

Inspection report for Longshaw Children's Centre

Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	119084 Longshaw Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY272648 Longshaw Children's Centre

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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.

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector. The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre, parents, members of the governing body and a number of partners including representatives from the local authority, health and education professionals and representatives from Bootstrap, Blackburn college and the Credit Union. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Longshaw Children's Centre is an integrated nursery school and centre, located in the Higher Croft and Ewood wards of Blackburn with Darwen. The reach population of the centre is 216 children aged from birth to four years. Unemployment is high in many parts of the reach area and most of the available jobs are low paid. Over one fifth of the working-age population are claiming out of work benefits. Some 88.4% of the population are described as having low or no qualifications. Estimated weekly income is significantly lower than the borough average and the percentage of children aged birth to four years living in households dependent on workless benefits is around 40%. The majority of local families are of White British heritage.

Most children enter early years provision with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than those expected for their age. The proportion of disabled children and those with special educational needs, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average.

Longshaw Children's Centre is a phase one centre offering the full core offer. It is one of 13 centres which operate across Blackburn with Darwen. It is led by a governing body with a delegated budget, in contrast to the other children's centres which are directly funded and operated by the local authority. The governors are responsible for taking a strategic

overview of the setting. The nursery school hosts a full time day care provision for children from birth to four years.

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

4
4

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

4
4

Main findings

The extent to which the children's centre is able to deliver high-quality, integrated provision is significantly compromised by a lack of effective partnership working and sharing of information between the children's centre, the local authority and other key statutory agencies. Governance and accountability arrangements are not clear. As a result, centre leaders feel that the centre is set apart from the rest of the network of children's centres in the borough. The centre lacks the necessary information to fully support those families who are most in need of intervention and guidance. It does not have the capacity to access the wider range of services which are provided centrally on their behalf by the local authority. Leaders have not received appropriate training and support to develop their skills and knowledge of procedures and processes including the monitoring and tracking of families accessing services provided by other agencies. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve is inadequate.

The centre has access to some information about its reach area, but it is not used systematically to complete a thorough needs analysis. As a result, the needs of some families in the wider community are not accurately identified and services are not as well targeted as they should be. This impacts on the centre's capacity to set challenging, measurable targets within its development plan and monitor progress against these, to ensure provision is rigorously matched to need.

Despite these challenges, the joint leadership team are motivated to seek further improvement. They have taken the initiative to develop partnerships with a range of local voluntary and private agencies. This has ensured that outcomes for families in their reach are at least satisfactory. Provision for children to learn and develop is a clear strength of the centre and some children make good progress during their time at the nursery school and childcare provision. Centre staff are fully aware of their role to safeguard children and they

have worked hard to raise the profile of the centre within the community. Working closely with the local infant school, the centre has successfully raised parents' awareness of leading healthy lifestyles, particularly in relation to oral health and healthy eating. Opportunities for families to learn how to become more involved in their children's learning has also engaged a significant number of families. These sessions have raised their expectations and improved their personal development, health and welfare.

Families who access the school or childcare provision make good gains in their learning and personal development. However, the level of family engagement is limited to those who attend these provisions and staff do not have the capacity to engage with other families from the wider community. This has a significant impact on the centre's ability to promote greater equality through the engagement of specific target groups in centre activities, particularly those whose circumstances might make them particularly vulnerable.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop the centre's capacity to provide high-quality integrated provision for a greater number of families in their reach area by ensuring that:
 - responsibilities for governance and accountability are clear and fully understood and include representation from parents
 - the centre has the resource to access those centrally commissioned services which are available to the network of children's centre across the borough
 - centre leaders receive appropriate training and support to develop their skills and knowledge in relation to this.
- Strengthen partnerships with the local authority and other statutory agencies to ensure better integrated working and sharing of information.
- Improve the rigour and effectiveness of local needs analysis in order to:
 - ensure that needs can be identified and work prioritised more rigorously and appropriately across the reach area
 - set and monitor ambitious, measurable targets that secure improvement in outcomes, especially for families most in need of intervention and support.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre has developed a number of innovative ways of encouraging parents to adopt healthy lifestyles. The nursery cook offers weekly 'food taster' sessions to parents and monthly invitations to join their children for lunch are well attended. One mum told us how amazed she was to see her child enjoying pizza with a vegetable topping, 'It gave me the confidence to persevere with getting him to eat more vegetables at home.' The centre also works proactively with local charities and food cooperatives. This has ensured that families have weekly access to affordable fresh fruit and vegetables. However, despite a reduction in

obesity rates of 5% to 24.4 % this year, too many children are overweight in their Reception year. The centre has recently received the breastfeeding-friendly accreditation in recognition of its work in this area. However despite a small increase of 1.2% this year, the number of mums who choose to continue to breastfeed their baby beyond six weeks is only 28.6%.

Families clearly feel relaxed and safe within the centre and those parents who have turned to the centre for help during family crisis praise the support given by centre workers. Children enjoy playing in the outdoor area and are gaining an appropriate understanding of how to keep themselves safe. This learning is supported by a variety of activities such as 'beep beep' road safety week. Children subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes, who are known to the centre, are well supported and there is some evidence of improved outcomes.

The enthusiasm and dedication of the nursery and childcare team now ensures the provision of good quality early education and learning experiences, including for disabled children and those with special educational needs. The effectiveness of this provision on improving the outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is closely monitored and shows some children make good progress and start school well prepared for this next stage in their learning. The proportion of children achieving at expected levels at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved steadily and is now 46.4%. Although this is below the national average, this is a significant improvement from their initial starting points. Parents and children are encouraged to use the nursery library and the centre hosts a monthly 'snuggle and sing' activity in this area. This has helped model to parents the importance of songs and rhymes to support the acquisition of early language for their children.

Parents have a voice within the centre. They are often asked to evaluate provision and feel that they are listened to. The governing body includes representation from parents. However, the centre's leaders recognise there is a need to ensure that more families from the wider community engage in centre activities and become empowered to participate in the governance of the centre and in key decision making at this level.

Parents particularly enjoy the opportunities offered to learn about how they can better support their children's learning. This often gives them the confidence to take those first steps back into training and education. For example, one parent having been signposted by the centre to the local college, is now a teaching assistant. Although the centre can demonstrate some success in relation to supporting parents back into training and employment, take-up rates for family learning activities are currently only satisfactory, and the centre is not able to track the longer term impact on the economic wellbeing of these families.

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
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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	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?

4

The centre understands the needs of those children and families who access the nursery and childcare provision. For example, the local infant school praise the skill of nursery staff in the early identification of children who may require extra support to accelerate their learning. Despite identified weaknesses in partnerships with some key agencies, the centre's provision makes a positive impact on outcomes for families accessing services. However, the centre does not have enough information about the needs of families living in the wider community who are not currently accessing services. As a result, the range of services offered by the centre is limited and not sufficiently targeted at the needs of all families in the reach area.

Good provision delivered through the nursery and childcare provision ensures the achievements and aspirations of children are raised. Parents who have attended family learning activities offered through the centre say that they feel empowered and comment on the real difference the centre has made to their own confidence. One parent told us, 'I really look forward to bedtime stories with my son now and it feels great that I can help him with his reading.' This affords a clear demonstration of a parent's increased ability to both support and contribute to their child's on-going development. However, the provision of individualised support to promote progression onto further education and training is less well developed for adults accessing the centre.

Care, guidance and support for those using the centre are satisfactory. Parents spoken to during the inspection spoke highly of the individual and personal support provided by the staff in times of crisis. The provision of two- year-old funded places gives some parents the opportunity for respite which has a positive impact on their mental health and personal wellbeing. One mother told us, 'For the first time ever, I now look forward to my children coming home from school.' Others spoke of the help they have received to find housing and to lead healthier lives. However, the centre's inability to reach out to the wider community means that a greater number of families are not benefitting from the centre's provision.

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	4
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?

4

The joint leadership team has developed a shared sense of purpose among its staff to improve the lives of children and families who access its services. At an operational level, this multi-skilled team has developed some effective partnerships with a range of local private and voluntary organisations, such as the Credit Union, Bootstrap and food co-operatives. These provide some additional opportunities for families and ensure that overall outcomes for families are at least satisfactory. However, partnerships and collaborative working at a strategic level are not yet well enough established, and roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability lack clarity. As a result, centre staff remain unclear about longer term planning and expectations for the area with regard to the integrated delivery of a wider range of services which meets the needs of the wider community. This includes staff receiving the appropriate support and training to enable them to access those services which are provided centrally on their behalf by the local authority.

The commitment of the governing body to the work of the children's centre and its role as a critical friend is clearly evident. However, the absence of key strategic partners on the children's centre sub-committee means that the level of support and challenge is insufficiently rigorous to address the broad-ranging responsibilities of the centre. Self-evaluation is not based on systems for in-depth monitoring, contributions from all partners or a thorough analysis of data. Nor does it include sufficient information regarding progress against those targets set out in the centre's development plan. This inability to set and monitor progress against challenging and measurable targets means that the centre is not improving at a fast enough rate.

Statutory safeguarding arrangements are met. All staff have undertaken appropriate safeguarding training, and Criminal Record Bureau and recruitment checks are undertaken. As the lead designated person for safeguarding, the childcare manager undertakes regular training relevant to her role.

The centre listens to the views of those attending to shape its programme, but does not currently have the ability in terms of available or accessible resources to encourage enough families from across the community to engage with its services. Systems for identifying the needs of target groups and monitoring the impact of the provision for them are too imprecise to show how quickly the achievement gap for the most disadvantaged is being narrowed. In addition, the current procedures for data analysis do not allow the centre's leaders to ensure all key target groups are being reached. As a result, those who hold the

centre to account are unable to demonstrate that services are effective and offer a fully inclusive range of provision. Consequently, the management of resources is not having a consistent impact on outcomes for the greatest number of families. This means that the centre's value for money is inadequate.

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	4
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	4
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	4
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	4
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	4
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.	4

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

Longshaw Nursery School and Children's Centre provides integrated nursery and childcare provision for children aged from birth to four years. One local infant school, Longshaw Infants, also resides within the centre's reach area. Information from their most recent Ofsted inspections has been taken into account when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children in this report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Longshaw Children's Centre on 6 and 7 February 2013. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

We found that those responsible for the children's centre are not always clear about their particular roles and responsibilities. As a result, they do not always have a clear idea about whether the services they offer are really helping you to change your lives and improve your financial situation. We know that the centre staff know those of you who use the nursery school and childcare service really well. However, there are families who live near the centre who do not know about the support and advice available to them. To improve this, we have asked the centre and its partners to work together more effectively and share information about local needs. This is so that the centre can work more closely with a greater number of important partner agencies to set ambitious and relevant targets to reach more families and improve their lives. We have asked that all centre leaders are appropriately trained in order for them to do this effectively.

The centre has access to some information about its reach area, but this is not always used well enough to plan future provision. Staff do not always have the resources to take advantage of some of the services available within other children's centres in the borough. As a result, the range of activities and services offered is not broad enough to meet the needs of everyone in the community. The staff at the centre do not have systems to accurately track and monitor the impact of the different things that you take part in. This means that the targets set in the centre's development plan are sometimes not ambitious enough, and so improvements do not happen at a fast enough pace. We have asked the centre's leaders to address this.

However, despite these challenges, your children's centre is particularly good at ensuring that your children have access to good-quality childcare and some children make good progress and enjoy their learning from their initial starting points. Some of you have taken advantage of opportunities to volunteer in the school library and have enjoyed participating in planned activities to play and learn alongside your children in nursery. The centre is also focused on ensuring that families and children remain safe. There are clear procedures to ensure this happens and these are understood and consistently implemented by staff. You told inspectors how the centre is a lifeline especially when times get tough. Staff work hard to improve your understanding of how to keep your children and families safe and this has included helping some of you to manage your children's behaviour better.

We know centre staff pass on information about the importance of leading healthy lifestyles and ensuring children get the best start in life. We heard how much you enjoy going for lunch with your children and trying out the recipes at home for yourselves. We recognised that despite some of the weaknesses in leadership arrangements, the centre has a positive impact on families who are accessing the centre. Parents told us they value the centre's staff and feel listened to. We noted that parents were not fully involved in the governance

arrangements and in making key decisions about the centre, so we have asked the centre's leaders to improve this for you.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us. We are very grateful 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.