

Little Lane Children's Centre

Little Lane, Ilkley, West Yorkshire, LS29 8HZ

Inspection dates	11–12 November 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:		
		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:

- Not enough children or parents, particularly those from identified families who may be in most need of support, regularly engage with the centre, which reduces the impact of the services the centre offers.
- Monitoring of services by leadership, governance and management lacks a sufficiently rigorous check on how well the centre contributes to improving outcomes for families identified as in most need of support and on the quality of the services it delivers. As a result, the pace of improvement in the provision is not rapid enough.
- The centre is not able to fully demonstrate the difference that its services for adults and children make because procedures to assess and monitor their progress are not sufficiently well developed.
- The centre is not doing enough to encourage the small number of unemployed adults in the area to gain skills and qualifications to help improve their chances of employment.
- Case files are not of a sufficiently high quality and do not clearly show the impact support is having in helping children and families to move forward.
- Numerous changes in management and uncertainty regarding the future status of the centre has resulted in infrequent advisory board meetings, insufficient involvement of parents in decision making and a lack of focus on challenging the centre's work.

It has the following strengths:

- Strong partnerships with health visitors, schools, and voluntary organisations have resulted in early referral and good engagement with some of the most vulnerable families.
- Discussions with parents show that the centre provides good quality, well coordinated support and guidance. Parents who use the centre hold it in very high regard.
- Health outcomes are good with a high proportion of mothers breastfeeding their babies and low obesity rates for children entering Reception Year.
- Despite a turbulent time, the centre's staff team remain positive and highly committed to providing good services for families.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- The local authority, governance, leaders and managers should:
 - more rigorously monitor the impact that the centre's services have on improving the outcomes for families identified as in most need of support and reducing inequalities
 - analyse data more carefully to monitor the regular participation of vulnerable families in appropriate services
 - carefully monitor the quality of its services through more regular observation and supervision of staff
 - ensure regular meetings of the advisory board and involve more parents in strategic decision making.
- Together with partners, improve access to services by finding ways to identify families who may be in most need of support and target services more effectively so that more families from the vulnerable groups identified regularly access the centre.
- Improve the quality of services to a good or better level and enhance the achievement of children and their parents from families identified as in most need by:
 - developing a coherent approach to tracking children's development from birth to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage
 - encouraging more adults to access adult learning, volunteering and employability support and improve the tracking of the progress of parents who access services to show their journey on to further education, training or employment
 - making sure that all family case files demonstrate best practice in assessment and recording, and that actions are fully evaluated and monitored for impact.

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 the children's centre manager and officers from the local authority. They also held meetings with centre staff, parents, members of the advisory forum and a number of partners, such as those from health, education and voluntary organisations.

The inspectors visited sessions held during the inspection including, 'Stay and Play' and 'Little Learners'. They also involved the children's centre manager and local authority improvement officer in all team meetings. The centre manager took part in a joint observation of a session alongside an inspector.

They looked at a range of relevant documentation, such as the centre's self-evaluation, development plan, a sample of case studies and key policies. During the inspection, they also took the opportunity to talk with adult and child users of the centre.

Inspection team

Jean-Marie Blakeley, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Cathryn Parry	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Little Lane Children's Centre is directly managed by the local authority. The centre is based in the same building as the Youth Service in the town of Ilkely, approximately 12 miles north of Bradford. The centre has an advisory board made up of stakeholders including professional partners, church and community members and parents.

Approximately 883 children from birth to four years of age live in the centre's reach area. The very large majority of families are of White British heritage. The local area is regarded as fairly affluent with all wards being in the least 55%-100% deprived seen nationally. Around 5.7% of children under five years old live in families that have no adult in work. The centre and its partners believe this data belies some hidden needs such as social isolation and domestic violence. Children's skills and abilities on entry to early years provision are generally typical for their age.

Leaders have identified the children and families in most need of support as: women with maternal mental health issues; children living with adults that have substance misuse issues; families facing economic issues such as low income or where no one is working; and children with additional needs.

The centre works collaboratively with partners and provides family support, 'Stay-and-play' activities and access to health and parenting programmes. It signposts families to other services such as adult training and employability support.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centre engages well with families who are most in need of its support, including those children living in workless households or with adults with mental health or substance misuse issues, who either ask for help or are referred by partners. However, the centre has not developed sufficient strategies to seek out and identify all of the families who may have hidden needs and may form part of the centre's most in-need groups.
- Most children and families are registered with the centre, including those expecting children. Data show that the large majority of families have been seen. However, the centre does not routinely analyse its attendance data to monitor how well all groups identified as in need of support, such as families living in workless households, sustain their engagement with the centre's services.
- Information sharing between partners has a positive impact on increasing registration and on providing coordinated early support for children and families. The strong partnership and joint work with health visitors means that the most vulnerable families, due to their circumstances, are usually identified at an early stage and referred to the centre for appropriate support.
- The small numbers of families identified as in most need of support, referred to the centre for one-to-one help because of their circumstances which make them vulnerable, engage well with family support services. The centre works well with partners to contribute to the integrated support for children subject to a child-protection plan, or a Common Assessment Framework process or those identified as being in need.
- The centre appropriately refers children with special additional needs and/or disabilities to specialist services. Children with additional needs from across the area have good access to support at sessions delivered by one of the centre's partners in the centre. This provides good opportunities to meet children's individual needs and, as a result, some families engage regularly with the centre.
- Most three- and four-year-old children access early education. The majority of eligible two-year-olds access their entitlement to high-quality nursery places. The centre knows those children who have not yet taken up the offer and is encouraging their families to access the good range of quality provision in the area.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The quality, range and relevance of services available do not currently provide sufficient balance between those open to everyone and those to engage vulnerable families who need targeted support. As a result some sessions have low attendance and others are oversubscribed with some families being turned away. This limits the impact of the centre's services on improving the well-being and lives of families.
- There is insufficient focus on encouraging the very small minority of unemployed adults to increase their employability skills through training, volunteering or adult education. The centre does not rigorously monitor the number of workless families who engage in activities to help them get back to work. The progress made by those who are signposted to education and training run by partners, is not being systematically checked.
- Family support workers are highly valued by families for the support they provide. Parents say, 'This place has been a life line, we would not be together if it wasn't for the centre.' However, case files do not all provide clear details of the positive impact of the centre's work in helping families get back on track. Additionally, the quality of record keeping, including ensuring detailed assessment of need and action plans, requires improvement.
- The majority of parents from families identified as most in need of support benefit from parenting programmes or individual support in the home, which helps improve their parenting skills. Parents confirm that their confidence and skills increase because of what they learn and they are better equipped as parents to help their children play and thrive.
- Staff are positive role models in activities and sessions and, as a result, parents interact well with their children as they enjoy playing in the well-equipped centre. However, the centre has not fully developed systems to monitor the progress made by children that attend sessions and demonstrate the impact of its support on improving their readiness for school.
- Data show that the majority of children living in the area achieve a good level of development by the time they reach the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, the centre does not carefully track all children who access its services to measure how much value they add to raising achievement.
- The strong partnership with health professionals has a positive impact on increasing the percentage of mothers who breastfeed their babies to rates way above the levels seen nationally. In addition, childhood obesity rates are low and considerably below the national level. As a result children and families are developing healthy lifestyles and inequalities are reduced.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The high number of management changes has limited the establishment of robust systems to assure the quality of the provision and rapidly improve areas of identified development. Nevertheless, managers and staff have maintained a strong commitment to providing good services for families and the centre has continued to increase the registration and participation of families.
- The local authority's monitoring processes, although identifying most broad areas requiring improvement, are not precisely focused on measuring the full impact of the centre's work and the sustained engagement of families identified as in most need of support. As a result governance, leaders and managers do not have a full and accurate picture of the impact of the centre's work.
- Most of the data that the centre requires are readily available. However, the centre is not making best use of what is provided to help it check in precise detail its progress in meeting its key priorities.
- The advisory board includes strong representation from local churches, professional partners and some parents. Uncertainty about the future of the centre during the last year has reduced the focus of the board, the attendance of some members and the frequency of meetings. Although the board remains highly supportive of the work of the centre, the challenge provided and its role as a critical friend is limited.
- Consultations and informal feedback from parents contribute to the development of the centre. However, not enough parents are involved in making strategic decisions about the centre.

- Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements. Staff are safely recruited and vetted. Close partnership working with health services and children's social care ensures that children and families receive effective early help. Children who are subject to child-protection plans, children in need and those who are looked after are known to the centre, and staff contribute to their support packages as appropriate.
- The centre provides a good environment for the delivery of services and through effective partnership work resources are maximised to avoid duplication of effort. Staff are appropriately qualified and have good access to training and informal support from managers. However, the many changes of manager have led to inconsistencies in the regularity and recording of professional supervision. Systems to observe activities and practices to improve the quality of services delivered have not been sufficiently established.
- The recently appointed manager has a good understanding of the areas of the centre's work which require improvement. However, it is too early for her to have had an impact on improving the provision.

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	23449
Local authority	Bradford
Inspection number	452788
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	883
Centre leader	Lizzie Hughes
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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