

Little Harwood Children's Centre

Robinson Street, Blackburn, Lancashire, BB1 5PE

Inspection date 30–31 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Adult education and training programmes are not as well established as other services and do not have a high enough importance for the children's centre's staff and parents.
- The centre is well resourced to extend children's learning through play and the sessions are welcoming and enjoyed by families but opportunities are missed to extend children's communication skills further.
- Although the centre is working well with those families most in need of support, it does not monitor the effectiveness of its work over the short or long term.
- Information is not shared between partners to clearly demonstrate the difference services are making to families' lives.
- Governance arrangements are not well-embedded. The advisory board is kept well informed on the work of the centre but key partners and parents do not always attend meetings on a regular basis. Information provided is not used to challenge and drive improvement.

This centre has the following strengths:

- Most families in the reach area are registered with, and participate in, the centre's activities.
- Outreach work effectively supports families in identified target groups to access and use the services and remain engaged until their needs are effectively met.
- Comprehensively completed case files and discussions with parents provide a clear picture of the range of support given by the centre and the significant steps taken by 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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the senior leadership team, the Chair of the advisory board, centre staff, partners, parents and the local authority.

The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Kathryn Gethin	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Sarah Drake	Additional inspector
Ken Fisher	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Little Harwood Children's Centre is managed by the local authority and is located in Blackburn with Darwen in the north-west of England. The centre is a purpose-built building near to a local primary school, health centre and community centre. There is also a local authority nursery on-site. The nursery is subject to a separate inspection and its report can be found on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre opened in 2007 and works collaboratively with the John Smethurst and Seven Trees Children's Centres to deliver services to families in the Little Harwood area. The centre offers a range of services to meet its core purpose. The centre has been subject to many significant changes in the last year. These include: changes to the terms and conditions for children accessing the on-site nursery; a new geographical manager; the de-commissioning of some services; and the loss of some staff.

Little Harwood is a multi-heritage, multi-faith community with a large amount of terraced housing. These are at the lower end of the house price scale. Approximately half of the population have no qualifications. There are 1,079 children aged under five years living in the local area. Of these, there are currently 314 children aged from birth to four years living in fit for work, workless households in the area. Children enter early years provision with skills and knowledge below those expected for their age. The centre seeks to focus its services on groups of people who need support. These include: lone parents; children with additional needs; pregnant teenagers; teenage parents; and workless households.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Work with partners in education and training to increase the emphasis placed on providing adults with opportunities to follow courses directed towards increasing their employability.
- Ensure that staff build on opportunities to promote children's learning in sessions such as stay and play by identifying the needs of individuals and more skilful use of questioning.
- Gather more robust data so as to provide a clear picture of the effectiveness of the centre's work and where it needs to focus its future efforts.
- Formalise strategic partnerships by using service-level agreements to hold partners to account.
- Review the existing membership of the advisory board to ensure partners are fully represented and are able to provide sufficient challenge and hold the centre to account.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- A very large majority of the families in the area with children aged from birth to four years are registered with the children's centre. Target groups are clearly identified and active engagement with universal and targeted services by those families is very high.
- The outreach team is improving access to services for targeted families. A recent campaign to promote the work of the centre by door knocking and being more visible in the community has been successful in increasing the number of families engaging with the centre.
- Identification of the needs of families registered with the centre is good. These include domestic abuse, mental health problems and child neglect. Families are successfully matched to the services they need, including, where appropriate, specialist services. However, not enough information is gathered from partners to effectively measure the impact of these services.
- The take-up of the free entitlement to early education has increased as a result of successful outreach work. There are suitable and sufficient places to meet demand.
- Very effective multi-agency working is in place. This includes social care, midwifery and speech and language services.
- The community café is an asset to the centre. The message of healthy eating is promoted well and the menu provides meals at a very reasonable price. As a result it is very well used by families.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Fifty per cent of people of working age in the Little Harwood reach area have no academic or vocational qualifications. Insufficient attention is given to the need for them to develop and accredit their English, mathematics, and information and communication technology competencies. This deprives parents of opportunities for improving their personal effectiveness and for helping their children with reading, writing, speaking, listening, and numerical calculations.
- Planning for children's activities does not take into sufficient account individuals' needs. Although it identifies key words for sessions, staff seldom use these in practice and do not use questioning well enough to extend children's communication skills.
- The centre provides a suitable range of services and activities aimed at improving outcomes for families and children. There is a 'sifting system' through which the needs of new families and those who are identified as most vulnerable are considered on a weekly basis. This leads to swift referral to the 'right help at the right time in the right place'.
- The healthy eating and nutrition programme successfully addresses the lifestyle issues within families in a fun and supportive environment. Parents speak highly of the support given and, as one parent said, 'I wouldn't have done it without them.' However, not enough information is readily available on other areas of health and well-being, for example, stopping smoking and drinking less alcohol. Consequently, the centre cannot demonstrate its impact on health outcomes over time.
- Partnership working with other services provides a network of support and staff are persistent in helping individuals to improve their life-chances, however long this may take.
- Comprehensively completed case files provide a clear picture of the range of support given by both the centre and other agencies. These files, and talking with parents, outline the significant steps taken by them to develop their confidence and keep themselves and their children safe.
- Children's additional needs are identified early so that they can gain access to, for example, speech and language support. This helps to improve their readiness for school.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**Requires improvement**

- Local authority leaders and managers have taken the centre through a period of significant change. During this time performance management has not been as strong. However, there is a clear vision for the development of the service. Staff morale and motivation are high and staff have fully embraced the new working arrangements and opportunities to develop their skills.
- Relationships with health and social-care partners are strong. The on-site antenatal clinic provides prospective parents with information about the centre at an early stage. The recent agreement on sharing live-birth information will further improve the centre's ability to provide additional support where required.
- Governance arrangements are not fully effective. The advisory board meets on a regular basis and is highly supportive of the work carried out by the centre. However, key partners and parents do not attend on a regular basis. Despite a raft of information being made available to the board not enough challenge is provided to drive improvement.
- Service-level agreements with partners are not sufficiently established to agree how information can be best shared. Therefore, the centre cannot as yet accurately monitor or measure the impact of this joint work.
- Resources are well-managed and targeted. Where services cannot be accommodated within the centre, the outreach team and partners work directly in the home or at local community centres. The sharing of expertise and services through the early-help team helps to ensure that resources are used effectively to meet families' needs.
- Safeguarding is given a high priority by the centre. Policies and procedures, including for the recruitment of staff, are in place and implemented. Parents using the centre are helped to develop their understanding about how to secure the safety of their children, including, for example, the potential dangers of using mobile telephones to photograph children.

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.

Children's Centre details

Unique reference number	21814
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwin
Inspection number	427519
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,079
Centre leader	Mrs Maria Nugent
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01254 506910
Email address	maria.nugent@blackburn.gov.uk

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