

Inspection report for Ledbury Children's Centre, Ledbury

Local authority	Herefordshire
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Centre leader	Zoe Woods
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Ledbury Primary School URN 21764
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 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, centre staff, partner agencies, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre's documents and policies, and minutes of management meetings.

Information about the centre

Ledbury Children's Centre is situated in a rural market town, and is located in the grounds of Ledbury Primary School, in a purposely designed building. There is ample outdoor play space, including a Forest School. Some office accommodation is shared with Herefordshire Locality Services, providing an office and meeting rooms on the school site. The centre was designated as a phase two children's centre in January 2008 and full core purpose was approved in March 2009.

The community the centre serves is in one of the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. There are a range of local amenities, including seven primary schools and one high school in the area. There are four wards within the children's centre reach, which includes the town centre and some of the outlying rural areas. The number of children aged 0-4 years living in the reach area is 831, of which 85% are registered with the centre. The 2011 school census shows that 92.4% of children living within the reach are White British, which is similar to Herefordshire as a whole. The majority of the population which is not White British are primarily of Eastern Europe heritage, with a small number of Traveller families. The estimated number of lone parents within the area is 422, or 21% of households with children, a slightly lower average than the county as a whole, which is 23%. The number of children living in households receiving out of work benefits is 10% of the population, lower than the Herefordshire average of 14%.

The centre is not linked with any early years provision, and does not commission child care services. It meets its core purpose through providing a range of integrated services, and also acts as a 'hub' for child-centred community provision, such as a meeting venue for childminders, clinic space for community paediatrics and a location for a pre-school child care group to meet. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage children display skills and knowledge which are slightly below expectations for their age, but there is an improving trend year on year.

The children's centre is managed by the local authority. The partnership advisory board has a wide range of representatives, including professionals and parents, and is chaired by the headteacher of the linked primary school. The centre works in partnership with a variety of professionals and community groups, including health services, police, social care and early years providers to deliver both universal and targeted programmes.

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

Ledbury Children's centre provides satisfactory services to the area it serves. The environment has both indoor and outdoor facilities and the centre is well equipped. A wide range of services are available from the centre and this encourages families to attend. A high proportion of families with children 0-4 in the area are registered with the children's centre. Staff are friendly, welcoming and warm, and those who have been directly supported by the centre or engaged in its activities are very positive about how helpful individual staff are. A variety of health professionals deliver services from the centre, promoting good engagement with the centre's services. An example was baby weighing at a stay and play session. However some joint targets such as children's obesity rates are not collated and used to develop and shape services.

The children's centre is at an early stage in understanding how it prioritises and meets the needs of all the vulnerable groups in its reach. The staff and centre leader know individual families well, and have created strong local partnerships, ensuring that the majority of families in the area come into contact with the centre. However methods of data collection to review the impact of its work are currently

underdeveloped. So, the centre cannot yet fully check whether and how well it meets the needs of all of the most vulnerable groups.

The partnership advisory board sees itself as providing a supportive forum in partnership with the centre. Members now recognise the need to challenge the centre's progress in meeting the children's centre core purpose and, in this respect, it is recognised by leaders that the board is not yet sufficiently mature. Parent representatives to the advisory board are keen to develop their role and make sound efforts to seek the views of parents and represent these at the meeting. There is regular discussion of the main areas of service delivery, and information is shared to enable all stakeholders to support the overall aims of encouraging families to use the centre. Discussions have a specific focus on some areas of children's development, particularly progress at the Early Years Foundation Stage and transitions into school.

Recent changes in the line management structure for children's centres in Herefordshire have resulted in some lack of continuity at a senior level in establishing accountability for outcomes; this is recognised and is being addressed. These changes have also resulted in some improvements in sharing information such as a stronger liaison with health to obtain local birth data. Software systems within the centre allow health professionals access to relevant health data, and children's centre staff access to social care data. This has led to more targeted support for families, and demonstrates a knowledge of the areas for development and capacity to improve. The senior leaders are aware that there is more to do to engage all partners in the work of the centre, especially in relation to debt counselling and benefit advice, and access to employment and adult learning opportunities.

The leadership team comprises the children's centre leader and the integrated services leader, who oversees a number of children's centres in Herefordshire. Formal supervision files do not consistently demonstrate that there is a regular and robust review of activity, but staff report regular informal supervision and management oversight. Staff morale is good, and the team works closely together and with partners to support individual families and service delivery. They are skilled and knowledgeable, and have a high level of relevant training.

The children's centre staff have worked hard to engage families within the locality through a range of innovative partnership methods which are welcomed by families. These include attending open days of the housing services provider, developing family learning opportunities, and bringing in library services.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Enhance the strategic role of the advisory board and the local authority in driving forward improvement to ensure that the correct priorities are identified and supported by performance targets which are achievable, measurable and reviewed at regular intervals.

- The local authority should ensure that the centre is able to access data from all relevant agencies at the level of the reach, and to assist them in developing systems to evaluate the impact of integrated services on the most vulnerable groups in their area.
- Ensure that supervision throughout the line management structure links staff development, service planning and casework activity strongly to the centre's priorities in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable within the reach area.
- Work more closely with partners to improve the economic well-being of families through providing debt counselling, benefits advice, employment and employability support, and greater access to adult learning opportunities.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre's strengths in relation to the core purpose are in providing targeted services for children with special health or learning needs and these appointments and groups are well attended. Early learning and the links with the primary school and its nursery help the children to make successful transitions between the settings. The centre promotes healthy lifestyles by providing outdoor play, structured walks and forest school activities, all of which supports family learning. There is a high level of participation with health services. The range of health-related activities such as ante-and post natal services, breastfeeding support groups and volunteer peer counsellors is very positive. Although immunisation rates have improved, the centre's data is not yet sufficiently robust to show whether breastfeeding or obesity rates have improved.

Herefordshire has employed an early years teacher to support children's centres in incorporating early years skills into their programmes, and has developed tracking systems for children using the centre. Baseline assessments have been undertaken, but it is too early to assess the direct impact of children's centre services. However there has been a strongly improving trend in the proportion of children in the reach area attaining 78 points at end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in Ledbury Primary School. Although still slightly below the national average, this figure has doubled in the last three years to 60%.

There are effective systems in place to monitor and ensure safe practice in work with children and their families. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used in most cases in individual work with families to provide support and help them understand how to keep themselves and their children safe. The centre is involved with the large majority of families with a CAF in their area and is supported by the Multi Agency Group (MAG) locally to ensure the relevant partners are engaged in this work and that it is effective. The centre ensures that it is aware of all children in the reach area who are subject to child protection plans. It currently has direct involvement with a third of these, and plays a role in child protection plans where appropriate. First aid courses have been run at the centre and these are well

received, families are also referred to fire safety services for advice on home safety. Families who have benefited from this comment that this has increased their awareness of safety issues, improved their confidence in knowing what to do, such as checking smoke alarms have batteries, and helped them keep their children safe.

While the centre is not able to fully demonstrate its effectiveness in helping families into further education and employment, there are examples of families accessing family learning courses, such as 'story sacks', and parenting courses, such as the 'solihull' programme. Parents evaluate these positively, reporting that their confidence and parenting skills have improved. Some parents who had attended numeracy courses in the past enjoyed the experience and said they would be keen to access further adult learning opportunities. The centre has been successful in recruiting volunteers to support its development, including the parent representatives on the partnership advisory board. Volunteers who spoke with inspectors reported having gained skills and confidence which they felt would help them in re-entering the workforce.

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	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 co-location of the centre with the primary school and nursery, and the delivery of health services from the centre ensures that most parents with children 0-4 in the reach area are aware of and have registered with the centre. Many have engaged in its services. As well as providing specific services and programmes for under fives and their families, several community groups use the building. Activities to attract families who do not currently use the centre are improving, and there are efforts to raise awareness through working with partners, such as sharing birth data and

undertaking outreach activities through the local housing provider to reach those in outlying rural areas. Health partners are instrumental in ensuring that there is an awareness of the range of services and have also developed an action plan to increase their identification of vulnerable children under 2 years old. At this stage it is too early to assess the direct impact of these activities, although the centre can show that 10% of children registered are from minority ethnic groups, which represents a higher proportion than across Herefordshire as a whole. A high proportion of lone parents use the centre, and family support work and case studies demonstrate that children from these families have benefited from the centre's services.

The work with individual children and families demonstrates the skills and strengths of the centre. Recent feedback from families includes a parent who said 'the children's centre staff are fantastic and so caring. I know if I need support or need to find something out I can come here'. This reflects the view of parents spoken to as part of the inspection. There is a good range of advice and information leaflets throughout the centre, some in other languages, and the centre signposts families to the relevant services. Where individual family support work is undertaken centre staff offer individual advice and support which has helped families to address debts, especially rent arrears, and advice to access employment and training opportunities. However there is little in the way of specialist advice relating to benefits, debt counselling, employment and training as part of the universal service delivery.

Children and parents enjoy playing and learning together. The children's centre staff increasingly engage some parents in their children's learning as part of ongoing development of tracking children's activities, starting with learning journals for some regular attendees and those who attend targeted groups such as 'smiley faces', and 'language steps'. It is clear from some of these speech and language activity sessions that children are making good progress from their starting points, and this is reflected in improving scores in Early Years Foundation Stage scores in primary school Reception Year. A crèche is provided by the Centre to allow parents to attend learning opportunities which are run at or by the centre, such as First Aid courses, and parenting programmes. Advice and guidance to parents is offered in relation to child minding and day care options, and the centre keeps a record of inspection outcomes to help parents choose. Nearly all day care and nursery settings in the reach area have inspection outcomes that are good or better.

Case studies and observations demonstrate that the centre provides appropriate and timely support in times of crisis, for example working closely with women's refuge services and the police, and identifying support and action where domestic abuse and harassment are an issue.

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	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Governance and accountability arrangements are satisfactory. The partnership advisory board includes representatives from the wide range of professional partners, and parent representatives always attend. The board supports the work of the centre, particularly in developing services which directly affect children's readiness for school, and this has led to improvements in speech and language skills. The chair of the board is starting to develop a more rigorous approach to ensuring the centre meets its targets in respect of all the vulnerable groups within the reach area. The parents' forum enables the centre to consult regularly with parents about service delivery and this has resulted in developments to, for example, some of the family learning sessions.

Most families with children aged 0-4 in the reach area are registered, and through its partnership and outreach work the centre continues to try to engage those within the wider rural area who are more difficult to reach. Overall the wide range of universal and targeted services provides satisfactory value for money. The centre has an approach that welcomes families from all backgrounds; children and families whose first language is not English and children with special learning needs are appropriately engaged and supported.

Recruitment processes are sound. All staff have received safeguarding training relevant to their roles, and are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. The centre is represented on county wide multi agency risk assessment bodies and centre leaders have a thorough knowledge of safeguarding and risk management processes.

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	3

target groups	
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

Ledbury Primary School was inspected in 2010 and judged to be good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Ledbury Children's Centre, Ledbury on 13–14 December 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We found that the children's centre provides a good location for you and your children to access health and early learning services. You get support and advice related to the needs of you and your child, about lots of things, including in times of crisis. Parents find the centre staff helpful, welcoming and a good way to get information about services in Herefordshire, and especially how to keep your children safe and well. There are lots of fun things for you and your children to do at the centre. Many of these will help you to enjoy learning together, and help your child to stay healthy and to develop important skills ready for school. Some of the work of the centre is to ensure that children in the area who are most vulnerable are able to have the help they need to do well, and the centre's leaders do not yet know enough to make sure this is happening.

We have asked staff and leaders to make sure that all parents with children under five who live in the area know what services they can get from the centre, and that those who need it most are able to benefit. We want all of the professionals working in the centre to help in ensuring this happens. Centre leaders will also need to make sure the centre's staff are working for the right length of time with families who most

need their help, to make the best use of their time and skills. We were very pleased to hear from you how helpful and supportive you find the centre staff, and we could see this when we came to some of the groups.

We have also asked that Herefordshire council who oversee the work of the centre do more to make sure they help the centre to get the information it needs so they can tell how they are helping. This may mean they ask you for more information about your circumstances. We also want them to work with the local advisory board which has parent members, to challenge the centre more if it is not showing it can meet the needs of children who would benefit the most.

We have particularly asked that the centre makes sure they provide more in the way of guidance, support and advice on benefits, debt management and help with employment and training.

We saw how you were able to tell the centre the things that had helped you, and how suggestions you made were acted on by the centre. We were very pleased to meet some of you and your children as part of the inspection, and found your views and comments extremely valuable. We really appreciated the time you took to tell us about the centre, and found this really useful in adding to what we saw ourselves. I hope you will continue to be involved in helping the centre develop. Thank you very much for taking the time to meet us.

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