

The Limes Children's Centre

Johnsons Road, Whitehall, Bristol, BS5 9AT

Inspection date 17–18 September 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Inadequate	4
The quality of practice and services		Inadequate	4
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that is inadequate.

- Not enough families are registered with the centre and only a small minority of families attend centre activities on a regular basis. Families of all groups identified as in most need of support, such as from workless households and teenage mothers, do not access the centre in sufficient numbers.
- There are not enough opportunities for adults to access training or improve their economic well-being. Nor are there systems in place to track the progress of adults or children who do engage with centre activities.
- The quality and impact of services is inadequate because the centre does not have accurate information about the families living in the reach area. Consequently, it is unable to plan its activities to meet their needs. This also significantly restricts the ability of senior leaders to measure the centre's impact, especially on families who need the most help.
- Management and governance arrangements are inadequate because they do not challenge and support the centre to improve well enough. The local authority has been slow to address many long-standing issues within the centre.
- The centre's self-evaluation process has historically been poor and has not involved staff, key partners or governors sufficiently. The resulting development plan does not set out clearly enough the steps that will be taken to make sure the centre improves.

This centre has the following strengths:

- The new centre manager, in partnership with the local authority, has a realistic view of the centre's performance and quickly identified its weaknesses. Key actions have been put in place to bring about urgent improvements in these areas. Many serious issues, such as the health and safety of centre users and significant safeguarding concerns, have been swiftly resolved, although safeguarding still requires improvement.
- For those few families who do access services provided by the centre, the quality of support they receive is good and the centre's work clearly makes a positive difference to their lives.

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 three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and managers in the local authority; health, education and social care partners; parents; and representatives of partner organisations from the voluntary and community sector. They also met outreach workers; early years practitioners; a local primary school headteacher; and representatives of the governing body and children's centre advisory board.

The inspectors visited the centre, linked nursery school and other sites used by centre outreach staff, including Wellspring Healthy Living Centre, Croft Ends Church 'drop-in' Centre and St George Pre-School and 'drop-in' sessions held at Bristol Children's Playhouse.

They observed the centre's work, including the 'Tips for Talking' and 'Childminders Group' along with other 'drop-in' sessions. They also looked at a range of relevant documentation, including centre policies, procedures and case files.

Inspection team

Alan Comerford-Dunbar	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Joyce Cox	Additional Inspector
Gail Robertson	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The Limes Children's Centre opened in 2008 and is situated in a converted house within the grounds of The Limes Nursery School (URN: 108905), which is subject to a separate inspection. The report can be seen at www.ofsted.gov.uk The centre is a stand-alone centre. The centre's governance is through the school governing body, which manages the day-to-day running of the centre with representatives from the community, professional agencies and parents. In addition, there is a newly formed children's centre advisory board which reports to the school governing body.

The centre meets its core purpose by providing a range of services, including health, adult courses and workshops. Outreach work takes place in family homes or at nearby community venues. Childcare is provided on-site and is subject to a separate inspection. The report can be seen at www.ofsted.gov.uk

Currently, 1,490 children under the age of five years live in the reach area, of which just over half (51.1%) are registered with the centre. Families come from a broad range of ethnic backgrounds; the largest group of families are of White British heritage (47%). Most families come from minority ethnic groups, with Somali and Pakistani heritage families being the largest of these groups; nearly a third (30%) of children speak English as an additional language. Approximately a quarter (25%) of families live in workless homes, with just under a fifth (19%) eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Most children enter early years provision with a range of skills and knowledge that are below those expected for their age.

The local authority is undertaking a review of service delivery for its 15 children's centres in the East of Bristol; this review will be concluded in 2014.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of families who are registered and regularly using the centre, especially those most in need of support, by:
 - working more effectively with key partners to ensure the centre has accurate information about the number of children and families in the area so that leaders can set clear and measurable targets in the development plan
 - making better use of data to identify the needs of the local community
 - effectively advertising programmes being run by the centre
- Increase opportunities for adults to improve their economic well-being by:
 - working more closely with key partners in adult education, Jobcentre Plus and voluntary organisations within the community to ensure all adults are made fully aware of available services
 - tracking adults' progress so that the centre can measure the impact of its work.
- Establish a system to track children's progress during their time at the centre and when they move on to other early years settings so that the centre can check how well it is preparing them for school
- Establish more effective leadership, management and governance by:
 - ensuring the governing body and advisory board are clear about their roles and responsibilities to challenge and support the work of the centre
 - involving all staff and key partners in evaluating the centre's effectiveness and determining future priorities
 - establishing an active parent forum so that parents can more effectively influence decisions taken by the centre.
- Further improve safeguarding arrangements by:
 - ensuring all staff receive training on how to recognise signs of abuse and how to deal with it
 - ensuring access to the site occupied by the centre is more secure.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- The centre is not reaching enough families from the groups identified as in most need of support, for example families from workless households and teenage mothers. Also, only 3% of all fathers engage with the centre. The centre does not know what proportion of families from minority ethnic groups are also in targeted groups; only 11% of families from a minority ethnic background attend the centre, despite the fact that the majority of families living in the reach area come from a minority ethnic group.
- The centre is not effective in ensuring that families in the area know what it has to offer. As a result, only a minority of children and families living in the area access services on a regular basis, and information shows that this is not an improving picture. The centre has begun to increase its outreach work in order to be seen in the community.
- Access to all early childhood services is unclear due to poor data and a lack of close working relationships with key partners. Following a time of significant staff change, the centre is re-establishing its partnerships with a range of professionals, including health visitors, midwives and other key community groups, to help staff identify local families in most need of support and to check the impact of strategies for encouraging families to participate in relevant services.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- The range and relevance of services is inadequate because too few families, including those from groups identified as in most need of support, are accessing the centre. Services are limited to 'drop-

in' groups and one-to-one support. Limited external data or internal evaluations have been collected to target the specific needs of families. Services are therefore run with little planning, unclear outcomes and insufficient evaluation to measure impact. Recently, much work has taken place to collect more accurate data to help managers to better plan to meet the identified needs of families, although it is too early to judge the impact of this work.

- Some significant aspects of children's centre services are not in place. These include parenting courses, opportunities for education, and employability-related programmes and targeted volunteering activities for adults. For example, within the reach area, over half (53%) of families come from a minority ethnic group, with nearly a third (approximately 30%) of families who speak English as an additional language, yet the centre has not run an English for speakers of other languages course in the past 12 months.
- For those few families who attend the centre, good-quality sessions such as 'Tips for Talking' help them to learn how to interact more effectively with their children. At the 'drop-in' sessions at Bristol Children's Playhouse, parents have good opportunities to socialise and learn from each other as well as the good role modelling of the staff. However, staff from the Limes do not sufficiently check the impact of activities on individual children or adults who attend, so they do not know what impact their work has on individuals or track the progress they make.
- There are examples where the centre provides a good service to the community, for example in its initiatives to support the work of childminders in the area.
- Free early education for two-year-olds is in place but the centre does not know how many children may be eligible or how many children have taken up their entitlement. The centre does not evaluate children's readiness for school rigorously enough. Data from the four local Reception classes within the reach area show that children who are more disadvantaged are not catching up with others quickly enough.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- Leadership, governance and management are inadequate. The centre has had a turbulent and troubled past with many changes in leadership. Staff morale was very low, although it has recently improved due to the influence of the new centre manager. There is no parent forum so parents have little input into the running of the centre and the school governing body has recently been appropriately reconstituted to make it clear about its responsibilities regarding the children's centre.
- The newly formed advisory board is not effective because its membership does not include enough key partners or parents of children using the centre. As a result, services are not planned carefully enough to meet the needs of families in the area. Leaders do not sufficiently take into account the knowledge and experience of key professionals or accurate information about the local area.
- There have been several changes in staff roles and responsibilities, with many staff performing different part-time roles within the children's centre and the linked nursery school; this is confusing for users of the centre and limits the effectiveness of some staff in improving the quality of provision. Recently the centre manager has done much to rectify this situation, and leaders and governors plan to conduct a review of the roles and responsibilities of all staff.
- Although children subject to the Common Assessment Framework arrangements or child protection plans are adequately protected, safeguarding procedures and practices are not rigorous enough. Case files demonstrate that the centre's involvement has helped to reduce the level of support needed for some highly vulnerable families although not all staff are skilled at recognising signs of abuse or have experience of working with families in challenging circumstances.
- The self-evaluation process is weak and does not drive improvements. The self-evaluation report was written in isolation by the centre manager and key stakeholders, like staff, families or other professionals in the area, did little to contribute to the process. Furthermore, the report was not shared with key stakeholders or even governors of the centre. Targets set are too broad, insufficiently measurable and are not focused on increasing the reach of the centre or improving the quality of services provided.

- Partnership working is weak, with many key partners within the reach area not actively involved with centre activities. The centre does not work closely enough with professionals from Jobcentre Plus, adult education, health workers and other key organisations in the area. Too often, key professionals work in isolation within the reach area; as a result, families are not able to access a cohesive range of services that meet their different needs.
- The recently appointed centre manager has worked tirelessly to improve the performance of the centre. The manager has effectively highlighted to the local authority many relevant concerns regarding the work of the centre. The authority has set appropriate actions to improve the centre's performance and is now providing good support to leaders and governors through the children's centre improvement officer, who makes regular visits to ensure that centre staff and managers are maintaining momentum towards improving the centre's performance.

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.

Unique reference number	23211
Local authority	Bristol
Inspection number	428657
Managed by	The governors of The Limes Nursery School and Children's Centre on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,490
Centre leader	Catherine Bolam
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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