

Lighthouse Children's Centre

Heath Road, New Invention, Willenhall, Walsall, WV12 5EF

Inspection date 9–10 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a good centre.

- The large majority of children aged under five years living in the reach area are registered with the centre. A high proportion of families from the most disadvantaged communities regularly access its good quality services. The centre is engaging particularly successfully with its main target groups of pregnant teenagers, young parents, lone parents, children in workless households and disabled children.
- Centre leaders use their good local knowledge and the area-based information provided by the local authority to work flexibly with partners. This means families receive the services they require at exactly the right time. The centre, located at the heart of its community, takes outreach services, such as 'Stay and Play,' to different venues, to ensure that families living further afield can access activities more easily.
- Family support work is targeted very effectively at helping those most in need. Strong partnerships and good sharing of information result in services being joined-up effectively. Families speak very highly of how much the centre helps them; comments such as, 'It has been a lifeline,' and 'We would have been totally lost without the centre's support,' are typical.
- Leadership is pro-active in looking ahead to ensure that services are shaped to meet existing and future needs. Staff members are a united team who share in the leadership vision, which is to assist young children in getting off to a flying start, help families overcome personal challenges and equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to improve their well-being. The advisory committee keeps the work of the centre under close review and provides appropriate levels of support and challenge. As a result, the centre is well placed to continue to improve.

It is not yet outstanding because:

- Despite some effective collaborative work to raise achievement, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is below levels seen locally and nationally, and the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is narrowing slowly.
- The centre identifies the right priority areas for improvement through very detailed self-evaluation, but the targets and timelines in its action plan are not precise enough in respect of improving children's health, and engaging with fathers and children from minority ethnic families.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leaders, family support workers and representatives from the local authority; health and education professionals, parents, volunteers and members of the advisory committee. A very large number of partners met with inspectors to explain the nature of the collaborative work in place to support local families. Home visits were undertaken with family support workers, and observations of activities were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at the centre's self-evaluation, action planning, delivery plan, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures, advisory committee minutes, the annual user survey responses and a range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Christine Field	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Heather Hartmann	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The centre opened in 2008 as a purpose-built, phase two, stand-alone centre. It delivers or supports access to a range of services to meet its core purpose, from a number of community venues, such as local church halls, Pool Hayes Community Association, Pool Hayes Primary School and New Invention Library, in addition to the centre itself. The centre is open, Monday to Friday, from 8.00am to 6.00pm all year round. There is community use of the centre on some evenings and occasionally at weekends.

The centre shares a site with Beacon Primary School and is managed by the school's governing body on behalf of Walsall local authority. Registered childcare, which was inspected in 2012, is provided on the same site. The report for this inspection can be found on our website at www.ofsted.gov.uk. An advisory committee of the governing body (comprising partners, staff from all primary schools in the reach area, parents and staff) oversees the day-to-day running of the centre. There is also a parents' forum. The centre leader has been in post since the centre opened.

There are 851 children aged under five years living in the centre's reach area. Children enter early years provision at levels typically below those expected for their age. The reach area comprises nine super output areas, of which two are in the 10–20% most disadvantaged in England, based on the indices of multiple deprivation. Around 15% of families are in receipt of out-of-work benefits and 17% are eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Most families are of White British heritage with a small percentage from other ethnic groups.

The centre has identified its main target groups as pregnant teenagers, young parents, lone parents, children in workless households, children from minority ethnic families, disabled children and fathers.

The local authority is undertaking a review of service delivery for its 18 children's centres; this review will be concluded in September 2013.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- With early years partners, increase the proportion of children reaching a good level of development, particularly in their communication and language development, and move rapidly to narrow the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of young children and the rest, to at least that seen nationally.
- Sharpen action planning to include measurable targets and ensure sufficient focus on further improving children's health, particularly reducing obesity levels, and increasing the engagement with fathers, and children from minority ethnic families.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The centre's successful work to improve its reach has resulted in the large majority of young children and families accessing centre services, including an impressive 90% from its most disadvantaged communities. The vast majority of children aged three and four years take up their free entitlement to early education in good quality settings, with which the centre maintains close links.
- Effective systems for quickly following up all new births, together with weekly health clinics run from the centre, result in an increasing number of families visiting the centre. This enables staff to show what other services are on offer and interest those who may be less likely to participate than others. All teenage parents living locally engage with ante-natal services; they enjoy attending the 'Bumps

'n' Babes' sessions where they learn about what it means to be a parent and make new friends.

- The local authority provides useful information about families' participation in the well-planned activities. Consequently, staff know which key groups are relatively under-represented, such as children from minority ethnic families and fathers, and are developing plans to further meet their needs. Outreach work in areas that have been identified as requiring extra support, such as where childhood obesity is relatively high, enables families to access groups such as 'Food Dudes' that they may not otherwise have done.
- Close assessment of the needs of two-year-olds has led to most taking up free places. Early years partners meet at a sub-committee specifically set up to support improvement in young children's learning and development. Members share views and undertake joint training, for example on speech and language. However, the group has not yet given sufficient focus to targeting achievement and narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The quality, range and appropriateness of services offered by the centre are typically good. This is because the centre knows its families well and, helped by the increasing use of statistical information provided by the local authority, makes sure the right blend of services are provided. One of the centre's key strengths is the way it personalises services, for example, to meet the specific needs of pregnant teenagers and of children with special educational needs such as autism.
- 'Stay and Play' sessions held at various community venues are well attended because they offer parents the chance to enjoy being with their children, socialise with other parents, and receive guidance about early learning activities that they can replicate at home. Staff are very positive role models and this helps parents to see at first hand how to treat one another, and successfully manage their children's sometimes difficult behaviour. High quality programmes give extra support to young parents and others who need it, and help them to build confident parenting skills.
- Adults, including those from workless homes, benefit from a range of services that enhance their education, employment opportunities and life chances. Case studies and the centre's tracking information show that some gain qualifications and others find paid work following training. Parents are actively encouraged to become volunteers, and take-up rates are good. The centre's close liaison with a local college enables those on modern apprenticeships to complement their studies with work in the centre, helping to run various activities alongside centre staff.
- The quality of care, guidance and support provided for families is strong. One-to-one support for those most in need through home visits and specialist work helps them overcome often complex problems and has a significant impact on their well-being. Well-coordinated work and regular information sharing between partners ensure that particularly vulnerable families are monitored closely so that assessed risks are reduced.
- The centre's work to promote healthy lifestyles is seen in the steadily rising level of breastfeeding. However, childhood obesity is rising after a period of decline. The centre is seeking to tackle this through organising various activities, such as 'Eat Better-Start Better', to raise awareness about healthy lifestyles. The absence of specific targets to assist improvement makes it hard for leaders to check the impact the centre is having on this area of its work.
- Helping prepare children for school has been at the heart of the centre's ongoing work with early years partners. Sessions have taken place on potty training, sharing books and reading together, for example, and useful leaflets have been handed out to help children make a smooth transfer. Centre staff visit all of the schools in their area to see how well children have settled in; there is recognition that a stronger focus on communication is required to further support children's achievement.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre leader is totally committed to making sure local families enjoy healthy and fulfilled lives and overcome the personal challenges they face. She has built a hard working team who have the

necessary qualifications, experience and expertise to respond well to children's and families' needs. Very strong partnership work results in families, particularly those most in need, benefiting from well-planned, well-located, good quality services.

- The staff regularly seek the views of parents during and following each activity. Parents and carers speak highly of the services, and often pay tribute to the welcoming and inclusive nature of the centre and the expertise of the team. They describe staff as, 'supportive', 'understanding' and 'simply brilliant'. Parents are instrumental in shaping services and wider decision-making through their membership of the parents' forum and advisory committee.
- Governance arrangements are effective and the advisory committee keeps a close eye on the work of the centre, providing appropriate levels of support and challenge. It reports regularly to the governing body which in turn makes sure that its contractual obligations are fully met. The local authority monitors the centre's performance through monthly checks on participation levels, key groups' engagement and health outcomes, and through an annual review.
- Safeguarding matters are taken very seriously. Staff vetting procedures are thorough, and ongoing training on aspects of child protection ensures that staffs' skills are up-to-date. Early help procedures have built on the previous use of the Common Assessment Framework and result in the most vulnerable families, including children subject to a child protection plan and looked after children, being effectively protected.
- The centre has a clear view of its strengths and shortcomings. Leaders and governors share in the process of identifying priorities and ensure that all resources are allocated efficiently. The action plan is focused on the most pressing aspects requiring improvement, but targets and timelines are not sufficiently precise and this impedes otherwise effective work to further improve the outcomes for children and families.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

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Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	421474
Managed by	The governing body of Beacon Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	851
Centre manager	Tahra Hussain
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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