provision to help children learn, develop and gain skills for the future is improving satisfactorily. In some cases, parents are also making progress in their personal and educational journey's which has led to some seeking enrolment on childcare courses and teaching assistant roles. Whilst others have learnt new practical skills in first aid and joined the 'Lets Knit' group'. However, the centre has limited robust evidence available to demonstrate how it has enabled adults to progress to further employment, education or training as it does not currently track their long-term progress. In addition, the lack of crèche provision impacts on the centres ability to develop and sustain courses for parents on adult learning programmes.

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?

3

Stable leadership and a clear vision for the future are leading to stronger pace of improvement within all aspects of the centre's work. The manager and her team have an increasing secure picture of the make-up of this challenging community due to the wide range of local partners and organisations they now work beside. In addition to, a closer analysis of local reach data to inform their practice, provision and plans for the future.

Parents confirm that their views are sought but some have more direct influence over the development of services than others. Regular strategic planning with partners is beginning to focus priorities and drive improvement across outcomes. However, partners, the advisory board and parents are not yet meaningfully engaged in the self-evaluation processes and development planning. This prevents the centre from being made fully accountable for its performance. Current priorities are well informed but the setting and monitoring of targets is not robust and in some cases, lacks clear success criteria to show performance over time.

A strength of the centre is their work associated with the safety, welfare and protection of children and families reinforced by robust safeguarding policies and procedures. As a result, families experiencing difficulties associated with domestic violence, substance misuse or who require more intense support due to the complexities of their need, usually make significant and positive changes in their lives. Staff working with families with circumstances that make them most vulnerable are well trained, the suitability of staff and partners are confirmed via criminal record bureau checks and safety and security procedures are effective across the site.

Partnerships with health professionals are particularly strong, resulting in the delivery of well-attended health services and strategic input via the advisory board. Growing links with a wide range of partners such as Home Start, local schools and the private and voluntary childcare sector is helping to increase provision and improve outcomes. As a result, the centre provides satisfactory value for money. The manager has established many new creative partnerships due to her adept ability to network and tap into work within the wider community, providing access to local funding streams and innovative provision such as the 'Women's Group'. However, the centre has yet to devise a systematic approach to evaluating partner services in order to capture outcomes and demonstrate stronger performance.

Equality impact assessments have helped to re-focus the centres provision and the priority given to the engagement of the most vulnerable groups and families. Early signs indicate that outreach provision within the Haulgh area is having some success engaging Black and Minority Ethnic families to groups but the centre are yet to make a full assessment of family's needs in this area. The centre hosts a designated group for disabled children and those with special educational needs which is well attended by families across the Bolton area and staff are thoroughly commented to providing an inclusive and welcoming place for all.

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 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	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	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	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 range of provision.	3

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Leverhulme Children's Centre on 17 - 18 October 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

As part of our inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you, staff and centre partners who work with you.

The centre has experienced a slow and difficult start due to lots of management changes and a local authority re-structure leading to some cuts in provision. However, the centre leader and her team are thoroughly committed to providing services which improve your lives and opportunities and they have started this work by getting to know your communities better and by working with other people who can help them. However, leaders know they still have much work to do and that they must make better use of information they have to match new services to those most in need.

We found that the centre provides a safe and welcoming place for you and they work hard to support and protect you during times of crisis and difficulty. Information from the 'Safety

Week' confirmed that parents took steps to stop smoking and improve safety in the home to prevent accidents. We also found that parents and children enjoy 'Family Teas' and 'Happy Eaters' sessions and these groups have helped parents to cook healthy low cost meals and be more aware of ingredients which are bad for you.

The centre works well with many partner agencies and this is helping to make sure that you get the advice and support you need around debt management, pathways to work and training and links with UCAN and others is helping with these issues. However, the centre doesn't always get enough information from their partners to measure the difference to your lives. Therefore, we have asked them to find a way to do this. You told us that you have some opportunities to raise your views about the centre and how it is run and one or two parents have actually joined the advisory board. This is good news, but we have asked the centre to encourage more of you to be involved in this way. A few parents help to run 'Parent Led Play' sessions but too few people have volunteering opportunities.

We found that families using the centre really look forward to groups such as 'Chatter Matters' and 'Messy Play'. Some of you told us that by attending these groups and 'Book Start' activities, you now feel better prepared to help your children with their development and learning and you have seen a difference in children's speech and language skills. As a result of mixing with other children, you also told us that your children are more ready for school when the time comes. However, we know some parents are not accessing their free entitlement for nursery education for their children, so we have asked to centre to find out the reasons for this because we know by doing so, most children improve in their personal and social skills in time for school.

The centre has made slow progress in reaching out to all the families in its area and engaging them in services which best meet needs however, this is starting to improve. For example, more fathers are getting involved and the centre have just provided a 'Mini Movers' play session in the Haulgh area, to encourage families from Pakistani and Asian backgrounds, to join in too. However, the centre must do more to find out about the needs of the 50% of people yet to use the centre, then they must set robust action plans to make sure they develop services for everybody. This is a big task, so we have asked the local authority, the advisory board and centre partners to help the centre with this work and to monitor how well they do it.

Thank you for taking time to speak with us and we wish you every success for the future.

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