

Inspection report for Leigh Children and Family Centre

Local authority	Southend-On-Sea
Inspection number	406953
Inspection dates	20–21 March 2013
Reporting inspector	Christine Field

Centre leader	Imelda Callowhill
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Darlinghurst Primary and Nursery School URN: 114790
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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the cover manager, senior leaders from South East Essex Primary Care Trust Trust, frontline staff, a range of partners, advisory board representatives, local authority officers, childminders and parents. They also observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the self-evaluation form, priority action plan and service development plan.

Information about the centre

The children's centre has been managed by the South Essex Partnership Trust (SEPT) since October 2009. It was designated as a phase two centre in 2010. It re-located in July 2011 to share premises with Darlinghurst Primary School, which is subject to a separate inspection.

The children's centre is one of two health-managed centres with a shared manager and a team of six staff that works across both centres' reach areas. A range of services are provided in order to meet its core purpose. Currently the deputy coordinator is on maternity leave and the centre manager was on annual leave at the time of the inspection. A cover manager oversaw the inspection with support from SEPT senior leaders. The centre works in partnership with three other children's centres that comprise the West Locality; each are subject to separate inspections. Governance is provided by the partnership advisory board comprising various agencies and parents.

In February 2012 the centre extended its reach to include families with young children living in West Leigh. The centre's reach area includes 16 Super Output Areas (SOAs) with only one assessed as having significant levels of deprivation. There are 1,630 children aged 0-5 years living in the reach area. Most families are from White British backgrounds with 1% from other minority ethnic groups. The proportion of children living in workless homes is assessed as 6%, with 0.5% of families in receipt

of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities when they enter early years provision are typically in line with the level expected for their age.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The centre provides good services to local families that result in good outcomes overall. Its excellent partnerships, particularly with health services, lead to local families significantly improving their physical, mental and emotional well-being and this outcome is outstanding.

Families are helped to keep safe and move forward in their personal and social achievements due to the good support and guidance of staff together with the good quality learning opportunities provided by the centre. Children achieve well from their starting points, as reflected in the above average outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Few adults are signposted to services to enhance their educational achievements, but those who are engage in a range of basic skills training. Eight volunteers support the centre following their successful completion of an accredited course. Others are helped to improve their financial stability, but numbers are very low due to the low level of unemployment locally. However, the centre rightly recognises that there is scope to further enhance the learning opportunities provided for parents and to improve the tracking of their achievements and progress into employment and further education.

Families enjoy the time they spend at the centre, describing it as 'welcoming, friendly and inclusive'. New mothers, who the centre is in contact with very soon after the birth of their baby, told inspectors how much they appreciate sessions such as 'Baby Massage' and 'First Steps' where they share experiences, build strong friendships and grow in confidence as parents. Parents from all target groups help shape services, for example through the comments they make which they post on the 'You said - We did' display board and through their responses to consultations. Their wider contributions to the life and development of the centre are supported by the emerging work of the revitalised parents' forum and by representatives on the

partnership advisory board.

Leadership, management and governance are good. The centre is increasing its reach with the large majority of local families engaging in services. Safeguarding is given high priority and families are well protected due to strong multi-agency work and robust use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes. The centre's self-evaluation is very detailed but not all of the centre's own judgements are convincingly substantiated by the data available. Some targets identified in the service development plan lack precision and this makes it hard for the partnership advisory board to keep a full check on the centre's performance. Nevertheless, senior leaders have a clear and accurate understanding about the centre's strengths and shortcomings. They have set out a small number of well-conceived priorities together with the required actions and monitoring arrangements to assist the centre's next steps development. The new chair of the advisory board brings a wealth of expertise to support the on-going development of self-evaluation processes. These features, together with the centre's good track record, demonstrate its good capacity to build for further success.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen service development planning by setting specific and measurable targets that the partnership advisory board can use to check the impact of the centre's work on different target groups
- Work with partners to enhance the learning opportunities for parents and improve the tracking of their achievements and progress into employment and further education.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Obesity levels in young children are not as high as in some other areas of the borough but the centre is not complacent and ensures that families can access a range of experiences that encourage exercise and healthy eating. For example, 'Baby-led weaning' and 'Cook 4 life' sessions are well attended and evaluations show the positive impact they have on improving diet and lifestyle. The centre works proactively to promote breastfeeding and the proportion of mothers sustaining their babies' breastfeeding is rising. Inspectors observed mothers feeling relaxed and comfortable when breastfeeding their babies during sessions. A further 2% increase has been set for this year, which the centre is working towards in partnership with midwives and health visitors. At 100% the level of immunisation for two years-olds shows the exceptionally high-level engagement of families with health services. Other children's centres in the locality refer families suffering mental or emotional health problems to 'Leigh' in order to access their highly-regarded specialist support.

Children and parents accessing services behave in ways that are safe because of the good role-modelling by centre staff and clear expectations that are given prominence in display - for example, the zero-tolerance to using mobile phones. The take up of training sessions such as 'First Aid' is high and participants say how much they learn.

One mother noted that 'I now realise how quickly children can get scalded by hot water and I am extra alert at home'. Families whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable are effectively safeguarded due to the strong network of multi-agency support. The centre works very effectively with partners to help some parents to cope with mental health issues and empowers others to take control of potentially abusive relationships. Dovetailed partnership work ensures that children, including those subject to child protection plan, are well protected.

At over 80% the proportion of reception age children achieving a good level of development is well above the 64% National average. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is narrowing over time but last year the gap was wider in the West Leigh area than in Leigh. All activities for young children delivered from the centre, such as 'Little Leapfrogs', are planned using the principles of the revised Early Years Foundation Stage. This approach ensures that experiences focus on learning and development and helps to build their skills in readiness for the future. The centre has plans well in hand to enhance its well-established partnership with a local nursery to identify how interventions can add further value to children's achievements and ensure that the most vulnerable receive the very best start in education.

A high number of adults extend their parenting skills by attending sessions that focus on caring for their children, such as the 'Delta' post-natal group and the 'Two for Joy' specifically for parents with twins. One parent's comment sums up the benefits: 'the group makes me feel more confident, I feel I can ask anything, know I am not alone and always get reassurance'. A well established volunteer programme helps keep adults' skills fresh, with activities such as helping at the 'Weigh and Stay' clinic. The centre signposts parents to courses run by a debt counselling charity and has secured funding for families to purchase specialist equipment for children with disabilities through its partnership with the 'Sunflower Trust'. At 14% the proportion of adults living in the reach area without a qualification is half that seen across the borough. The centre is working effectively to address existing needs, for example by signposting adults to training in literacy, numeracy and ICT skills run by a nearby children's centre, but recognises that improvement is required in the tracking of outcomes in order to establish a clearer understanding of aspirations and personal goals.

Families from all target groups enjoy the time they spend at the centre and the trusting relationships that exist with family support staff. Where suggestions have been made, such as providing more singing, messy play and practical activities, they have been taken on board. The centre is soon to run a 'Grandparents Group' in response to parents' feedback and to meet the needs of the growing number of grandparents who are carers of young children. Parents play a pivotal role in governance; until relatively recently the partnership advisory board was chaired by a parent who has since returned to work. The parents' forum is active in decision-making and contributes in other ways such as organising fund raising activities including quiz nights and cake sales. A member has recently set up 'The Friends of Leigh' Facebook page.

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	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre has a good understanding of the community it serves because the manager has built extremely productive and purposeful relationships with a range of partners. These enable early identification of needs and timely interventions that lead to local families achieving good and improving outcomes. Outreach work is increasing as the centre has extended family support resources and re-balanced its programme to give priority to more targeted work alongside universal services. The number of teenage pregnant mothers in the reach area is extremely low but 100% are accessing services, with one currently training to become a breastfeeding peer supporter. A majority of virtually all other target groups are in regular contact with the centre, although those described as 'workless' are not being as well reached as others. The centre is already working to assess more robustly the needs of this small but significant group by reviewing the information held and following up cases on a one-to-one basis.

The centre is very welcoming, providing parents, childminders and children with a stimulating, well-resourced environment in which to relax and enjoy the experiences provided. Parents say that 'The staff are brilliant and I do not know where I would be without them' and that 'They give me a reason to get up in the morning'. Sessions such as 'Baby Massage' and 'First Steps' enable new parents to build strong friendships and grow in confidence as parents. The centre's effective support helps children's learning and enables them to socialise and build good skills for the future. Inspectors greatly enjoyed observing the room-full of parents and toddlers attending 'Little Leapfrogs' access a range of activities such as play dough and mark-making and sing with exuberance about 'speckled frogs'.

Care, guidance and support are good. Health visitors are the lead professional in most CAFs, and family support workers who lead the centre-based sessions carry out

home visits jointly so that any follow up work can be closely coordinated. The most vulnerable families usefully record their experiences and the impact of services through the developing 'Learning Journeys' process. Parents suffering post-natal depression are given integrated support to help build strong family bonds and say that they feel able to 'drop into the centre or text and always receive fantastic support'. Others who experience personal crises, such as domestic violence, are helped to overcome personal challenges by the effective support of staff and other centre partners. Notice boards and a wide range of leaflets and other resources provide centre users with good information about the range of provision and additional support available.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre is led and managed well by skilled staff who are passionate about their work, and morale is high. Excellent partnerships, especially with health services, bring extra value to the range and quality of the centre's work and the outstandingly positive impact it has on improving families' well-being. Parents make a good contribution to the life and development of the centre. Their views are sought regularly and post-activity evaluations reveal a high-level of satisfaction.

Governance provided by the partnership advisory board is effective in ensuring that the centre's provision meets local needs and enables the large majority of local families to achieve at least good outcomes. Resources are allocated efficiently and effectively and the value for money provided is good. The day-to-day management of the centre runs smoothly and staff value the high quality professional supervision they receive. New staff identify that the comprehensive induction arrangements have helped them get up-to-speed quickly and undertake their role with confidence.

Leaders have an accurate understanding about the centre's strengths and weaknesses, despite some aspects of self-evaluation painting an over-generous picture in terms of the grades recorded. The service development plan is focused on the right things but lacks precision, and this makes it hard for the partnership advisory board to gauge the impact of the actions being taken. More recently a sensible number of priorities with specific targets and clear monitoring arrangements have been established to guide the centre's improvement. This has yet to be implemented due to the manager's temporary absence. The new chair of the advisory board, who is a deputy headteacher of a local school, brings a wealth of

expertise to support the on-going development of the centre's self-evaluation processes.

Safeguarding is given high priority, and families are well protected due to strong multi-agency work and robust use of the CAF processes. Policy and procedures fully meet requirements. Staff appointments are vetted carefully and the centre undertakes comprehensive health and safety checks. Staff are fully up to speed in child protection matters. Parents identify strongly that they feel safe when they use the centre.

Equality and diversity are promoted well, and there is a strong culture of respect and inclusion. All the centre staff access mandatory equality and diversity training and ensure that services suit the needs of the community. The narrowing of the achievement gap reflects positively on this aspect. Displays welcome centre users in their home language and a 'one world map' shows from which countries families originate. Families with children with disabilities or special educational needs are helped by calling on the expertise from another children's centre.

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	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

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

Not applicable

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Leigh Children's Centre on 20 – 21 March 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

We chatted to some of you, your children, staff, childminders and a wide range of partners, health leaders, advisory board and local authority representatives linked to the centre. We looked at case studies, evaluations of the centre's work and a range of documents including safeguarding policies and procedures. We very much enjoyed sharing in some of your activities.

The centre provides good services for you and your children that enable you to live happier, healthier and safer lives. Its excellent partnerships, particularly with health services, lead to many of you significantly improving your physical, mental and emotional well-being. The good support and guidance of staff are at the heart of the centre's good provision. This is summed up by one parent: 'The staff are brilliant and I do not know where I would be without them.' Safeguarding is given high priority and you told us that you feel well protected and safe when using the centre.

Your children achieve well from their starting points, as reflected in the above average outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Some of you enhance your educational achievements or keep your skills fresh through volunteering opportunities. Others are helped to improve their financial stability, but numbers are very low due to the low level of unemployment locally. The centre rightly recognises that there is scope to further enhance the learning opportunities available and work to support employability, and we have asked them to give priority to this.

You told us how much you enjoy the time you spend at the centre and describe it as 'welcoming, friendly and inclusive'. New mothers told us how much they appreciate sessions such as 'Baby Massage' and 'First Steps' where they share experiences, build strong friendships and grow in confidence as parents. It is great to see so many of you contributing to the life and development of the centre through your suggestions, work on the parents' forum or as members of the partnership advisory board.

Leadership, management and governance are good. The centre's self-evaluation is very detailed, but some of the improvement targets in the service delivery plan lack precision which makes it hard for the partnership advisory board to keep tabs on how the centre is doing. We have asked them to look at this in going forward. Once again thank you for your welcome; we thoroughly enjoyed our time at the centre and wish you the very best for the future.

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