

Inspection report for Leam Lane Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Gateshead |
| Inspection number | 383690 |
| Inspection dates | 28–29 September 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Judith Elderfield |

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| Centre leader | Beverley Coombs |
| Date of previous inspection | Not applicable |
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| Linked school if applicable | Not applicable |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | EY316032 Starting Out Neighbourhood Nursery |

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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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 maintained nursery 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 one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre users, representatives from the local authority, the centre's advisory board, partner organisations, staff and volunteers. They spoke to centre-users formally and informally at various groups.

They also observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation, action plan, satisfaction survey results, evidence files and case studies.

Information about the centre

Leam Lane Children's Centre was designated in March 2006 and is a Phase 1 centre providing the full core offer. The centre is located in the east of Gateshead in the middle of the reach area it serves. It moved into the multi-functional building it now occupies in 2006. The building contains a day nursery, library, housing association, community centre and Gateshead Customer Services. The centre has an advisory board, which has local management responsibility for the three children's centres in the east area of Gateshead. The team and centre manager work across the wider east area of Gateshead.

Almost all families living in the centre's catchment area are from White British background, with very few families from minority ethnic heritages. There are large numbers of families living in areas of deprivation within the centre's reach area. The

proportion of children attending schools in the area that are known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average, as is the proportion of children under four years old who are living in households on workless benefits. Most children enter childcare and early years education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age.

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 families

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Capacity for sustained improvement

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

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Main findings

Leam Lane Children's Centre provides good support to children and families who live within its locality. Parents, carers and children enjoy coming to the friendly and welcoming centre. Children are happy and well behaved. Parents told inspectors that they feel happy, safe and well looked-after at the centre. They describe staff as 'really helpful' and say that they 'make you feel welcome'. Programmes for 'Baby Massage' and 'Baby Social', are very popular, with parents reporting better sleep patterns for their children after the baby massage sessions. However, at the time of inspection there was some confusion about when the children's centre could use the outside play area belonging to the adjacent nursery. Staff have no clear guide lines as to the times of day this area can be used and therefore on a very warm day children attending the centre do not have access to outside play.

A particular strength of the centre is its strong partnership-working which provides all round care for all families, particularly those in greatest need. As a result, users stay safe, gain confidence and develop parenting skills. The centre works hard to seek the views of the users, through surveys, evaluations and the 'Your Voice' meetings for parents and carers. Parents do not hesitate to articulate their views, but at present none of the parents feel confident enough to attend the advisory board meetings.

Outcomes for learners are good and the centre is inclusive and promotes equality well. It uses local and wider comparative data about health priorities to ensure that the provision meets individual and community target group needs very effectively. Outstanding partnerships with the local Primary Care Trust, adult learning services and other agencies is integral to the centre's success. A good range of services is

provided to equip parents and carers with the knowledge to improve their own health and that of their children. Health clinics and courses to help parents recognise the importance of physical activities and play in promoting good physical and emotional health and development are organised well.

Effective collaborative working operates between partners and the three children's centres within the east Gateshead area. Resources, including staff are shared across the children's centres. Activities and training are coordinated effectively to ensure a sustainable rolling programme. As such, users are able to access services across the joint reach areas. Procedures and protocols for safeguarding are robust and regularly reviewed. All staff are well-trained and continuously update their knowledge to ensure that they have the most current guidance. Consequently, staff effectively ensure the ongoing safety and well-being of children and their families.

Overall, the provision of information and guidance is good and staff have been trained to provide advice about benefits, welfare and employment. The centre runs good training programmes to help raise the standard of the parents' and carers' ambitions and confidence; this also enhances their children's lives.

Managers know the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and have actions in place to address these. Data is used well by the centre to identify and respond to local priorities. Target-setting and the use of comparison data are robust. The local authority has invested in a new system to improve the quality of data further but it is too early to judge the impact of this. Strong teamwork, high expectations and continuous improvement are central to the work of the centre. The local authority provides a robust quality assurance role and the advisory board is increasingly effective in identifying priorities through effective consultation. Managers and staff routinely reflect on practice to evaluate the impact of provision. Self-evaluation is accurate and informs the development plan. This has a positive impact on developments made to provision and meeting individual needs. As such, the centre is in a good position to further improve outcomes for families and children and the capacity to improve further is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Make greater use of the outdoor space to ensure that children have regular opportunities to play in the fresh air and further develop their physical skills.
- Support parents and carers to develop their skills and confidence in order to contribute to the management of the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

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Evidence through case studies, data analysis and discussions with partners and parents all reflect the very positive impact of partnership-working and the services provided, on the children's and families' emotional well-being and physical health.

Families engage well in the services offered by the centre. The good advice and training on health issues and safety in the home are having a positive impact on how well families keep themselves and their children healthy. For example, some parents join the many physical activities on offer in the community centre, which is in the same building as the children's centre. Others now enjoy the use of the nearby swimming pool. The rates for smoking cessation during pregnancy and numbers who sustain breastfeeding fluctuate. The 'Bosum Buddies' support group is well-advertised across the reach area. With the accent on a relaxed environment, mothers are invited to share their problems with a health care assistant, peer counsellors and other mums. The 'Young Mums To Be' and 'Parents With Prospects' are accredited courses and parents develop a very good range of knowledge and learn how to keep their children safe and healthy in the home and how to learn through play. These courses give the parents confidence to try other courses on offer; many decide to become volunteers which has in turn led to full-time employment.

Children make good progress in their learning and development and those who attend the registered nursery enjoy good provision. As a result the achievement gap for these children is narrowing. The centre has good relationships with the local schools. 'The Prepare Yourself for School' programme is a four-week programme, which aims to support parents and carers with the transition between the centre or home and the Early Years Foundation Stage. Parents report that they really enjoy and benefit from the recreational activities, such as the well-attended 'Dads' Breakfast' club, which runs once a month. Dads and their children are involved in many activities with the focus on physical activity and outdoor play; achievement is celebrated well with photographic evidence of the fun everyone is having clearly displayed in the centre. Documentation and continuous evaluation shows how much the dads enjoy this time with their children.

The 'Your Voice' meetings and 'Talk Time' sessions are effective in capturing the views of parents. The centre records all the families' views and documented evidence show the centre does its best to act upon them. The centre staff have worked hard to encourage parents and carers to become involved in the governance of the centre. However, despite the manager's and the management teams' best efforts the parents and carers are reluctant to join the board. However, the centre acknowledges that this is an important area of the east children's centre governance and that more work needs to be carried out in this area.

Children using the services at the centre are effectively safeguarded, including children from vulnerable families and those who are hard-to-engage. Parent support workers understand the Common Assessment Framework well and are actively involved in multi-agency work to protect children and their families who are deemed to be vulnerable; they signpost families to appropriate agencies, or to the centre for parenting support or to sessions that will help them with their parenting skills. The knowledge and involvement of centre staff in the use of the Common Assessment Framework and in supporting those subject to child protection plans or who have other needs is highly-effective in improving the safeguarding of children and minimising the number of families reaching acute crisis points in their lives.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

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| The extent to which children, including those from target 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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre | 2 |
| The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment. | 2 |

How good is the provision?

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Learning is purposeful as each activity or session has clearly identified and recorded outcomes, which are the basis for planning, evaluation and improvement. Reflective practice is encouraged for every planned activity or session. The community values the centre and users say they find the centre staff extremely approachable. A good range of activities, trips and courses is provided for users. Families enjoy many sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Splash and Swing'. Good links with adult learning services are also used to promote learning that meets users' needs. However, the children's centre has no outside play area of its own and guidelines are not clear as to the availability of the nursery's play area.

Parents report that the care guidance and support given are good and staff ensure that support is provided for as long as it's needed. The well-planned activities for babies and toddlers ensure that children are cared for well while receiving stimulation and the opportunity to explore the environment. All the sessions are well-attended and provide good guidance and support for parents and carers. Many parents and carers, as a result of support received through the centre, have increased aspirations for themselves and their children.

Learning development and enjoyment are promoted well. Many parents take the accredited 'Young Mums To Be' course. One mother said 'I learned a lot from the course and it got me ready for my baby'. The level of care promoted by staff is good as is their commitment to enable families to succeed. The centre provides a daily update of job opportunities. These are kept in a file with other useful information, which is located conveniently in the welcoming reception area. Staff are always available to help download application forms and offer support in completing them. In addition, while there are no formal arrangements for users to receive guidance at

the centre from Jobcentre Plus, a member of their staff is on hand in the local jobcentre one day a week to help and support children's centre users who attend there.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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| The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups | 2 |
| The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups | 2 |
| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups. | 2 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

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Governance, lines of accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood. As a result, multi-agency working and performance management are effective at all levels. The manager continually strives for the centre to offer the best service possible. This ambition is shared by all staff who work together well. Good lines of communication exist and morale is high across the centre. Much has already been done to analyse local needs including those in target groups. Staff are not complacent about the ongoing challenge of engaging with those families who are not yet using services provided at the centre; the inclusion of all children and their families is central to the centre's vision.

Partnerships are outstanding. A range of partners work together highly successfully to support all families to achieve good or better outcomes. Many of these high-quality partnerships are based in the children's centre such as the community police, midwives and youth crime prevention. Close and very effective working relationships between the centre and the fire service, educational psychologist and the family nurse partnership, ensure the safety and well-being of all the families connected to the centre. Inspectors spoke with representatives from a range of partner agencies, all of whom spoke very highly of the centre's open approach to partnership working for the benefit of the community.

Development plans shows good evaluation of the Leam Lane Children's Centre and how the centre fits into the plans for children's centres in the east of Gateshead. The plans, formulated by the east Gateshead advisory board are on-going and identify the priorities for each children's centre. Significant time has been invested in setting challenging targets for the centre following recent changes made to the children's centres and budgetary restrictions.

The centre has good-quality arrangements for safeguarding all users. The vetting of staff is rigorous and relevant training is regularly updated. All staff, including administration and cleaning staff, have a secure knowledge of policies and the manager ensures that they consistently have access to current guidance. Risk

assessments are completed and regularly reviewed. Staff are vigilant in identifying and responding to potential dangers that users may encounter. Good procedures and protocols ensure that the information is shared between partners so that the needs of children and families at risk are prioritised.

The centre deploys staff well and uses resources effectively to ensure that users of the centre can benefit from a wide range of integrated and cohesive services delivered from the east Gateshead children's centres. For example, the very popular 'Stay and Play' sessions are run on different days in each centre. All families are welcome. The creative use of accommodation and resources is impressive. Leaders and managers have plans and targets to ensure that they meet the needs of the users and ensure the centre continues to provide good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

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| The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood | 2 |
| The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes | 2 |
| The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups | 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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose | 1 |
| The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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 nursery provision was inspected at the same time as the children's centre and was judged as good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Leam Lane Children's Centre on 28-29 September 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. We met a number of you during our visit. We talked with staff from the centre and from other organisations who work with your centre to provide services and activities. During our visit we were able to observe some sessions and activities.

Those of you we spoke to told us that you enjoy coming to the centre and that you feel happy and safe there. You also told us that your children enjoyed coming too and particularly enjoy activities, such as 'Stay and Play', crèche sessions, 'Baby Social', and that you like being able to meet up with other parents and carers and share ideas. The children's centre provides good support and is very much at the heart of your community.

The advisory board plays a very proactive role in the on-going development of the centre. However, the centre would like parents to become more involved in the decision-making within the centre by becoming active members of the advisory board together with your continuing input into 'Your Voice'. The centre staff are continuously reviewing how to manage the demand for popular activities. From our observations, discussions and case studies, we were able to see how much impact the centre is having on your lives. For example, some of you told us that you were able to improve your own health and that of your children after attending particular sessions at the centre, or by receiving guidance and support from some of the well-trained and qualified staff.

Your centre offers a good and varied range of activities and training sessions. You can also get good-quality guidance and support to deal with health problems, parenting and safety in your home. Some of you also told us that you have received help to make your homes safer for your children by having safety equipment installed. The staff at the centre offer you home visits if required and give you personal and individual attention to help you become more confident parents and carers and to help your children succeed in life.

We have suggested the centre clarifies the availability of the play area so your children can enjoy the fresh air when attending the centre.

Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with us during the visit. We very much enjoyed talking with you and we appreciated your willingness to talk with us about some of your personal experiences. We wish you all the best for the future.

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