

# The Limes Children Centre

Johnsons Road, Whitehall, Bristol, BS5 9AT

<b>Inspection dates</b>	4–5 December 2014
Previous inspection date	17–18 September 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
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.

- While an increasing number of families are participating regularly in centre activities, this is not yet the majority. The centre does not work effectively with some partners, for example Jobcentre Plus, to share resources in order to secure the sustained contact of a higher number of families.
- When they attend some centre activities, children from birth to two years of age are not having the progress they make recorded sufficiently well.
- There are not enough opportunities to help parents, particularly those who are out of work, enhance their education and help them prepare for progression to training, volunteering and employment. When parents do pursue opportunities the centre does not monitor how well they achieve and meet their goals. This means that the centre cannot use data to plan future services.
- The leadership team has been through a period of significant change. As a result, systems to monitor and evaluate the centre's performance are not fully embedded. Priorities set out in the improvement plan are accurate, but not all actions have measurable success criteria. It is therefore difficult for staff to demonstrate when they have been successful in meeting their targets and for the governing body and the newly formed advisory board to offer sufficient challenge.
- The centre has emerging structures in place to ensure the quality of provision provided to children and families. However, these are not yet fully embedded across all services and provision.
- Partnerships at a strategic level are not fully effective. Protocols for the sharing of information between the centre and some partners are not consistently in place. As a result, centre staff are not always able to measure the effectiveness of their work or track families to find out if there have been any sustained improvements to their lives.

### It is not good because:

- The children's centre manager and headteacher of the on-site nursery school, ably supported by the local authority, has skilfully guided the children's centre through an extended period of reorganisation, while continually improving service delivery and the skills of the staff team. As a result, this centre has made significant improvements since the last inspection.
- The dedicated team of centre staff and family support workers build trusting relationships with families and provide much-needed support to some of the most vulnerable families in the community. The centre places a strong focus on early intervention for children and families.

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

- Strengthen the centre's ability to increase the number of families accessing services by working more effectively with partners to develop specific strategies for sustained engagement. Ensure that this work is based on the efficient sharing of both relevant information and additional resources.
- Further improve the quality and impact of universal provision for children aged from birth to two years by developing systems to monitor and track the progress they make from when they start attending.
- Extend opportunities for adults, particularly those who are unemployed, to enhance their economic stability by providing more opportunities to access relevant courses and implementing procedures to track and measure the progress adults make when they access courses or programmes, and use these data to help plan future services.
- Strengthen the new arrangements for governance to ensure the governing body and advisory board consistently challenge the centre's leaders and drives the centre's improvement.
- Improve the effectiveness of the monitoring of the centre's performance by:
  - ensuring effective information-sharing arrangements with all partners
  - developing the 'improvement plan' further to include more specific measurable targets that enable the centre to better evidence the impact of the whole range of work they undertake
  - undertaking more direct observations of provision in order to ensure consistency in the quality of some children's centre activities.

## 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 Her Majesty's Inspector and two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and managers in the local authority; health and education partners; parents; and representatives of partner organisations from the voluntary and community sector. They also met outreach workers; early years practitioners; a local primary school headteacher; and representatives of the governing body and children's centre advisory board.

The inspectors visited the centre, the linked nursery school and other sites used by centre outreach staff, including Easton Children Centre Nursery and St George Community Centre.

They observed the centre's work, including the 'English for Speakers of Other Languages course' and the drop-in session, 'Play and Learn'. They also looked at a range of relevant documentation, including centre policies, procedures and case files.

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## Inspection team

Susan Crawford, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Joan Lindsey

Additional inspector

Jameel Hassan

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

The Limes Children's Centre opened in 2008 and is situated in a converted house within the grounds of The Limes Nursery School (URN: 108905), which is subject to a separate inspection. The report can be seen at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). The centre is a stand-alone centre. The centre's governance is through the school governing body, which manages the day-to-day running of the centre with representatives from the community, professional agencies and parents. In addition, there is a newly formed children's centre advisory board which reports to the school governing body.

The centre is working towards meeting the core purpose by providing a range of services, including health, adult courses and workshops. Outreach work takes place in family homes or at nearby community venues. Childcare is provided on-site and is subject to a separate inspection. The report can be seen at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Currently, 1,428 children under the age of five years live in the area served by the centre, of which just over half (51.1%) are registered. Families come from a broad range of ethnic backgrounds; the largest group of families are of White British heritage (47%). Some families come from minority ethnic groups, with Somali and Pakistani heritage families being the largest of these groups. Nearly a third (30%) of children speak English as an additional language. Approximately a quarter (25%) of families live in workless homes, with just under a fifth (19%) eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. The centre has identified families from minority ethnic groups, workless households and low income families as families who need extra support. Most children enter early years provision with a range of skills and knowledge that are below levels expected for their age.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Centre leaders have a good understanding of the needs of families living in the locality. This informs the centre's own activities and the accurate analysis of data provided by the local authority to identify those families who most need their help. As a result, an increasing number of families are participating regularly in centre activities.
- Despite this increase, data shows that not enough families are accessing services, including expectant mothers and those who are reluctant to access services. While staff are working hard to encourage more families to attend, there has been too little focus on how they might work with a wider range of partners to more effectively share information, and even more crucially resources, in order to secure the sustained engagement of children and families.
- Work with families in their homes has increased. The sensitive approach and breadth of knowledge demonstrated by family support workers have been key to ensuring the participation of some families in centre activities, particularly those who might otherwise have chosen not to.
- The centre manager has been proactive in going out to local community groups and developing good links with schools, health and social care to advertise the services of the centre. However, the impact of this work on improving the numbers of families accessing services has yet to be seen.
- The large majority of eligible two-year-olds are taking up a free pre-school place this year, which is a significant increase on last year. Most three-year-olds take up their free pre-school place. All of these children are attending early years provision in the area that has been judged to be at least good.

**The quality of practice and services**

Requires improvement

- A growing range of generally good-quality activities are delivered by the children's centre team and commissioned partners. Parents who attend activities clearly benefit from the experience, particularly in terms of improving their confidence as parents. They told inspectors how the centre had made them 'better parents' and enabled them to 'enjoy their children again'. However, the numbers of children and families accessing these opportunities need to increase because they are too low.
- The centre has developed an effective referral system which enables the accurate assessment and early identification of need. Where a need for a specific service is identified, the team ensures that families receive the correct support to make positive changes to their lives, for example, the delivery by health of speech and language courses to parents such as 'Talking Tips'. This provides parents with strategies that they can use in the home with their child to develop their language and communication skills.
- The tracking of children over two years of age who attend children's centre services who go on to school or registered early years provision shows that the majority make good progress in their learning compared with those who do not access centre services. However, the progress of children aged from birth to two years is recorded less well, particularly where they attend only universal children's centre activities, such as 'Play and Learn'. This is because staff do not always use their good knowledge of child development when delivering these sessions to assess children's learning.
- Partnerships with early years providers and schools are strong, supporting the quality and consistency of the early years offer delivered in a range of settings. Local groups, including child minders, value the support of centre staff, who have helped to build their capacity and skills in providing good-quality early education which aids transition into school, reduces inequalities and supports next steps in their learning.
- Adults do not have enough opportunities to gain qualifications or the skills needed for work. Those who do access training, such as parenting programmes and how to keep children safe, are not routinely tracked, so the centre does not know what impact its services are having. There are few opportunities for parents to attend activities and courses for self-help or volunteering.
- The centre provides sessions such as 'Baby Limes' and 'Dreamtime Arts' which have contributed well to families' improving understanding of how to keep themselves healthy. New parents are given advice and guidance and, as a result, most health outcomes are better than those seen nationally.

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

Requires improvement

- The centre has been through a period of significant change since the last inspection. During this time the centre has at least doubled the number of families accessing services. This is testament to the quality of leadership and management, which continues to improve. However, the centre's impact on improving outcomes for local families across the reach area is poorly evidenced because of the lack of meaningful tracking and evaluation.
- The local authority has worked hard to develop a clear strategy for improvement which values the role of children's centre as an integral part of its delivery of early intervention services. Priorities identified in the newly developed 'improvement plan' are accurate and targets are ambitious and challenging. However, the centre's ability to accurately measure the effectiveness of its work is hindered by a lack of more specific measurable targets within this plan. This has also weakened the ability of the governing body and advisory board to offer effective challenge regarding the centre's ongoing performance.
- While some strategic partnerships are working well, for example that with education partners, others are not sufficiently developed. This means that data and resources across the locality are not shared effectively in order that they deliver more integrated services and improve the lives of families that are most in need.
- Staff are given regular opportunities to review their own work through supervision and the completion of activity evaluation forms. However, the leadership team do not monitor sufficiently

the quality of the centre's activities delivered by their own staff and those who are contracted to deliver a service. As a result, they do not always identify issues swiftly and respond quickly to improve practice and engagement.

- All staff have an adequate knowledge and understanding of procedures to keep children and families safe, and this is supported by regular training. The centre group works closely with health and social care colleagues in order to reduce the risk of harm to children, including those subject to a child protection plan, looked after children and those identified as in need. By working together, partners have had a significant impact on the lives of some families, including those whose difficulties have been assessed using the Common Assessment Framework.
- Governance is improving. While parents are not represented on the advisory board or governing body, their contribution to shaping the centre's delivery is sought regularly after sessions and courses. The chair of the advisory board and of the governing body is the same person, and provides an effective level of challenge. The board is aware of some data and how staff's performance is being managed. The discussion at the annual conversation review shows that some members are aware of where improvements need to be made in the centre's performance and in reducing any inequalities. However, the new structure is not yet embedded.

## 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**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	23211
<b>Local authority</b>	Bristol
<b>Inspection number</b>	447540
<b>Managed by</b>	The governors of The Limes Nursery School and Children's Centre on behalf of the local authority.

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	1,428
<b>Centre leader</b>	Kathryn Kempster
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	17–18 September 2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	0117 9030317
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