

Lighthorne Heath and District Children's Centre

Stratford Road, Lighthorne Heath, Leamington Spa, CV33 9TW

Inspection dates

4–5 June 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 large majority of families with children under the age of five are registered with the centre and make use of its services.
- Excellent relationships with a wide range of partners, and particularly health visitors, keep the centre well informed about the needs of families living in the area.
- The centre reaches those living in outlying areas by organising activities at a number of different venues and by arranging home visits when necessary.
- The centre has established a 'Nurture Nursery' to cater for two-year-old children who are eligible for funded nursery education; the nursery has been very well received by parents.
- The centre provides a wide range of good-quality activities for parents and young children.
- The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the staff is excellent. Many parents say that the centre has a major impact on improving the lives of their families.
- The centre's leaders provide good leadership and maintain an excellent sense of teamwork.
- The centre uses its resources efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families.
- The local authority, the Pre-School Learning Alliance and the advisory board provide good support and guidance for the centre and ensure it is performing as it should.
- The centre has good policies, procedures and practices for safeguarding families.

It is not outstanding because:

- The centre has yet to identify all families with two-year-old children who are eligible for free nursery education because detailed information is not provided by the local authority.
- The centre does not engage a small minority of families who would benefit from its support.
- Systems for collating, recording and sharing information about families whom the centre is supporting are inefficient and are not checked rigorously enough.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- In conjunction with the local authority:
 - devise more efficient ways of collecting and collating information about the families whom the centre is supporting
 - ensure this information is shared with everyone involved in supporting these families
 - ensure that records are checked regularly and rigorously so that they contain the information needed.

- Increase the proportion of families with the greatest level of need who engage with the centre and benefit from its activities and services.

- Work with the local authority to gain more detailed information about families whose two-year-old children are eligible for funded nursery education.

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: representatives from the local authority, the Pre-School Learning Alliance and the local advisory board; the centre manager and deputy manager; the staff of the children's centre; various groups of parents and users of the centre; and representatives of organisations who work in partnership with the centre.

The inspectors visited activities taking place at the children's centre, Lighthorne Heath Primary School, Temple Herdewyke Community Centre and Kineton Methodist Church Hall.

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

Inspection team

Graham Sims, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Ann Taylor

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Lighthorne Heath and District Children's Centre is a stand-alone centre managed by the Pre-School Learning Alliance on behalf of the local authority. Governance of the centre is shared between the local authority, the Pre-School Learning Alliance and the centre's advisory board. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the centre manager and the deputy centre manager, both of whom are part-time and who oversee the work of a relatively small team of staff. All 39 children's centres in Warwickshire are in the process of being reorganised. Lighthorne Heath is shortly to become part of a group with Wellesbourne and Badger Valley children's centres; these three centres will have joint governance arrangements and will be managed by The Parenting Project.

The centre opened in 2008. It occupies purpose-built facilities adjacent to Lighthorne Heath Primary School and has sole use of a room at the school. The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a range of activities and courses for families, by working with health visitors and partner organisations, and by referring parents and children to other specialist providers. The centre provides crèche facilities at some of its activities, but does not provide other day care for young children. In November 2013, the centre established a nursery for two-year-old children which is registered separately, and was inspected shortly after this inspection. The centre runs many of its activities at community facilities scattered throughout its reach area.

The centre serves a very large rural area centred on the village of Lighthorne Heath. An estimated 519 children under the age of five live in the area. Most families are White British. The area is one of relative affluence, although there are pockets of deprivation, where levels of unemployment and the proportion of families dependent on benefits are well above those for the surrounding area. Other families are rurally isolated because there is little available public transport. One of the villages in the area houses families working for or training with the Ministry of Defence on short-term contracts.

Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are generally just above those which are typical for their age.

The centre has identified its key target groups as: two-year-old children living in potentially vulnerable circumstances; service families with children under the age of five who move into the area; children under the age of five whose families face challenging circumstances.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Every family with a child under the age of five living within walking distance of the centre and a large majority of those living in outlying villages are registered with the centre. Most of these families and parents who are expecting children have used the centre's services, and some families with the greatest needs are very regular attendees.
- Excellent relationships with a wide range of partners, and particularly health visitors, keep the centre informed about families who would benefit from the centre's services. The receipt of information about new births enables the centre to have a good knowledge of where families with young children live and to check that these families have received information about the centre's services. Excellent liaison with a representative from an organisation which provides social housing for vulnerable families and with a representative working with families from the armed forces keeps the centre informed about the needs of the large number of families moving into and out of the area.
- Because of poor public transport services, families who live outside Lighthorne Heath and who do not have their own transport find it difficult to access services at the centre. Within the limitations of its resources, the centre does what it can to organise activities in outlying areas by using community facilities. Parents greatly appreciate these sessions and the efforts made by the centre's staff to keep in touch. Where necessary, the centre organises home visits.
- The centre has been proactive in providing funded nursery education for two-year-old children who are eligible to receive free nursery places. The centre has set up its own eight-place 'Nurture Nursery', which is due to expand to 12 places and which has received high acclaim from parents whose children attend. The availability of the nursery has also increased parents' participation in other activities organised by the centre. The centre's assiduous efforts to identify other eligible two-year-olds are hampered by lack of specific information about these families from the local authority, with the result that there are still a few eligible children who have yet to be identified by the centre.
- The centre has good procedures to update its information about families living in the area. It works hard with its partners to identify those families who would benefit most from the centre's activities or from services provided by other agencies and to encourage them to attend. Despite its efforts, a small minority of service families and those with the greatest level of need do not engage with the centre or participate in any of the centre's activities.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The centre provides a wide range of good-quality activities for parents and young children. Some are open to any parent and young child to attend, such as the various stay-and-play groups held at a variety of locations throughout the reach area. Those who attend greatly enjoy these sessions and value the opportunities for them to meet other parents and for their children to develop social skills.
- Some activities, such as basic skills courses in literacy and numeracy, baby massage, and speech and language, are put on to meet specific needs. Parents say that these courses have helped them to learn new skills, to form stronger bonds with their babies and to improve their parenting skills.
- The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the staff is excellent, particularly for those families in contact who are facing challenging circumstances. Discussions with parents indicate that the centre has had a major impact on improving the lives of families, building parents' confidence and providing ideas and skills which help their children to develop. Some parents refer to the centre as a 'lifeline'. Those living within walking distance of the centre refer to it as 'the hub of the local community'. Those living in outlying areas say that the centre's activities help them to feel less

isolated.

- The centre responds extremely well when families are referred to them or the centre's staff have identified specific needs. Staff arrange home visits, refer families to other agencies or organise specific activities which groups of parents can attend. In these ways, the centre makes an important contribution to reducing inequalities. However, there are still a few families from the centre's target groups who do not attend activities which are organised especially for their benefit.
- Parents are full of praise for the care and compassion shown by the staff. Various parents sent messages describing the staff as 'friendly', 'welcoming', 'caring', 'supportive' and 'kind'.
- An above-average proportion of mothers continuing to breastfeed their babies for six or eight weeks, a below-average proportion of five-year-olds who are obese and above-average levels of attainment at the age of five reflect the impact the centre is having on the lives of some families. Even in the short time it has been open, the neighbouring school has noticed the positive impact the centre has had, through establishing the 'Nurture Nursery', on the readiness of young children transferring to the school.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre is led and managed well. There is a clear sense of purpose behind each of the centre's activities and a determined drive to seek out and then provide the most appropriate help for families who are most in need. Despite the uncertainty of pending changes, leaders have maintained an excellent sense of teamwork among the small, but dedicated and caring staff team. One parent said, 'Without exception, they are very forthcoming, welcoming and extremely friendly and always go the extra mile for you.' Many others commented in similar vein.
- The centre uses its limited financial and personnel resources efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of the large majority of families. The centre uses its contacts with and knowledge of the local community to establish activities in as many outlying areas as possible. It maintains the services of a number of staff who are employed to help with specific activities as and when needed.
- The local authority and the Pre-School Learning Alliance provide good governance. Both organisations review the centre's performance at regular intervals. They have a good understanding of how well the centre is performing and how effective it is in reducing inequalities. They both set targets for future performance, which the centre is largely successful in meeting. The Pre-School Learning Alliance has used its expertise of running other children's centres to provide helpful procedures and guidance which have improved the centre's practice.
- The advisory board fulfils its role well. A wide range of partners contribute their advice and support, keep an eye on how effective the centre is in meeting the needs of the community and hold leaders to account for the performance of the centre. Parent representatives relay the views of other parents expressed at the parents' forum. The centre is also diligent in seeking parents' views on the quality of courses and activities and uses these views to amend the services it offers.
- The centre's policies, procedures and practices for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and families are good. Staff receive regular training. Policies and procedures are clearly displayed and explained to visitors and users of the centre. Staff are checked to ensure they are suitable to work with children. Detailed service level agreements with other organisations, such as the health services, ensure that each partner has a clear understanding of its duties and obligations. Regular 'Family Matters' meetings with health visitors and other partners ensure that the centre is well informed about the needs of children subject to a child protection plan, looked after children and

those who have been assessed under the Common Assessment Framework.

- Although the face-to-face collaboration with health visitors and other partners is excellent, the methods for ensuring that the outcomes of all interactions with vulnerable families are recorded and all partners are fully informed is inefficient and, occasionally, results in important information not being conveyed. Efforts to provide health visitors with a base at the centre stalled at the last minute. Because partners are based at some distance from the centre, the paper-based records are not easily accessible to all partners. Files are not checked rigorously enough to ensure they provide all of the information needed for subsequent visits. The centre and local authority have yet to give serious consideration to other ways of collecting, collating and sharing information, such as electronic-based systems.

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	21780
Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	442894
Managed by	The Pre-School Learning Alliance on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	519
Centre manager	Becki Cameron
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01926 691105
Email address	becki.cameron@pre-school.org.uk

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