

Inspection report for The Lemon Tree Children's Centre

Local authority	Kingston-Upon-Hull
Inspection number	361100
Inspection dates	30 June–1 July 2010
Reporting inspector	Jean Kendall HMI

Centre governance	Governing Body of Highlands Primary School
Centre leader	Elaine Warhurst
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Lothian Way Bransholme Hull HU7 5DD
Telephone number	01482 828901
Fax number	
Email address	Elaine.warhurst@hullcc.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Highlands Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Lemon Tree Nursery Limited

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were also held with members of the Advisory Board, parents, carers and service users and a representative from the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

The Lemon Tree is a purpose built centre offering the full core offer including childcare and early learning, health, family support and outreach support. Jobcentre Plus staff work out of the centre for four hours a week offering general advice and support with benefits calculation. The centre has been delivering full operational services since March 2006. There is a 36 place full daycare nursery for children aged from birth to 5 years located in the building. The nursery is managed by a private company and has separate Early Years inspection arrangements. The nursery was last inspected in March 2008; the inspection report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Health staff deliver a range of services from the centre including midwifery clinics, parenting advice and specialist support such as speech and language development. A childminder network meets at the centre and training is provided for childminders and prospective childminders. The centre coordinator reports to an Advisory Board which includes broad representation from partner agencies and one parent representative. The Advisory Board reports to the Governing Body at Highlands Primary School.

The centre serves a community that experiences relatively high levels of social and economic disadvantage being ranked in the top 30% of the most deprived wards in the country. The majority of local residents served by the centre are from a White British background. There is a small, transient Polish community and a few families from other minority ethnic groups. The proportion of children attending school in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is well above average. A high proportion of children aged under-four are living in households where no-one is working or with average weekly residence based pay which is much lower than the national average. Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills that are below expectations for their age. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities in nearby schools is above average.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

2

Main findings

The Lemon Tree children’s centre provides good quality support to children and families in the locality. It provides a friendly welcome in a well organised, bright and cheerful environment. Children’s enjoyment is evident as the sound of their laughter fills the centre. Parents told inspectors that they highly value the openness, professionalism and supportive approach of staff. The inspection confirms their views. Centre staff have effectively built trust and developed constructive relationships with community members.

One of the centre’s key strengths is the success with which professionals from health, education, family support, social care, and private and voluntary providers work together to provide timely support for families in crisis or facing specific challenges. This aspect of the centre’s work is outstanding. All staff have a clear understanding of their role in safeguarding vulnerable families. They work effectively together to reduce risk of harm and prevent difficulties escalating. This strong teamwork and cohesive approach is consolidated through the co-location of key personnel at the centre, including the local authority lead, Common Assessment Framework (CAF) coordinator and inclusion officer.

The centre makes a strong contribution to improving the health and well-being of expectant and new mothers and their children through a range of good quality maternity services and parenting support. The promotion of learning and

achievement of children is also a significant strength. The varied play and development activities effectively support the growth of children's skills, health and personal development as well as strengthening the bonds between parents and their children. The private nursery makes a good contribution to improving achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Children and users report that they feel safe in the centre. This reflects the good safeguarding arrangements to ensure that all staff are subject to appropriate checks, the site is safe and assessments are undertaken to eliminate risks. However the thorough, regular site checks are not systematically recorded and policies, whilst fully up to date and of good quality, are not readily accessible by parents. Children are well behaved and demonstrate a good understanding of how to maintain their own health and safety, for example by ensuring they wear hats in the sun. The strong emphasis on promotion of safety in the home and community, with access to free safety equipment, helps parents develop a good understanding of how to keep their family safe.

Centre staff have a good knowledge of the local community and strive to ensure that all groups are able to access the full range of activities. The promotion of equality and achievement for all is at the heart of its work. Outreach work and home visits effectively ensure the most vulnerable receive appropriate support for their specific needs. Data indicates that more fathers and young parents are receiving initial contacts. However, despite efforts to publicise activities and events, some key target groups, including young parents, fathers and families with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are under represented in the centre's work. There are no specific provisions regularly provided for these groups and the means to gather their views are limited. Some of the centre's resources, such as the sensory room in the nursery and the computer room are under used. Centre staff recognise that there is more they can do engage a wider range of users and take their needs into account to plan and extend provision.

Evaluation of activities and events is good. Parents who engage with activities are encouraged to reflect on their learning and their views are used well to adapt and improve the quality of these provisions. Self-evaluation is used to good effect to evaluate the impact of early learning sessions and daycare provision on achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. However the impact of the centre's activities on other outcomes in the wider community is not fully analysed. The centre uses data to set reach targets and uses national indicators to inform its work, but similarly, the impact of provision on priority indicators is not consistently recorded and analysed. Consequently priorities and targets for improvement tend to be focused on improving what is currently on offer rather than on evaluating what difference they are making or the demand in the wider community.

The centre runs an active volunteer programme through which users are provided with good quality adult learning courses. The programme provides an excellent means for users to develop their key skills and is effective in supporting them into work or further education. However courses available to the wider population are

more limited. Parents who spoke with inspectors said they would welcome more adult learning courses at the centre.

The Centre Coordinator manages the day to day running of the centre very effectively and is highly respected by professionals and parents. The local authority work in partnership with centre leaders and the Advisory Board to provide good quality performance management. Staff are motivated; they enthusiastically embrace new initiatives and are keen to extend the centre's work. Together with the Advisory Board, they have a good understanding of the quality of provision, strengths and areas which require further development. All are keen to take advantage of the many opportunities for professional development promoted through the centre and the local authority. The high level of professional expertise, together with strong teamwork and effective leadership, means that there is good capacity to extend the current good practice.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- With the local authority, develop processes to evaluate the impact of provision on improving outcomes for key target groups and against priority indicators.
- Develop and extend the means through which parents, including those from vulnerable groups, are able to contribute to decision-making, strategic planning and evaluation of provision. Use this evaluation to plan activities to engage a wider range of users, including fathers, young parents and families with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Enable families to use the available resources, such as the sensory room and computers, more fully.
- Enhance opportunities for all parents to engage in further training and development to improve their economic stability and well-being.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for children who attend the centre or receive support through outreach and home visits are improving, particularly in health, safety and educational achievement. New and prospective parents receive good quality guidance through ante- and post-natal clinics, home visits and sessions focusing on preparing for birth, play and development and positive parenting. These provisions all have a positive impact on the health, safety and well-being of both mothers and children. There is a high take-up of vaccinations in the locality and the percentage of obese children in reception classes is reducing, although still above national averages. The incidence of breast feeding is increasing but is still well below the national average and remains a key priority for the centre.

Well established lines of communication and integrated working make a good

contribution to improving the safety and well-being of children. Timely support for families with children identified as at risk or in need is helping to ensure that difficulties do not escalate and families receive relevant support from different agencies early. The centre is calm and orderly enabling children to play and develop their skills in a safe environment. Safety focused events and family days are well organised and well attended. Evaluations indicate that children and adults enjoy these events and gain good awareness of how to keep safe at home and in the community.

The nursery provision, childcare and play and development sessions make a good contribution to children's enjoyment and achievement. Good quality data, analysed by the centre's qualified teacher support, indicates that children who have accessed a number of sessions make good progress in gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales. They make particularly good progress in communication, language and literacy skills and in their personal, social and emotional development. Speech and language therapists make a strong contribution through the 'Talking Twos' sessions and also through training centre staff to identify potential difficulties early. Parents' evaluations indicate a high level of enjoyment and learning, which is reflected in the high take-up and retention rates in available sessions. Children show how much they enjoy the sessions through their happy and enthusiastic response and their good behaviour. They particularly enjoy the high quality outdoor facilities.

Positive relationships between staff, children and adult users of the centre are evident in all activities. All users show respect for the behaviour code with the result that the centre is calm, friendly and welcoming. The centre provides ample opportunities for children to make a positive contribution through childcare and nursery provisions. Good use is made of parents' evaluations to inform future events and adapt sessions to meet needs. A small but active Parents Forum has made positive contributions to enhance site safety and in suggesting family events and trips. However, opportunities for parents to shape future services beyond those currently available are limited. Although the centre is fully inclusive and welcoming to all families, the full engagement and contribution of identified target groups, such as young parents and fathers remains a challenge and an area for further development.

The nursery provides well for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the centre is well equipped to cater for specific needs. At present, however, there are few parents with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities engaging with universal services at the centre. There are no specific sessions for these families. The inclusion officer, currently based at the centre provides good support for families at their homes, but the centre has not carried out a full needs analysis. The local school reports that some children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are unknown when they start at the school.

The volunteer programme makes an excellent contribution to the economic well-being of participants. Volunteers were keen to share their positive experiences with

inspectors, for example in gaining skills and confidence that have supported them in accessing employment and further training. The recently established links with Job Centre Plus, including a weekly surgery, mean that adults have regular access to jobs and benefits advice although this service is not currently used to full capacity. The centre offers a range of good quality adult courses which are well attended but parents feel that there could be more. Whilst basic skills courses are available in other nearby locations, some parents reported that they are not aware of all the available adult learning opportunities. The number of families accessing free childcare through the two year pilot is improving but is below target.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides good quality services, which are helping to improve outcomes for families attending the centre and for those who receive more targeted support in their homes. Provision is enhanced through the strong partnerships and effective teamwork between health, social care, family support, education professionals and all centre staff. The needs of vulnerable families referred to the centre are effectively assessed and support is well organised between agencies. The location of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) coordinator on-site supports CAF implementation with good engagement of agencies and parents.

The quality of care, guidance and support for young children, parents and carers in centre based activities is consistently good. The assessment of children's learning needs and progress has been enhanced by support and advice from the qualified teacher who works out of the centre. Good quality professional development promotes good practice in implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. This is enabling practitioners to make informed decisions about the developmental progress children are making and plan effectively to ensure children's purposeful learning and high levels of enjoyment.

The quality of care, guidance and support for families in crisis or facing particular challenges is outstanding. For example, one family told inspectors that the centre's staff provide 'invaluable help for our son' and have helped them access services which have significantly improved the quality of their life. Several case studies indicate that well coordinated multi-agency support has brought about positive outcomes.

The centre is successfully engaging with childminders through network meetings and regular sessions with the qualified teacher support. Childminders told inspectors that they feel well supported and have access to a wide range of professional advice to promote good quality provision and prepare for inspection. Transition planning with local schools has been identified as a development area by the centre. There is good engagement with nearby Highlands Primary School, which supports continuity and progression in learning for children attending the school. However transition planning is less well embedded with other schools and Early Years Foundation Stage settings in the area.

The centre has a good understanding of the needs of the community and has identified the most excluded and vulnerable groups. There is a good range of universal activities which are well attended. Parents know they can always seek advice and say that they generally receive good quality responses and information. Advice relating to health matters and access to benefits is readily available. The inclusive approach and welcoming environment ensures that once users register with the centre they go on to engage with a full range of activities. However, centre leaders and the governing body are aware that some groups are under represented in these activities, such as young parents, fathers, and families with disabled children. There are plans to extend provision but as yet, the centre does not have a clear indication of the level of demand.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management at all levels are effective in promoting good quality multi-agency support for the most vulnerable and good quality universal services. The centre coordinator is highly respected by professionals and parents. She ensures

the smooth day to day running of the centre and effectively manages the performance of centre staff. Other professionals have a good understanding of the various line management accountabilities and work together respectfully and effectively. The recently introduced care pathway plans provide an excellent model for the health and care of children aged 0-5 years with clear lines of responsibility and accountability for all agencies. Professional supervision is regular and systematic and has a positive impact on improving the quality of services currently offered.

Good safeguarding arrangements are supported by the clear lines of communication and collaboration between agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. All checks and vetting processes comply with current requirements. Training in safeguarding and child protection procedures is up to date and of good quality.

The strong partnerships, supported by good communication and teamwork mean that staff feel confident to share ideas and build on best practice. They share leaders' ambitions for the community and are keen to expand their work. The local authority makes a good contribution to development planning through good communication and information sharing. Performance management arrangements through the local authority maintain close supervision of the centre's work. All partners, including the advisory board have a clear understanding of the aspects of work that could be developed further to extend the reach and range of activities.

Self-evaluation is used effectively to develop the activities and services currently being offered. Users' views are given due consideration so that activities are adapted to meet the demand and needs of those accessing the centre. Data relating to reach and priority indicators are available to inform centre planning enabling the centre to set ambitious reach targets each quarter. The evaluation of the impact of activities and services on children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and provides a good model for the centre. However the impact of the centre's activities on other outcomes for users and the wider community is not fully analysed and is identified as an area requiring improvement.

Whilst the centre is highly inclusive and welcoming to all in the community, the engagement of key target groups remains a challenge. Once families sample activities they are keen to take full advantage of all that is on offer. Resources, including personnel, are effectively targeted to provide good quality support, outreach and activities in the centre. However some of the centre's resources, such as the sensory room and computer base are not used by members of the community as fully as they might be.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is	2

integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Information from the most recent Ofsted inspection of The Lemon Tree Nursery has been taken into account to a limited extent when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children in the report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected The Lemon Tree children's centre on 30 June & 1 July 2010. We judged that the centre provides good quality support to you and your families.

During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you and professionals who work with you. Parents who spoke to us all said that The Lemon Tree is a friendly and welcoming place, full of staff they can trust. We agree. We found the centre to be well organised with staff who have a high level of professional expertise and supportive approach. The centre coordinator does a good job in running the centre and responding to your requests and needs.

The centre does some things especially well. All the professionals work effectively together to ensure families receive the right advice and support in a swift and timely

manner. We found that the way in which the different teams and agencies work together to help families through complex or difficult times is outstanding.

Staff provide good quality care, guidance and support for all centre users. They make a good contribution to improving the health, safety and educational achievement of children and families. Everyone we spoke to said they feel safe at the centre. Many of you value the use of the community room to meet friends or stop for a drink. This reflects the good quality safeguarding arrangements and safety of the site. Home safety visits, the provision of safety equipment and community events have also helped you to prevent accidents in your home and community.

Many of you attended the Health Day. Your evaluations indicate that this was a thoroughly enjoyable day in which you were able to get useful advice about dental care, healthy eating and personal care. The children's centre offers a number of other good quality programmes and activities aimed at improving health. The centre's close work with midwifery services ensures new parents have access to regular antenatal classes, advice and support. However, there is still more work to do to increase the number of new mums who choose to breastfeed their babies.

The various play and development sessions are of good quality and open to all parents and carers. The centre is keen for young parents, grandparents, mums and dads from all parts of the community to attend these sessions and take advantage of the flexible sessions for parents who may be working, training or need some respite care. Despite this, there are still some groups, such as young parents and fathers who do not take full advantage of the services provided. The childminder network and sessions provide a good meeting place for other professionals in the area.

The quality of the childcare provision is good because early years staff receive good levels of training and support. This enables them to provide a stimulating play and learning environment for all the children. The 'Talking Twos' sessions have been particularly useful in helping you support the development of your children's speaking and listening skills. Your evaluations show that you particularly enjoy play sessions with your children as you receive lots of useful information and tips about how to manage behaviour and support your children in their learning.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities attending the nursery receive good support, so that they make steady progress in their learning and development. However, there are not many families who have children with disabilities currently taking advantage of the other available activities in the centre. There are no specific sessions for children with disabilities and valuable resources such as the 'sensory room' are often not in use.

Those of you we met spoke highly of the centre and were eager to share your many positive personal experiences. The centre runs an excellent volunteer programme which has helped participants to play a more active role in the centre and develop work related skills. Some of you have been well supported in returning to work

because you have received good advice and been provided with childcare. However some of you also told us that you would appreciate more opportunities for adult learning and we agree that the centre could provide more relevant courses for you.

The Lemon Tree Children's Centre is led well by the centre manager. The Advisory Board and Governing Body have a clear understanding of what the centre does well and how to improve further. All the staff work hard to ensure the centre makes a positive difference to the families in the community and they have good capacity to make further improvements.

Staff are keen to extend and improve the work of the centre. They know that more needs to be done to ensure a wide range of families in the community can benefit from the good provision. They are also looking at ways in which more of you can contribute your views and ideas. Inspectors have made a number of recommendations to help improve how the centre identifies the needs of everyone in the community and uses this information to plan future activities. These include more activities for children with special educational needs; training opportunities for adults to improve work based skills and better use of the extra resources and equipment in the centre such as the computer room and sensory room.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us, we are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.