

Inspection report for Linaker Primary School and Children's Centre

Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	362517
Inspection dates	23-24 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Diane Auton

Centre governance	The Governing Body of Linaker Primary School
Centre leader	Mr Colin Coleman
Date of previous inspection	n/a
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Linked school if applicable	Linaker Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	

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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.

An inspection of the associated primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the centre manager, staff, members of the advisory board, a range of providers, parents, users and local authority officers linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's operational plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Linaker Children's Centre serves a residential area of Southport. It was established in 2006 as a phase 1 children's centre, providing the full core offer of services. Statistical data for the area indicates that levels of social and economic disadvantage are above average; unemployment and the proportion of families on benefit are also above average. Most children's development on entry to early years provision is below expected levels for their age. Although most families in the area are from White British backgrounds, the proportion from other heritages has increased over the past four years and the community is now more culturally diverse than it was at the time the centre was established. A wide range of ethnic backgrounds is represented, with families from Eastern European countries, from Bangladesh and from mixed or other heritages.

The centre shares a single site with Linaker Primary School. The school's governing body has responsibility for governance of the children's centre and a dedicated centre committee ensures the centre's effective operation. The headteacher leads the school and the centre, working in partnership with the centre manager. Childcare is provided through the centre's nursery and crèche and regular stay and play sessions, which were all visited as part of this inspection. There are close operational links between the school's Early Years Foundation Stage and the centre's childcare

provision. Centre staff also provide and manage the school's breakfast club and the after school club, which were inspected as part of the Section 5 inspection of the school.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

This highly effective children's centre serves the needs of its community extremely well. It provides the full core offer for children and families within its footprint and extends its services to those living outside its designated area. The centre is very well led and managed. The centre's leaders, well supported by a highly effective team, set ambitious targets to improve the health, safety and well-being of the local community. Leaders target and adapt the provision well to meet local needs. They are particularly successful in their work to support teenage parents, both in and beyond the centre's reach area. As a result of these factors, the centre is making a positive difference to the lives of children and families, particularly for those most disadvantaged by economic and social circumstances. It is raising the aspirations and increasing the confidence of adults in the community by providing practical help and support for parents, children and families towards achieving better futures.

The outcomes for children and adults within the centre's reach are excellent. They are learning to lead healthy lifestyles, and attendance at ante-natal and post-natal clinics is high. Parents participate enthusiastically in activities and courses which develop their academic skills, contributing well to their future economic security. Parents say they feel extremely safe at the centre and many say it is their first port of call if they face difficulties. Adult users evaluate activities routinely. Where parents make requests for services, the centre strives to provide them. Parents say they feel listened to and respected. In order further to enhance consultation with its stakeholders, the centre is currently developing a User Forum to support more formal involvement by parents and carers in decision-making, but this is not yet fully in place. Adults participate regularly in a wide range of courses effectively designed to build their skills and confidence. They are gaining qualifications in basic literacy,

mathematics, and information and communication technology, preparing them effectively for future employment. The provision of childcare in the nursery and crèche supports this well. Parents newly arrived in the country are encouraged to meet at the centre and to attend courses to improve their English. Many then go on to other courses at the centre or elsewhere which enable them to access employment or further education. Children who live in the centre's area attain lower than nationally expected standards for five-year-olds, particularly in language, communication and literacy. The outcomes for children who attend the centre's day care are improving year-by-year, however, and data held by the centre show that the gap between children from very poor backgrounds and the rest is narrowing.

The leadership and management of the centre are outstanding; there is a strong team ethos, with staff working together extremely well. Excellent inter-agency working by highly skilled professionals means that they identify the needs of potentially vulnerable families at an early stage and intervene appropriately with provision tailored carefully to match families' individual needs. The centre makes excellent use of the Common Assessment Framework to target resources effectively. Safeguarding the users' health, safety and well-being is top priority. Leaders are reflective and the centre has identified areas for improvement effectively. High standards for achievement are set, although data from the local authority are not always used explicitly when the impact of services is evaluated or when the next steps in provision are planned. The centre currently demonstrates that it has a good capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Enhance the centre's good, informal strategies for involving its users in decision making by completing the establishment of the User Forum.
- Refine the good quality self-evaluation by making full use of data from the local authority to evaluate the impact of activities and plan further provision.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Many parents and carers set out with the intention of using the centre only to access a single service, such as ante-natal care, but stay on as their interest in learning new skills develops, and as their confidence increases. Parents' evaluations of the success of courses and activities are particularly positive. The provision of supported day care leads to significant all-round improvements for families, for as parents' skills are improving rapidly, so are those of their children. Case studies and other evaluations indicate that family learning is greatly improving outcomes for parents and carers. Education data show a narrowing of the gap between the outcomes for the most vulnerable groups and others, and a general rise in attainment by children attending

the centre, which is sustained as they progress into school. Parents are eager to go on to take further education courses in basic skills and in English, as the language barrier is significant for many new arrivals. The centre has had particular success in guiding very young parents into learning and training courses, after supporting them very effectively through pregnancy and through their children's early years.

Yoga sessions, Active Tots sessions, a 'Community fruit and vegetable scheme', the weekly gardening club, healthy eating courses, 'splash and sing' sessions and regular smoking cessation groups all help to ensure that families are developing a very good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy. Parents from the International Group have started to play a lead role in cooking sessions introducing dishes from their home countries. These sessions have been particularly well received and parents say this has helped them to feel welcome and become integrated into the community.

The importance of the role of fathers is extremely well promoted. The 'Dad's Club' provides a very wide range of learning and fun activities each week for fathers and children to enjoy together. A male project worker contributes most effectively to parenting support for teenage fathers. The very positive impact of this work is reflected in the number of fathers who attend a variety of activities, many of whom commented on how included they now feel and how much more confidence they have in their very important role as a father. Partnerships between agencies, including child and family health and social services, are having a highly positive effect on children's and families' emotional well-being and physical health across the Linaker footprint. High quality activities making this significant difference include breastfeeding support, baby massage, parent craft, weaning advice and support and advice for teenage parents.

Excellent procedures ensure that children are very well safeguarded. Parents say that they feel safe in the centre and that they trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties. Partnership working with health visitors, local emergency services and other partners is helping most successfully to raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities. Trained family development workers undertake safety visits to homes and the centre provides home safety equipment to its families, contributing to a reduction in the number of accidents in the home over the past 12 months. Some parents and carers have been subject to domestic violence and abuse. Family development workers provide excellent support in these circumstances and the centre works well with agencies to resolve situations and to protect children as well as parents.

Behaviour across the centre is good. Children in the day-care provision are well-behaved and relate well to one another. Parents, including fathers and young mothers, commented on how their confidence as parents has improved as a result of the activities offered by the centre. A visit to a stay and play session provided compelling evidence of young children and their parents bonding well and children developing their play, exploration and communication skills through a variety of interesting activities, chatting happily together about what they were doing. Parents

played with their children, and talked with each other and with staff about their children's development and interests. Parents all said they feel that they have a voice within the centre and that services meet their specific needs. For example, the centre has recently started a 'multiples' group for families with twins or triplets as a result of parental requests. The centre has helped parents into learning, training and employment, and several parents said that their economic stability and independence had improved greatly as a result of the opportunities the centre has provided.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

1

The centre team know and understand their community extremely well and this informs very high quality provision. The centre does not work in isolation with parents or children, but always seeks to improve the life chances and personal development of both. It is well equipped for this challenge. Meetings took place during the inspection with a wide range of the centre's users, including grandparents who are principal carers, foster carers, parents of disabled children, teenage parents, disabled parents and members of the international parents' group. Each one expressed great appreciation of the support they receive through the centre and of the positive changes that have resulted for their children and themselves.

The centre's early years practitioners demonstrate good specialist skills and a good understanding of the requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage. This promotes learning and development well. Experienced family development workers operate in the centre and also go out into the community; they have an excellent understanding of the community and its needs.

The assessment of need and the tracking of progress are extremely good. Interventions that are used and the progress of all vulnerable families are well documented and evaluated and provide a bank of case studies to help subsequent evaluations. The centre is exceptionally effective as a facilitating resource for the

families and children. It has outstandingly good links with family and children's services: statutory, community and voluntary. Through these it provides very effective support for all of the most vulnerable groups, such as teenage parents, lone parents, families in crisis and those experiencing domestic violence.

Some aspects of its provision are innovative, such as solicitor and Citizens Advice Bureau support for families with debt or legal problems. It is extremely sensitive to the particular needs of its culturally diverse community. For example, it is proving very successful in enabling parents coming into the area from other countries to integrate within the community. The partnership with the primary school is very strong. The centre works productively with a wide range of professionals, such as health visitors, midwives, speech and language therapists and social workers, and has successfully supported hundreds of young people and parents into adult learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
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	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The headteacher and the centre manager provide exceptional leadership and management for the centre. Leaders are fully focused on the needs of the immediate community. Their expertise and the skills of a united staff team combine to ensure that a high quality of service is provided across the centre's operations. Senior leaders are highly effective in ensuring children and families are safe. This is through rigorous attention to child protection, vetting and recruitment procedures. It is also the result of a sensitive approach to the variety of needs the centre's users present, which ensures that families feel comfortable with staff and protected. The centre's work to promote equality and tackle discrimination against vulnerable groups is of a high order. The centre makes a very positive contribution to community cohesion and the breaking down of barriers between families of different backgrounds.

Teamwork among staff is very good and morale is high. Staff are highly qualified and experienced. The centre is bright and welcoming and is highly inclusive. The building is well equipped to put on family learning courses, activities for parents and carers and crèches for children. Although space is sometimes restricted, particularly in the outdoor areas, every inch has been utilised well and the learning environment throughout the centre is of very high quality.

The governing body is supportive and has a strong commitment to the centre and to the ongoing development of its role in the community. Development planning is aligned to local and national indicators for children and families. Although leaders evaluate the impact of actions and services regularly and conscientiously, outcomes are not always measured against the data provided by the local authority. This reduces the clarity and effectiveness of evaluations, when this is the case. Parents and carers who spoke with inspectors place a high level of trust in the centre. Their views are taken into account when provision is planned, although, because the User Forum is not yet fully established, consultation to date has been mostly of an informal nature.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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 integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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	2

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

The judgements made in this inspection took into account the findings of the inspection of Linaker Primary School, which took place at the same time as this inspection. The report for the school can be found on the Ofsted website. The school's reference number is 104864.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Linaker Children's Centre on 23 and 24 September 2010. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

The centre is the main hub of services for children, families and carers who live in its area. Many of the agencies who support children and families are based here or work from the centre at different times. They work extremely well together and are very committed to making sure that your children get the best possible start in life, by supporting you outstandingly well. You told us how the centre is making a positive difference to your lives and those of your children. We found that the centre is outstanding in helping your children to keep safe from harm, be healthy and to enjoy and achieve. Your children who attend the centre's provision are prepared well for starting school. The centre is also helping adults learn exceptionally well. Those of you who spoke to us told us how the centre has transformed your lives and has had an enormous impact on the well-being of your families.

The staff at the centre are extremely well qualified and experienced professionals. You explained how well staff support you, both in raising your self-esteem and confidence, but also in providing practical help and advice. Those of you who are teenage parents, and your children, benefit greatly from the excellent support provided through the A.P.P.L.E project and this is one of the centre's particular strengths. The centre provides an excellent range of activities which are helping to improve your parenting skills. Several of you told us you believe your contact with the centre has been life changing. You commented on community activities, such as the dad's club and the cooking sessions in the International Group, as well as the support you have through ante-natal and post-natal care, and the one-to one support from family workers and health visitors.

The headteacher and the centre manager are passionate about improving the outcomes for children and families in the locality and are constantly looking for ways to improve the service the centre provides. For example, they recently started a 'multiples' group at the centre, for families with triplets and twins, in response to your requests. Activities are run at times to suit you, including during the holidays. Those of you who access courses at the centre are able to use the crèche facilities, knowing your children will be very well cared for and will have fun! The leaders and managers know what needs to improve to make the centre better for you and have the skills to carry out their plans effectively. The governing body supports and challenges the leaders well. The centre supports groups who are potentially vulnerable very well, such as very young parents, parents of children with additional

needs and families who have recently come to this country. It is highly successful in reaching those who are most in need.

We have asked the centre to do two things to improve it even further for you. The first is to set up the User Forum so that you can make more suggestions about the activities you would like. The second is to keep closer checks on the effects the activities are having for you and your children and planning new ones based on this.

Thank you to those of you who came to tell us your views on the centre. We wish you and your families every success for the future.

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