

Locking Castle and Locking Children's Centre

The Campus, Highlands Lane, Weston-super-Mare, BS24 7DX

Inspection dates 15–16 January 2014

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.

- A good range of quality services meet the needs of families well including disabled children and those with special educational needs. Parents grow in confidence and improve their parenting skills. A high proportion of families take up funded places in early education in local settings.
- Centre staff are well qualified and highly skilled in giving families effective support which enables them to bring about very positive changes in their lives. Parents trust centre staff and know they have their children's best interests at heart.
- The centre leaders and managers, including the partnership board and the local authority leaders, place high importance on the joint working between Locking Castle and Locking Children's Centre and two other centres, Castle Batch Children's Centre and Milton Old Worle Children's Centre. Centre leaders share and use information and resources very successfully when planning activities and sessions.
- There is a strong emphasis on partner agencies working together with the centre to protect families and children most in need. This gives parents the correct support. Partnerships with voluntary groups and other agencies give families good access to practical help, advice and guidance relating to housing, welfare benefits, home safety and health.

It is not outstanding because:

- There are too few opportunities for families to become involved in the partnership board and in setting the direction of the centre's work.
- More could be done to provide and promote a wider range of opportunities for adult learning and courses offered, to help parents return to work. The system for tracking the take-up and success of adult courses is not detailed enough.
- Some of the data from the local authority is too complex and does not help the centre evaluate precisely how well it is working.
- Records of the centre's work and how well it is doing are too long and too descriptive. This means it is not always clear what the centre needs to do to become an outstanding children's centre.

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. It was carried out at the same time as the inspections of Castle Batch Children's Centre and Milton Old Worle Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, managers from the local authority and centre staff. They met health, social care and adult learning partners, education and early years practitioners, centre staff, parents and volunteers. They also met with representatives from the partnership board.

The inspectors visited services delivered at the children's centre site.

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

Inspection team

Jane Neech	Her Majesty's Inspector, Lead Inspector
Joyce Cox	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Locking Castle and Locking Children's Centre opened in January 2010 and is a phase three children's centre located in the coastal town of Weston-super-Mare. It is managed directly by the local authority and has its own partnership board. The centre is part of the East Locality Children's Centres with two other centres in the town, Castle Batch Children's Centre and Milton Old Worle Children's Centre. The local authority is moving to a group model of children's centre delivery for the three centres and Banwell, Winford and Sanford Children's Centre from February 2014.

The centre building is part of a busy community campus which includes a library, internet area, coffee bar and foyer, sports and leisure facilities, meeting rooms, a primary school with a nursery and a special school. The schools are subject to separate inspection arrangements and their reports can be found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>

The centre offers a range of activities and services to meet its core purpose, including family support, outreach work, stay and play groups, breastfeeding support, child health clinics, outdoor activities, parents' support groups and parenting programmes, particularly for young mothers. A range of partners provide specialist advice, guidance or services to further support the work of the centre. These partners include community learning providers and Jobcentre Plus, who have recently begun meeting customers directly at the centre.

There are a total of 1,131 children under five living in the area served by the centre. The population is mainly White British with a small number of families from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of families moving into the area whose first language is not English is increasing. There is an increase in the number of families from workless households and lone parents registered at the centre. There is extensive new housing surrounding the children's centre. Some families stay in the area for only a short time. The take-up of housing is a mixture of rented and owner occupied housing. The area contains pockets of deprivation alongside areas which are more affluent.

Children's levels on entry to early years education are above those typical for their age and above national expected levels.

What does the centre needs to do to improve further?

- Create more opportunities for parents to become involved in the partnership board, and in setting the direction of the centre's work, particularly as the centre moves towards working as part of a group of children's centres.
- Promote and provide a wider range of opportunities, adult learning and courses, to help parents return to work. Track the take-up and success of adult courses and consider more closely how well this is providing parents with employability skills.
- Slim down the amount of data from the local authority and use only that which is helpful to the centre's evaluation of how well it is working.
- Keep records of the centre's work short and evaluative by focusing on what is working well and why, what is not working so well and why, and what needs to be done to improve further to become outstanding.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The large majority of families living in the communities served by Locking Castle and Locking Children's Centre are registered with the centre. The centre knows the majority of those from the priority groups, including young mothers and disabled children and those with special educational needs. Staff understand the local community well. They know that there has been an increase in the number of lone parents and families without employment and, as a result, have engaged with a large majority. In this way the centre promotes equal opportunity well for families with the greatest needs, by offering relevant services and activities.
- The take-up of funded early years education for two-, three- and four-year-olds across the locality is impressive. The centre sets aspirational targets to ensure that eligible two-year-olds receive their funding entitlement. These targets are regularly met and exceeded because of how closely the needs of very young children are checked.
- The close working relationships between health professionals and centre staff ensure that families needing additional support receive quick access to early practical help and guidance. It is this early identification and follow-up actions that contribute to the closing of the achievement gap as children develop.
- Staff promote the work of the centre very effectively to ensure that all families have equal access to the services that are available. Joint working with the other two centres underpins the good work at Locking Castle and Locking Children's Centre. Family support workers signpost families to activities which are held in Castle Batch Children's Centre and Milton Old Worle Children's Centre. This ensures that parents are aware of how the services offered at all three centres can benefit them.
- The centre is well informed about the expected number of new births and this enables managers to plan and amend the services offered. The overwhelming majority of teenage mothers use the centre services regularly.
- Parents are encouraged to take advantage of the good range of health and well-being related sessions, including the 'SHINE' programme for overweight expectant mothers. The completion rate on this programme is very good.
- Highly trained family support workers ensure that families with the most complex needs receive suitable support. In times of crisis family support workers react quickly and it is through their support, advice and work with partner agencies, such as social services or housing, that families are able to 'get back on their feet'.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Partnership working is strong. The shared partnerships by the three centres with a range of other professionals and organisations are very effective, including the early identification and support for disabled children and those with special educational needs. This makes a positive difference to the lives of families.
- Children make good progress from their starting points. Stay and play activities are planned with school readiness in mind. The majority of children reach a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, because activities offered at the centre stimulate children's curiosity and the take-up of good quality early years provision in the area is high.
- The centre uses information available to them to identify where children may benefit from extra support. Support for those on child protection plans, children in need and those supported through the Common Assessment Framework is good and caters for a wide range of needs. In this way the centre's care, guidance and support effectively help families.
- Parents say they are highly satisfied with the quality of services available to them and value the positive relationships they have with centre staff. Staff encourage families to think about changes that will improve their lives and that of their children. Young mothers are taught how to make inexpensive and nourishing meals which are shared with other mothers and their children. Parents say that their children now sit down at the table at home to eat and will try new foods.

- The centre's focus on reducing the risk of harm within families is effective. Health partners run information sessions and within 'Baby Basics' there is an emphasis on safety in weaning and feeding. Breastfeeding rates are in line with the local authority rates. First aid training is available for families and risk assessments are done on first home visits.
- Community learning partners offer short literacy and numeracy courses, as well as information about day-to-day family management, such as form filling and applying for school places. These courses, and the crèche facilities provided, promote equality of opportunity, for lone parents and also especially for those who are new to the country, who speak English as an additional language and whose knowledge of how systems work is limited.
- Volunteering at the centre gives adults confidence, especially in their reading, writing and speaking skills. Some volunteers go on to take accredited courses, for example in childcare. The range of opportunities for developing employability skills is limited, as is the evaluation of the success of what is being offered currently.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The local authority and the children's services manager work well together to agree the priorities for the centre and set a clear strategic direction with measureable targets. Action planning focuses on the priorities for the locality and these are also shared with Castle Batch Children's Centre and Milton Old Worle Children's Centre and Banford, Winford and Sanford Children's Centre. This effectively informs the commissioning and availability of services and resources.
- The partnership board includes a good range of expertise and members contribute to and challenge the centre's work. An impressive number of the partnership board attend the yearly meeting with centre leaders and the local authority to assess the centre's strengths and weaknesses. While leaders and the board understand the centre's priorities, written self-evaluation records by the centre are not always helpful in evaluating what is working well and what not so well, because records are too long and too descriptive.
- Parent views are listened to through the very active parent forum. Parents are not yet represented on the partnership board and so the chance for them to contribute to shaping the future of the centre is limited. Leaders and managers recognise that as the centre will shortly form a group with Castle Batch Children's Centre and Milton Old World Children's Centre and Banwell, Winford and Sanford Children's Centre', this is an important area for development.
- Data are used reasonably to inform judgements on the performance of the centre. However, the centre receives too much statistical information from the local authority, which is not always helpful to centre leaders in either seeing the 'big picture' or drilling down to the essential information required. This is because information provided is too complex.
- Suitable policies and procedures strengthen the clear safeguarding arrangements in place. Staff benefit from suitable training according to their role and so have a good understanding of what to do should they have a concern about a child or another member of staff.
- Appropriate recruitment procedures ensure the suitability of staff appointed. Clear records identify previous employment and the take-up of references. Staff receive regular supervision, which guides them in their work with families, including the completion of Common Assessment Framework assessments for children subject to a child protection plan, children in need and those who are looked after.

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.

Centre details

Unique reference number	21839
Local authority	North Somerset
Inspection number	430165
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1131
Centre manager	Madeline Williams
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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