

Leicester City North Children's Centre Locality

343 Gipsy Lane, Leicester, LE4 9DD

Inspection dates	22–23 October 2014
Previous inspection date	12 October 2011

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not applicable	
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 is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Although the numbers of families registered at the centre is high, too few children and families including those from priority groups sustain engagement with the children's centre.
- The local authority does not always share information in a timely manner; this limits the ability of leaders and managers to accurately prioritise services and demonstrate the impact of services.
- There are signs that outcomes for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are improving. However, the centre is not working proactively enough with all early years partners and schools to support children's learning, especially that of vulnerable two-year-olds.
- There is limited tracking of children's progress at locality-run sessions, and no systematic approach to finding out how well parents get on when they are signposted to education, skills or training courses. The number of adults accessing the range of opportunities available to improve their employability is low.
- The two existing advisory boards are not fully effective in challenging the locality's on-going development and holding it to account. They are in the process of merging following the local authority's recent re-organisation of children's centre services. Recently the local authority has not given sufficient focus to monitoring the locality's all-round performance.

It has the following strengths:

- Families' speak highly about the services they receive. They value the care and support that staff provide and they benefit from a range of appropriate services.
- Health and social care partnerships are strong. The locality works very closely with them to provide a package of support that is tailored to meet the individual needs of children and families.
- Family case files are meticulously maintained by staff and rigorously audited. Leaders check them regularly to ensure best practice.
- Staff are highly skilled, driven to reduce inequalities and improve the outcomes for families.

What does the locality need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority to ensure that data and information is sufficient to:
 - increase the engagement of priority groups and families living in all areas of the reach
 - assess local needs and shape appropriate services.
- Ensure that there is a clearly recorded focus on performance and outcomes in the local authority's monitoring.
- Strengthen governance by ensuring that the advisory board plays a more robust role in the monitoring and evaluation of services and to provide rigorous challenge and hold the locality fully to account.
- Improve children's school readiness by:
 - working with all local schools and childcare providers to make better use of data, improve attainment and narrow the achievement gap of the most vulnerable children by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - ensuring that the planning of services and the observation, assessment and tracking of children are consistent across locality services, are shared with parents and are used to plan future activities to ensure children make good progress from their individual starting points.
- Enhance the opportunities to extend parents' education, learning and work-based skills, and establish a way of checking their progress including those signposted to partner services.

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 three Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the children services manager; senior leaders and managers in the local authority; family support facilitators; early learning facilitators; a children's centre teacher and volunteers. They also met with representatives from health, social care, nurseries and local schools. In addition they met with staff from the benefits advice service and adult education; parents and centre users and members of the parents' forums and advisory board.

The inspectors visited the main site at Northfields and West Humberstone children's centre and each of the satellite centres: Belgrave and Rushey centre; Woodbridge centre; and St Saviours centre; and an outreach centre: Rushey Recreation ground. Various different types of activities were observed including 'Stay and Play' sessions.

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

Inspection team

Susan Crawford Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Geoff Dorrity	Additional inspector
Heather Hartman	Additional inspector
Ann Taylor	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the locality

Services for children and families in Leicester City are delivered in six locality cluster areas. The North locality children's centre service is managed by Leicester City Council. The locality advisory group, comprising most key partners, assists in its governance.

The locality is managed by the children's centre cluster manager. The North Cluster area covers the wards of Charnwood, Latimer, Belgrave and Rushey Mead. The locality has been established since 1 July 2014. Services are shared across the locality and Northfields and West Humberstone Children's Centre is open five days, Belgrave satellite centre is open for seven sessions and Woodbridge and St Saviours satellite centres both open for five sessions each week.

There are approximately 3844 children under five years of age living in the locality area. Data demonstrates that the population is mainly Asian, with white British and pockets of other minority ethnic groups, for example Roma and Eastern European, who are a target group within the children's centre locality. The number of children living in income deprived areas is between 16% in Rushey Mead and 48% in Charnwood. High numbers of children under five years of age are living in households that are claiming benefits. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to school are below levels expected for their age in most areas of the cluster.

The locality offers a range of services for families and children under five years. These include child health services and family support, including outreach and signposting for those seeking employment, crèche provision is provided for some of its activities. The services are run from the centres and different community venues, including Rushey recreational centre. There is no registered early years provision on any of the sites.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The locality has made great strides in increasing the number of families registered, currently over 90%. It has accurately identified its key target groups but access to services requires improvement because the locality is not yet managing to engage and maintain contact with the large majority of these families. In particular, the engagement of low income families, White British, Roma/Traveller and Eastern European families, are currently too low. The information available to assist this aspect of the locality's work is not wholly reliable.
- The locality now receives live birth information from the local health Trust which enables them to make prompt contact with families. The midwifery team are passing on information concerning expectant mothers at the 20-week ante-natal appointment stage, which helps to provide appropriate support. Health visitor child development clinics held at centres enable centre staff to have early contact with those families who attend.
- Good communication and partnerships with health and social care professionals have a positive impact on families' well-being, particularly those living in the most disadvantaged communities. Through effective sharing of information with its partners, such as the social care duty and assessment team, these families' needs are assessed thoroughly and sensitively. Relevant support is provided, enabling them to access appropriate, services until their needs are met.
- The proportion of eligible two-year-olds accessing their free education place has doubled but is still below the level seen nationally. The locality liaise with some schools and education providers to see how well children who have accessed children centre services get on in their new setting but there is currently no system to collect this information to see what difference the centre's interventions have on children lives.
- Family support facilitators have good local knowledge of the varied and extremely difficult issues facing some families such as those suffering from post-natal depression or those isolated at home. They draw successfully on this to plan timed packages of support that help reduce inequalities. One happy parent said, 'My life has massively improved, I've met new friends, improved my social skills and received fantastic support from wonderful workers.'

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Parents, who access the locality's services, value the support provided by the extremely resourceful early learning and family support facilitators who provide helpful guidance about children's learning, home safety, children's eating and sleeping routines. However, the quality of services and practice requires improvement because not enough priority children and families are benefiting from what is available.
- The children's centre teacher is working hard to increase the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, which has doubled in the last 12 months. However this is still below the national average. Anecdotal information suggests that some children who have accessed children's centre services achieve better than those children who do not. However, because of the weakness in tracking it is not clear what part the locality actually plays in this.
- Activity planning includes clear learning intentions, however evaluations rarely focus on these, and centre staff record more general observations. As a result, the locality cannot sufficiently demonstrate that all children make at least good progress.

- The number of adults engaging in the range of the services available to improve employability is low. Also, when parents access on site courses or are signposted to other providers their progress is not sufficiently tracked, which reduces leaders' ability to check the impact of services on improving equality.
- Partnership work ensures that families who most need support, including those experiencing domestic violence or suffering from mental health problems, receive well-coordinated early help. One-to-one support work is well focused on meeting assessed needs and its quality and impact are kept under close scrutiny by managers. Case files are maintained to a good standard. Staff are making increasingly effective use of a tool to capture how effective their support is in helping families get back on track.
- Staff work hard to build trusting relationships in this diverse community, and parents in receipt of family support told inspectors how friendly and non-judgemental the staff are. They value highly the help they receive at times of personal crisis. One mother's words sum up the views of many: 'they have had a really positive impact on me and my family, they really understand me and genuinely want to help.'
- Well supported by the health team, the locality staff place a strong emphasis on families adopting a healthy lifestyle. All health targets are met including the proportion of mothers who continue breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks, which is well above the level seen nationally.
- There are currently 12 volunteers across the locality from a range of different family backgrounds. Not only do those volunteers make a positive contribution to the centres but there has been significant impact on the lives of some, for example helping them into employment.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The dedication of leadership, management, governance and staff throughout the restructure of the locality to the new Early Help Targeted Service has resulted in good partnership-working with a wide variety of key partners. As a result, the locality is improving and children are effectively safeguarded.
- The locality is well resourced and staff are used effectively across the four sites, especially to provide services that are open to all, such as the very popular 'Stay and Play' sessions. However, the resources have not been used effectively enough to meet the needs of some priority families, or to provide enough support to identify and support adults to improve their education and employability. This has limited the locality's impact on reducing inequalities for families.
- The local authority has undertaken a range of useful monitoring activities. However, recently these have not been completed due to the consultation and restructure. As a result the impact of the locality's work has not been formally checked.
- Appropriate improvement targets have been set in collaboration with the locality manager. However, these require still sharper focus by setting clear milestones at the quarterly review point to ensure the actions taken meet set targets. Local authority officers recognise the manager's frustrations about the timeliness and accuracy of information and are working to resolve the situation.
- The advisory board is about to be disbanded and reconvened with new terms of reference to meet the needs of the new children's centre locality. Effective communication and organisation mean that the locality runs smoothly. The advisory board is extremely supportive of the locality's activities. However, not all members are entirely sure of its role in challenging the locality's work and holding

them to account.

- The senior leadership team are experienced, enthusiastic, and well qualified. They are well supported by a highly-skilled team of workers, who have specialist 'champion' roles including for breastfeeding. All staff and volunteers gain from a wide ranging programme of appropriate professional development opportunities.
- Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. The safety of families including at home is a vital part of the centre locality's work. Family support and early learning facilitators work extremely well with the multi-agency early help team and make effective use of the Common Assessment Framework/Early Help Assessment procedures to ensure that children, including those looked after, subject to child protection plans, or in need are protected against harm.
- Effective checking arrangements and swift early intervention strategies mean the numbers of children supported through child protection arrangements is reducing. The locality receives clear data to indicate how many children living in the areas served by the locality are known to social care. The majority of these families regularly engage in services and positive outcomes are consistently seen.
- Parents using locality services feel they are listened to and well supported by sensitive staff who are described as 'always having time'. They are frequently asked to evaluate services and returns show that they have a very high regard for the locality and how it helps their families.

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.

Locality details

Unique reference number	22205
Local authority	Leicester City Council
Inspection number	451347
Managed by	Leicester City Council

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3844
Centre leader	Sue Lyall
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	0116 292 4580
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