

# The Lofthouse Children's Centre

Longthorpe Lane, Lofthouse, Wakefield, WF3 3PS

**Inspection date** 26-27 March 2014

| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                               | <b>This inspection:</b><br>Previous inspection: | <b>Requires improvement</b> | <b>3</b> |
|--|---|-----------------------------|----------|
|  |   | Not previously inspected    |          |
| Access to services by young children and families          |   | Requires improvement        | 3        |
| 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:

- The centre's strong focus on maintaining targeted services for the most vulnerable families through what has been a turbulent time has led to some imbalance of universal and targeted provision.
- Outreach provision is developing in the more rural village of Thorpe, but does not yet meet the needs of all the families who face social isolation.
- While tracking is in place for children that attend childcare settings and access nursery education funding, this is not yet in place for all children that access activities at the centre.
- The centre does not systematically track the progress or impact for those adults signposted to externally provided adult learning provision.
- The advisory board does not provide a sharp enough focus on support and challenge to help promote rapid improvement. In addition, parental involvement in informing decision making is not fully effective.

### This children's centre has the following strengths:

- Strong partnerships through the 'Early Start' team, with good sharing of information, enables the centre to have a strong understanding of the needs of families and children within the area and target services at those in most need.
- Children make good progress in their learning and development. The take-up of the two-, three- and four-year-old entitlement to free education is high. The proportion of those achieving a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage is high.
- The centre has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement through honest, self-critical and accurate self-evaluation and good performance management by the local authority.
- The centre provides a very welcoming environment and is appreciated by its users. It provides a strong emphasis on welcoming and including fathers who feel comfortable being involved in the activities provided.

**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 an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the Early Start manager and the senior management team, family outreach workers, officers from the local authority and representatives from children's social work service. They also met health, education and early years partners, parents, and representatives of the advisory board. At the time of the inspection the centre manager was on annual leave. The inspectors visited collaborative services at the Rothwell Children's Centre. They observed the centre’s work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

**Inspection team**

Mike White, Lead Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Janet Stacey

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

The Lofthouse Children's Centre became operational in 2008 as a phase two, stand alone centre and delivers a range of services to meet its core purpose. The centre now forms part of the Rothwell cluster together with the Rothwell Children's Centre (URN 22559). It is co-located in a single building with the Rodillian Academy (URN 138336) and Daisy Chain Childcare (URN EY 382403). The Rothwell Children's Centre was inspected in 2011 and was not part of this inspection. Inspection reports for these organisations can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The centre is managed by the local authority and is open Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 4.30pm and Friday 8.30am to 4pm. Governance of the centre is through an advisory board comprising key partners, parents and grandparents. The staff team includes two family outreach workers and an administrative assistant. As part of the 'Early Start Team' in Leeds, the Health Visiting and Children's Services teams work collaboratively to provide one service for the children and families within the city.

There are approximately 630 children under five years of age living in the centre's area. The centre is on the border of Leeds and Wakefield and is located in the Ardsley and Robin Hood Leeds City Council ward serving several villages; Thorpe, Robin Hood, Carlton, Ouzlewell Green and Lofthouse. The very large majority of children are of White British heritage. Data show that the proportion of working-age people in receipt of workless benefits is considerably lower than the average across Leeds. Ofsted school inspection reports indicate that children enter early year's provision with skills, knowledge and abilities that are below those typical for their age. Thorpe is the most socially disadvantaged area, has higher unemployment compared to the other areas, and is in the top 24% most disadvantaged areas of the country.

### What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the centre's tracking systems to:
  - consistently capture the impact of the centre's work to improve outcomes, particularly school readiness for all children
  - measure the impact for those adults signposted to externally provided adult learning.
- Explore and implement ways of engaging parents and grandparents:
  - in delivering universal services
  - in contributing fully to the decision-making processes within the centre.
- Ensure that provision is developed to fully meet the needs of families and children in the Thorpe area.
- Improve the effectiveness of the advisory board by rapidly implementing the planned training and closely monitor its impact, to ensure rigorous support and challenge.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The friendly and very welcoming centre provides a good range of information for families on all aspects of safety, care and education. There is very strong partnership working between children's centre, health and social work colleagues as well as very effective sharing of data. This results in almost all families being registered with the children's centre. A strong focus on providing a supportive environment for fathers is particularly effective and consequently father's participation in services is good.
- The centre has a good understanding of the key issues for its families, which include social isolation, unemployment and, within the rural village of Thorpe, travel difficulties. Overall the large majority of families are engaging with, and using, the centre. However, this masks variations within the target groups. Although the centre is working hard to provide outreach services within the Thorpe area, as recognised in its self-evaluation, this is not yet meeting the needs of all those families.
- During a turbulent period of staffing issues the centre has maintained a good level of support for those families accessing services where children are at most risk. However, there has been a dip in the provision of some universal services, such as baby massage.
- Weekly meetings of the 'Early Start' team are used very effectively to assess the needs of children and families and allocate them to the most appropriate services and support. Take-up of free nursery entitlement for two-, three- and four-year-olds is very good with the most eligible children benefiting. Good partnerships with health, and the clinics running at the centre, help parents to access health services and advice and support on a wide range of health issues.

### The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The planning of activities at the centre stems from a child's interest and is linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores are in line with national averages and the achievement gap of the lowest 20% is narrowing and considerably better than the Leeds average. However, systems used to evaluate the impact of services and activities for users are inconsistent. Some capture good evaluation of impact while others capture levels of satisfaction rather than assessing impact.
- The local authority Early Years training team provides good support. This, together with the good quality childcare in the private and voluntary sector and co-located nursery, ensures that children are given the support they need to prepare them for school. The support for special educational or additional physical needs of those children known to the centre is good. Centre staff work well with key partners to ensure these children are also well prepared for school. Parents are seen as key partners and fully involved in decision making about their child. The progress of these two cohorts of children is tracked well. However, for all other children that access services at the centre systematic tracking of progress is not yet in place.
- Good partnerships with the health teams show signs of impact, particularly for reduction of smoking in the home and breast-feeding, although this remains a recognised area for further improvement. As a result of this work, there are some signs that long-held cultural attitudes towards health issues are improving. Assessment at age two shows children make good progress as a result of early intervention work provided by the centre.
- Although parents have benefited previously from becoming volunteers, opportunities to volunteer currently are limited. During the inspection some users stated that they have asked for support to carry out volunteer roles, such as breastfeeding peer support. However, they have not yet been offered the opportunity, or been provided with feedback as to how these requests are progressing.
- An increasing number of parents are taking family learning courses at the centre. A majority of these parents are from target groups. A large majority of the parents taking family learning

courses have progressed into employment or onto further education. However, while the centre signposts parents to accredited courses in English and mathematics or other vocational provision, the impact of these courses and the progression of those taking them are not systematically monitored.

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

Requires improvement

- The children's centre has recently gone through a turbulent time due to staff changes and long-term illness. The impact of this has been effectively managed to ensure that the services for the families most in need have been maintained. However, it has led to some reduction in the provision of some universal services, such as baby massage. The balance of services is now in the process of being restored. In addition, leaders acknowledge that the centre needs to do more work in the Thorpe area, to ensure that a large majority of families from this area access services.
- A well-established advisory board has good representation to reflect the views of key partners. The board shows a good understanding of the target groups the centre serves and the key issues faced by it. Senior leadership recognises that the level of support and challenge provided during board meetings needs to be increased. A city-wide training and a governance self-evaluation toolkit have been developed but not yet completed by the advisory board members.
- The self-evaluation process is very effective in identifying the strengths and areas for improvement of the centre. The self-evaluation report provides an honest, accurate and self-critical picture of the centre providing a good platform for further improvement. The quality improvement plan is thorough but some targets lack sufficiently specific timescales for completion. Staff supervision is frequent and they appreciate the opportunity to share information on caseloads and seek support where necessary. Local authority performance management provides a good level of challenge accurately identifying those aspects that require improvement.
- Appropriate systems are in place to find out if families are satisfied with the centre's services and parents and grandparents are represented on the advisory board. However, over the last 12 months the parents' forum has lapsed. The centre is currently identifying alternative approaches to re-engaging parents to fully contribute to the centre's decision-making processes.
- Staff are appropriately qualified with a good range of expertise and experience, which are well used to support colleagues. Accommodation provides a welcoming environment and is appropriately resourced. Strong partnership working and effective collaborative working ensures efficient use of resources and reduces duplication of provision.
- Suitable safeguarding policies and procedures are in place including the use of mobile phones. Staff have a good working knowledge of safeguarding procedures and this is supported well through regular training. Close partnership working with services, such as health and social services, through the frequent 'Early Start' meetings, contributes to keeping children subject to a child protection plan, looked after children and others whose circumstances make them vulnerable, safe from harm.

**What inspection judgements mean**

| <b>Grade</b> | <b>Judgement</b>     | <b>Description</b>   |
|--------------|----------------------|--|
| 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. |

**Select details**

|  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>                                     | 21842                                 |
| <b>Local authority</b>   | Leeds                                 |
| <b>Inspection number</b>   | 430160                                |
| <b>Managed by</b>  | The local authority                   |
| <b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b> | 630                                   |
| <b>Centre leader</b>   | M/s Patricia Amartey-Herbert          |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                                 | Not previously inspected              |
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