

Inspection report for Longsight Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	383996
Inspection dates	5–6 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Jean Webb

Centre governance	Managed by a third sector organisation on behalf of the local authority
Centre leader	Emma Perry
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	1a Farrer Road Longsight Manchester M13 0QX
Telephone number	0161 248 1500
Email address	emma.perry@thebiglifecompany.com

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY292646 AISHA Childcare

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.

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with advisory board members, parents, carers and representatives from the local authority. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Longsight Children's Centre is commissioned by the local authority to be managed and run by a local social enterprise under the name of 'The Big Life Group'. Aisha Childcare is the section of the group that manages the children's centre. It was designated in 2006. The Big Life Group has a service governance board to oversee safeguarding, finance and health and safety and is chaired by a medical director.

The centre is located within an inner city area of Manchester and includes more than 1,200 children under five years old. It provides the full core offer including childcare and early learning, family support, health, and childminder network support. There is a 46 place nursery taking children aged from six months to five years. There are crèche facilities in the centre and also a mobile crèche for central Manchester. It was last inspected in November 2009. The centre operates a wide range of services from a number of satellite venues.

Just under half of children in the reach area live in income deprived families. The centre is located in an area where the proportion of babies born with low birth weight is above the national average. Conception rates for girls aged under eighteen and births to lone parents are well below the Manchester average rate. The majority of the population are non-white British and the largest non-white group are of Pakistani origin followed by Bengali and Black Caribbean. There is a growing Roma community. More than 22 different languages are spoken in the centre. Seventy three per cent of school age children have English as their second language. The majority of the housing within the area is either owner occupied or private rented.

The private rented accommodation is of variable quality and can result in children living in poor conditions; those particularly vulnerable are children of refugee and asylum seekers or transient communities, such as Roma Gypsy families. There are higher than average rates of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The unemployment rate is significantly above the national average. Eighteen per cent of children live in workless households but this figure is 27% in one part of Longsight. Eighteen per cent of children are considered obese at reception age in some parts of Longsight. There is poor dental health of children in Longsight who have the worst dental health of all children in Manchester with 71% of five year olds who have had tooth decay compared with 59% of Manchester children overall. Children’s skills levels on entry to school are below those found typically, particularly in communication, language and literacy and also in their personal, social and emotional development.

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

1

Main findings

The outcomes for users, quality of provision and leadership and management of Longsight Children’s Centre are all outstanding. The centre is exceptional in the way it meets the needs of the very diverse community, particularly the vulnerable groups in the community. Users say they feel fully involved with the centre services and can contribute to how the centre is run and many view the centre as an extended family. The centre has developed very effective partnerships with a range of agencies including, social enterprises that have services such as teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages and working with vulnerable groups. Other partnerships include schools, health services, citizens advice bureau, job centre plus, the police, library services and Manchester Adult Education Service. Volunteers at the centre contribute enormously to the running of the centre and the support of families.

The centre is particularly effective in addressing users’ needs in those parts of the

community where people feel isolated and are potentially vulnerable. The emotional well-being of families has improved significantly. The centre helps carers to develop their confidence and empowers them to set up their own groups and greatly increase their economic stability and independence. Children thoroughly enjoy their learning and activities and show very good improvement in the skills they need for the future. All aspects of their learning and development are very well coordinated. However, a relative weakness is that parents and carers are not always provided with clear ways to extend their children's learning at home and not all parents and carers are fully supported to contribute to their child's 'learning journey' record or to clearly understand what their children have learned. Children with disabilities are helped enormously and very effectively in their preparation for school.

The quality of support families receive is excellent. The staff are highly effective in assessing the needs of families and making early interventions. Staff are highly committed to their work and users talk impressively about how much 'staff are there' for them. A typical view expressed by one user is 'the staff are always there to take the extra step'. There is a continuous flow of high quality information and advice that is made accessible to all users. The range of services is exceptionally well tuned to what the community wants and needs and makes sure that all groups of users in the community are catered for. Data are used very effectively to ensure equality of opportunity and appropriate targeting of hard to reach and vulnerable groups. Diversity is celebrated to ensure that users feel valued and to improve outcomes for all. Good safeguarding practice is evident throughout the centre and embedded very well in all procedures. High priority is given to safeguarding.

Self-evaluation and planning for improvements are completed exceptionally well and accurately to impact positively on outcomes for all users. Staff, users and partners' views are all used to fine-tune plans. The use of data from the evaluation and planning tool has had a marked impact on how well services are delivered and targeted to meet the needs of users. Evaluation at an individual level is also particularly good and it is evident that the centre staff know the community very well. However, some feedback from users is not well summarised to easily and quickly identify the effectiveness of the provision. Staff work exceptionally well as a team and the professional development and training of staff is well managed. Target setting for staff is specific and challenging and rigorously followed through. This starts at governance level and threads through to operations and front-line services. The children's centre is managed by a third sector organisation, with an independently chaired service governance board, on behalf of the local authority. Parents are involved through advisory groups representing all aspects of every child matters are and a parent's board. The centre is working hard to make sure all parents and carers are fully involved in the advisory boards. Staff are very clear about what needs to be done to make additional improvements for the future and the centre's capacity to further improve is outstanding.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further encourage parents and carers to contribute to their child's learning journey record and to extend children's learning and development in the home.
- Improve the collation and presentation of performance data in order to precisely inform leaders and managers of the impact of all services.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Outcomes for users are outstanding. The needs of the very diverse community are well understood and services are developed to have maximum impact on the lifestyles and the development of all users. The gap between the lowest achieving children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest is closing.

Healthy eating is promoted very well by activities and events, such as 'good grub', 'gossip and grub' both in the centre and community venues where users are able to experience and learn about healthy options and food from different cultures. Healthy snacks are provided for children that they enjoy. The meals and snacks provided at the centre are designed by external dieticians and continuously modified, as feedback is given from carers who demand healthy options for their children. There are some locations in the reach area with relatively high levels of obesity, mainly due to lack of open spaces for play and exercise. This is being addressed by offering services to encourage walking and exercise. The high rate of dental decay in children is being tackled very well. A well-attended dental health day signposted most children to a local dentist. There is a very good range of activities and support for those children and parents and carers with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These have helped to better prepare children for school and have empowered and encouraged parents and carers who had become isolated through their children's disability, to express their needs and become more active in the community. There is a significant increase in the emotional well-being felt by parents and carers as a result of courses, such as 'The Incredible Years', where parents and carers learn more about the stages of children's development and how to best support them through these stages. As a result, users report the behaviour of their children has improved. Children from vulnerable groups particularly benefit from the centre's work in developing healthier lifestyles.

Children are safeguarded well in the centre and in the home. They demonstrate they are happy and secure in the centre through their positive behaviour and good relationships. A recent child safety week promoted safe practice in the home showing parents and carers how to use safety equipment. Outreach workers check the safety of homes and the equipment installed. There have been many successful outcomes

in helping both male and female carers experiencing domestic abuse to lead lives free from danger. Parents and carers are well informed regarding their children's safety, through activities such as 'stranger danger' and crossing the road safely. The incidence of road traffic accidents has decreased. The entrance to the centre is very secure and carers say they feel very safe there. All children on a child protection plan have been supported very effectively and subsequently there are currently no children on a child protection plan.

Children have great fun in the nursery and the other childcare settings at the centre. There are high quality indoor and outdoor resources that effectively promote opportunities for children of different ages to learn and play together. The children helped to design the outdoor area, with grassy hillocks and a small winding 'road' for tricycles. A well-kept landscaped garden with herbs and flowers is an additional, attractive resource and is maintained by users for their use. An allotment has recently been set up next to the children's outdoor area to promote healthy eating and lifestyles for all users. Produce is used in the centres' kitchen. Children make very good progress in all aspects of their development. There are clear examples of how staff initiate and become engaged in children's play in order to develop good learning. For example, giving a child a key in order to start up a cycle and encouraging them to make the sound of car. Also, encouraging new vocabulary, such as 'ingredient,' when a child is involved with cooking. Three to five-year-olds skilfully use a computer mouse and carry out basic operations on the computer. Play resources used by children reflect different cultures, such as cooking utensils and clothes for role play. Parents and carers are encouraged to be involved in the formation of their children's 'learning journey' record folders and to make written comments about their child's learning and development. However, parent's and carer's comments tend to reflect how much their children enjoy the play rather than what they learn. This does not encourage them to continue the high quality work carried out in the centre at their homes.

Many adults make great achievements and attain level 2 qualifications in childcare and translation. They learn basic skills in information and communication technology (ICT) and often go on to develop their ICT skills further. There is a strong volunteer presence in the centre. Nearly a quarter of those who have had volunteer training go into paid employment, and some into further education. There are 28 active volunteers in the centre and their bilingual skills give tremendous support to users. Local people have priority for any jobs that become available in the centre and many of the staff were originally users of the centre themselves. Users give feedback on all services and this is listened to and appropriate changes are made. Users have a very strong voice in the centre and make their opinions known, having been empowered and helped to do this by way of activities, such as the 'blossom group' where users are supported to become a self-help group and increase their access to services that help them in a variety of ways.

There are excellent working arrangements with Jobcentre Plus, local providers, a recruitment officer and a work club, who set up displays every other month to

advertise jobs and training opportunities particularly suitable for lone parents to access. A family support worker is included in the event to give advice on topics, such as childcare. Those attending receive help with job search skills, training opportunities and jobs. At the last event, nearly 75% of those attending took up training or work opportunities.

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	2
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	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	1

How good is the provision?

1

All aspects of the provision at the centre are outstanding. Assessments of users' needs are completed sensitively and thoroughly and a pre-Common Assessment Framework is used very effectively to guide further assessment if necessary. All partners are effectively involved in the assessment of children and families and are well coordinated to ensure users' needs are met. The 'balance wheel' is a very useful self-assessment tool that is well established at the centre. It asks users to reflect on five key aspects of their life they would like to improve. This leads to 'stepping stones', a clear plan for improvement to move them towards where they want to be. At a later review, they see how well they have done in improving their own and their families' lives. The data from these assessments is used to evaluate the impact of services and results show improvement for all users, and for some exceptional progress and development. These well-embedded assessment and evaluation processes have resulted in the centre knowing and understanding their users' needs exceptionally well.

There is a very good range of activities and services available for users that effectively engage them and ensure enjoyment of their learning. There has been a marked increase in the reach of the centre, particularly to those with children under three. Compared to other children's centres a high percentage, of all carers reached are fathers. Activities help carers develop parenting and other skills that make them more confident and inspire them to continue with their learning. Training sessions

are of high quality. There are many community events, including Saturday activities for all the family and a weekly toy library. The detailed understanding of the diverse nature of the users has enabled centre workers to respond exceptionally well to users' needs, despite cut backs. Groups, such as young parents, a growing Roma community, isolated and non-English speaking women are examples of those that have been very effectively helped. Many of those accessing the centre are from outside the Longsight area but the centre does not turn anybody away.

The information, advice, guidance and support given to users are exceptional. There are well-used 'talk time' sessions for all users to access, both at the centre and at other venues, such as schools or General Practitioner surgeries. A full range of information, guidance and signposting is given at these groups. The Citizens' Advice Bureau is also available at the centre and this is particularly well used. A crèche is available for users when attending training and learning activities and the centre has a mobile crèche for use when services are delivered at other venues. Both paid and volunteer interpreters are always available so that non-English speaking users have full access to all services. The outreach team, family support workers and Early Intervention Team all work together very effectively to support families. A typical view expressed by a user is that they 'would be lost without the centre'.

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	1
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

Leadership and management of Longsight Children's Centre are outstanding. The direction and guidance for services given by the Big Life Group is exceptionally well managed and clear. The underlying vision of the third sector organisation works seamlessly with the requirements of a Sure Start Centre. Their clear focus is on providing an excellent service. The local authority is extremely supportive of this model of commissioning children services. They ensure that the service meets their requirements and also use the centre as a source of good practice that is shared with other children's centres.

The self-evaluation and delivery plan are detailed and thorough and are used very effectively to ensure all staff contribute to and have ownership of the action plan for improvement. All staff have clear and specific targets that are well monitored and supervised. For all services, a high quality evaluation and planning tool is used that sets out purpose of service, how it will be evaluated and how it links to Every Child Matters and national indicators. These are all reviewed by the senior management team, and the outcomes of the service and its evaluation are then used very well to plan further services. A wide range of different types of data are collected to evaluate the impact of services and used very well. Slightly better use could be made of some data by better collating and summarising feedback to more effectively inform leaders of the impact of all services.

Resources available to the centre have been reduced but they have managed to make best use of what is available, and in particular acquiring extra funding and using staff and volunteers exceptionally well. Volunteers are helping to plug the gap by assisting users who are pre-entry 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' (ESOL) learners so that the high demand in this area can be met. They also work very effectively with partners to make best use of each other's resources.

Safeguarding of children is well prioritised at all levels, and the systems and practices are well embedded in the centre. Recruitment and checks cover all staff, including external providers and volunteers. Risks assessments are completed to protect children, parents and carers and staff. All partners follow safeguarding practice and share information very effectively to protect children and families. The information available for staff and carers is a good reflection of the type of issues that may arise in the local community, due to cultural differences in approaches to safeguarding. Training and continuous development for staff in safeguarding is well planned and the centre also helps to train and advise their other partner organisations' staff.

Community cohesion and the inclusion of all families are very highly promoted and they have been particularly successful in integrating the Roma community. The centre supports a well-attended annual local neighbourhood festival, held at its site. The staff at the centre are from diverse backgrounds and reflect the composition of the local community. There is excellent use of data to monitor the cultural diversity of the staff and how their recruitment ensures equality of opportunity. Data are collected and used very well to check that all users and target groups are being reached. The centre is an extremely friendly and welcoming place. Many users outside the reach area prefer to attend the centre, and one such user explained, 'I can come here to the centre knowing I will not be judged'.

The centre works effectively with partners to deliver services. The health professionals and other partners sit on the advisory group meetings, which in turn feed into the delivery plan. The range of agencies at the centre share their information very well and ensure that there is good coordination of support for identified families receiving the services from more than one partner organisation. The childminder network is supported very well. Childminders and the children they

look after make good use of the centre's facilities. Users express high levels of satisfaction with the centre's work. Staff use a variety of ways to engage users, such as a free monthly prize draw which requires users to complete a satisfaction survey. Centre leaders recognise that the advisory board requires some further development to ensure the full involvement of parents and carers from the range of backgrounds in its reach area. However, the excellent work being undertaken to support the community clearly indicates that the centre provides outstanding value for money.

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	1
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	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Longsight centre on 5–6 July 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

During our visit, we looked at the centre and its resources, as well as its plans and documents. We talked to a number of you, the staff, partners that work with the centre and the professionals that work with you. We found the centre to be an extremely welcoming environment offering excellent support for you and your families. Staff are happy to 'go the extra mile' in everything they do. You contribute an enormous amount to the centre through the volunteering work that you do. We saw that the centre asks you regularly for feedback and always acts upon this feedback to improve the services they offer to you. Some of the feedback could be summarised better. You feel very much a part of the centre and you confidently voice your opinions and interests. Everyone was willing to share their experiences with us, and they are extremely positive, especially with regard to how much your confidence has improved, how well you are engaged in further learning – in some cases to achieve accredited qualifications. You told us that through the centre you have a better understanding of how your children learn and develop but you would benefit from more support with how to help you ensure your children continue to progress back in the home. You said you have excellent guidance and support on how to ensure the health of your child and how to keep them safe. You also said you feel the centre is like an extended family to you.

Your children are happy and secure in the centre and really enjoy the activities. The quality of the resources for you and your children are excellent and the outdoor play areas and garden are really appreciated by you. Your children are learning and developing very well. Some of you need support to better carry over the learning from the centre into the home. You also really enjoy learning and the family-based activities that bring the community together so well. The services have stopped you from feeling isolated. There is an excellent range of activities and services for you to choose from at this centre and many of you elect to come here instead of a more local children's centre. The centre is also very good at offering services at other venues, such as schools or GP surgeries so you can access them easily. The centre is very good at working with its partners in health, education and the community. They take a great deal of care in helping you to assess your needs and help you to improve the quality of your life. Many of you have gone on to further and higher education and also into paid work.

The people in charge of running the centre are doing an excellent job. Managers have worked very successfully to make sure that everything the children's centre does for you will make a difference to your families and the area in which you live.

Staff work very well as a team and are always looking at ways of how to improve services. They have developed new approaches to help them do this and give themselves challenging targets that are continuously checked. They make excellent use of resources. The manager makes very good use of the skills of the centre staff who come from very diverse backgrounds. Safeguarding children has a high priority and staff are well trained in this aspect. Centre staff produce guidance for you to help you to keep your family safe.

The centre does extremely well in including everyone and is great at promoting equality and celebrating the diverse group of users of the centre. Having interpreters readily available makes an enormous difference to how well you can access the services, as well as the crèche facilities when attending any training. There is much better community cohesion as a result of the centre's services and activities. All of you show respect for other users and support each other very well. The centre looks at data carefully so that staff understand clearly who is using the centre and what for. This information is used to make changes and improvements to meet the needs of particular groups.

We have asked the manager of the children's centre and the senior staff to look at how they can make things even better. The most important things to do are:

- help some of you to ensure your children carry on learning at home and build on what they have learned at the centre
- make sure that managers make best possible use of all the feedback you give them by sorting and presenting it a way that is easy to identify what is working well and how well you are being supported.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We are very grateful and we wish you every success in the future.

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