

The Leys Children's Centre

Cuddesdon Corner, 61–63 Cuddesdon Way, Oxford, Oxfordshire, OX4 6SB

Inspection dates	7–8 July 2015
Previous inspection date	21–22 July 2010

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Good	2
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a good centre.

- A large majority of local families are registered with the centre and make good use of its services. Those who attend are made to feel welcome and value the good help and support they receive.
- A high proportion of the families identified as being most in need of support are known to the centre and benefit from the high quality courses and activities.
- Staff work effectively with health partners and outcomes for children are improving.
- The centre successfully reduces inequalities by helping all parents to understand the many different ways they are able to support their children's learning and development.
- Children who attend the centre's activities have a good start to school life, and where extra support is required staff work effectively with partners and families to provide what they require.
- Home visits and community outreach work are highly effective, providing good support for families most in need and those who might not otherwise use the centre's services.
- The centre has established a strong reputation for the support it provides in the local community, such as hosting an effective job club and being a distribution point for the Oxford food bank.
- Staff and volunteers use their good experience effectively to help parents increase their self-confidence as they improve their parenting skills.
- Leaders and managers set high standards and monitor the centre's performance very effectively.
- The whole staff team is ambitious for the success of everyone. As a result, the centre continually raises the quality of its work and the positive impact it has on improving the lives of families.

It is not outstanding because:

- The take up of free early education by eligible two-year-olds is too low. There are insufficient places available in the local area.
- The proportion of boys who reach the level of development expected for their age is too low.
- Unexpected changes in membership of the advisory group have resulted in it losing its momentum in critically challenging the centre's performance. Meetings are less frequent and the position of chairperson is currently vacant.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that most, if not all, eligible two-year-olds benefit from early education by:
 - making sure families receive detailed information about the support available and understand the benefits of taking up the offer for their children
 - working effectively with the local authority and early years settings to increase the number of places available.
- Build on the developing progress tracking systems to plan appropriate next steps for all children. Provide specific activities that help families to support boys' learning so that their level of development is at least equal to that of girls.
- Appoint an independent chairperson to the advisory group and re-establish regular meetings so that members can provide appropriate challenge and governance.

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 three Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with parents and children, the centre's leaders, outreach and support workers and representatives from the local authority. They also met health, education and early years partners, adult education coordinators, volunteers and representatives of the advisory group.

The inspectors observed the centre's work, took children's views into account, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including parents' evaluations and satisfaction surveys.

Inspection team

Dan Grant, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Anthony Mundy	Additional Inspector
Dave Baber	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The Leys Children's Centre opened in 2006. It is a stand-alone children's centre offering family play sessions, health clinics, parenting advice, adult learning and family support. These services are delivered to families from the children's centre building, community venues in the area and through outreach home visits.

The centre is managed directly by Oxfordshire County Council. There is an advisory group to assist governance, made up of representatives of local organisations, members of the local community and parents.

There are approximately 1,304 children under the age of five years living in the area served by the centre. The area covered by the centre consists of two large housing estates to the south east of Oxford, Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys, which have high levels of disadvantage. Unemployment levels are high, with a large number of children living in households dependent upon workless benefits.

Approximately, a half of families within the area served by the centre are White British, with the remaining comprising families of Asian, Black British and Eastern European heritage. Most children enter early years provision with knowledge and skills that are typical for their age.

The target groups identified by the centre include: workless households; children who are subject to child protection plans; and, families eligible for free early education for their two-year-olds.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families Good

- The centre is very popular with local families because they recognise the benefits of attending the good range of activities. A large, and increasing, majority of families with a child under five years is registered with the centre and many of them attend regularly.
- Outreach visits are used increasingly effectively to engage those who may be reluctant to access the centre's services, and to explain what services are available and how the staff and partners can help them. Almost all of the families known to local authority social care workers receive effective support from the centre's outreach staff.
- Staff successfully prioritise families who are most in need of services, including those expecting a baby, and make sure they receive well coordinated support. Families with a new baby and children assessed as living in the most disadvantaged areas engage well in almost all activities.
- Staff ensure that families referred for specific help, such as those living in workless households and children subject to protection plans, have good access to support and services which are very well matched to meeting their needs.
- A high proportion of families benefit from attendance at well-structured parenting courses. This helps them develop greater self-confidence and improves their understanding of some of the rewards and challenges of being parents. The Stay and Play sessions are very well attended. Parents use these as an opportunity to learn new skills and seek advice from staff and each other.
- The proportion of families using funding for high quality early education for two-year-olds is increasing, but is not yet good. Consequently, many children who are eligible are not accessing a place to support the prime areas of early development including communication, social and physical skills. However, the centre works effectively to ensure a large majority of three- and four-year-old children eligible for funded places take up the offer.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Staff at the centre are approachable, versatile in how they deliver services and enthusiastic. They use their good levels of experience very effectively to establish and maintain positive relationships with families and partner agencies. A sensible balance of services available for everyone and those targeted at meeting specific needs is achieved.
- All families, including those most in need of support who use the centre's services benefit from the high quality courses, activities and advice. Staff and partner agencies respond quickly to requests to provide families with support, and the impact of their work on improving the outcomes for families is recorded thoroughly in case files.
- Many children and families benefit from the centre's exceptionally strong partnership with speech therapists. The centre offers a wide range of well organised and relevant activities which successfully support children's learning and development. It is clear that the centre contributes significantly to children's good progress through activities such as Book Start.
- Parents make very good use of a good range of courses, adult learning opportunities and training to ensure they increase their education and job prospects. Volunteering opportunities are well organised and several parents have used this as experience to help them gain employment and access to further and higher education. The centre provides a very successful job club.
- A majority of children using the centre's services achieve a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Although slightly below county and national averages in 2014, the figure was significantly greater than for local children not engaging with centre services. However, the proportion of boys' achieving a good level of development is not as high as that for girls.
- A useful start has been made by the centre in improving progress tracking systems, such as in the crèche, in order to more precisely plan children's next steps in learning. However, currently, there are not enough specific activities available to help families to support boys' learning.
- There is clear evidence that inequalities are reduced because of the effective work undertaken by the centre. For example, the well attended and successful groups for Asian women and Polish families help to improve English language and parenting skills. In partnership with a local food bank, the centre distributes food to a large number of families on a low income.
- Staff provide highly effective support for breastfeeding mothers. The centre's good range of information posters and leaflets has contributed well to raising awareness and helping increase the proportion of mothers who continue breastfeeding at six to eight weeks after their babies are born and to making sure children receive a healthy start to life.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The local authority provides effective challenge and support which ensure the centre continues to improve. Resources are of a high standard, deployed very efficiently and used to full capacity to meet local needs. The performance of the centre and the quality of its services are monitored thoroughly by senior leaders. Close analysis of data and trends in performance are used increasingly effectively by leaders to ensure all families receive a good range of relevant services.
- Leadership and management of the centre are good. Everyone involved in running the centre is ambitious for the success of all families. The priorities for the centre's work are correctly focused on families who are most in need of support. Accurate self-evaluation and the delivery of effective development plans ensure the centre continues to improve. As a result, the centre's work has an increasingly positive impact on improving families' well-being.
- Governance is currently not fully effective. The advisory group has a strong reputation for being thoroughly involved in all decisions relating to how the centre is run. However, the group lost some of its drive and motivation following the very sad loss of the chairperson. Since that time the group has not been able to re-establish its full capacity or effectiveness in holding the centre to account.
- Staff are very keen to help parents express their views about the centre. Almost all sessions are evaluated by parents. Detailed surveys of families who attend the centre, and those who do not,

have helped staff to make improvements to the ways services are delivered. One parent commented, 'This is our centre so we make sure it runs well.'

- The staff are well trained and the manager ensures they continue to perform well as a team. She manages staff performance very effectively to ensure families continue to benefit from their work.
- Staff and partners have a good understanding of safeguarding policies and use them effectively to help children and families remain safe and to promote their welfare. Safe recruitment strategies for staff are well established with thorough checks in place for the vetting of all those who work with children.
- Managers have clear oversight of the good work undertaken by staff as they support families with children identified as being in need. This includes those subject to child protection plans and looked after children. The centre makes good use of the partnerships it has with early help workers to ensure families receive effective timely support.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and, as a result, inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Centre details

Unique reference number	20884
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	464561
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,304
Head of centre	Amanda Powell
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