

Inspection report for Highgate Children's Centre (Thrunscoe)

Local authority	North East Lincolnshire
Inspection number	386971
Inspection dates	6–7 February 2012
Reporting inspector	Jean-Marie Blakeley

Centre leader	Gillian Bell
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	131257 Thrunscoe Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff and the coordinator from the centre, parents and representatives from North East Lincolnshire local authority. Inspectors also met with a number of partners including those from education, health, voluntary and private organisations. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Highgate Children's Centre is a phase 2 children's centre providing the full core offer of services. It is located on the site of Thrunscoe Primary School with outreach provision in Humberston and New Waltham. A children's centre coordinator manages this centre and one other centre as part of a hub.

Governance of the centre is by North East Lincolnshire Council with input from a senior management team made up of professional partners. A multi-agency locality team representing the community and professionals fulfils the role of an advisory board.

The centre serves a predominantly affluent, working community with specific pockets of deprivation. Data from the centre indicate that of the 1066 children under four-years-old, in the reach area, 20% live in workless households and 5% live in families that are in receipt of the childcare element of working tax credit.

The vast majority of local families are of White British heritage with a low minority ethnic population of 6%.

Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and abilities that are at or slightly below those found nationally.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

This is a good children's centre. The centre is at the heart of the community where families access good quality learning, care, guidance and support. The ambitious coordinator has inspired her team to prioritise the needs of key target groups. As a result, all outcomes are good and the centre represents good value for money. The clear evidence of improvements, strong leadership and management, and secure analysis of the strengths and areas to improve demonstrate a good capacity for continuous improvement.

Safeguarding is good. Staff have a good knowledge of child protection procedures. They are well trained and work effectively with other agencies to coordinate family support and to share relevant information. Users feel safe and confident when visiting the centre as it provides a warm, welcoming and friendly environment for everyone. Families adopt safe practices and healthy lifestyles. They eagerly participate in activity sessions such as 'Baby Massage' and 'Outdoor Play Whatever the Weather'. They learn about healthy foods to enhance their diets through participation in 'Toddler Chefs' and other healthy living courses.

The centre develops positive relationships with the community and its partners. The local authority provides secure data about the reach area, which the centre uses well to plan a wide range of activities across the hub. As a result, a high percentage of families at 79% engage with the centre. The centre is successful in engaging with its key target groups. For example, 78% of lone parents, 94% of teenage parents, and 79% of disabled children under four-years-old access services at the centre. However, the number of fathers engaging with the centre is low.

There is good promotion of equality and diversity. A range of festivals is celebrated throughout the year and displays around the centre reflect different cultures, ages, ethnicity and gender. This helps promote the centre as welcoming and inclusive. One lone parent said: 'I call the centre my lifeline; I don't know where I would be without the centre'.

Users make a positive contribution to the centre by volunteering and contributing to the parent's forum, consultations, surveys and session evaluations. Ten parents are currently either volunteering in the centre or on a work placement. One parent explained: 'I had a career interview which has helped me to decide on my career path. I can't believe all the courses at the centre are free.' However, few users are actively involved in making strategic decisions about the centre. Children make good progress in their personal and social development as they learn how to form positive relationships with adults and other children.

Children's achievement is good. In 2011, the Early Years Foundation Profile scores for children achieving more than 78 points in personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy increased by 3% to 71%. This exceeds the national and North East Lincolnshire average. At the same time, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers reduced from 26% to 22%. This is well-below the national average of 31%. However, the gap between boys' and girls' achievement is not sufficiently narrowing. Boys' achievement at 39% is considerably below that of girls at 61%. Boys achieve less well in communication, literacy and language skills. Adults' achievements are good. The majority of users that access the centre engage in relevant training or learning activities. Some adults gain literacy, numeracy or vocational qualifications.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should:
 - implement its plans to involve parents in strategic decision making through membership of the multi-agency locality team.
- Identify and implement additional strategies to help raise boys' achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores, particularly in communication, language and literacy.
- Develop strategies to increase the number of fathers engaging with the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes for children and parents are good and improving. Immunisation rates for children have improved with around 98% of all children being immunised. Families report that they are benefiting from the wide range of opportunities that the centre provides to promote their health and well-being. These include effective support on breastfeeding, healthy eating and physical activity. Effective targeting means that in the current year 80% of mothers of newborn babies have accessed breastfeeding support. As a result, the local rate of breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks has increased by 4% and is satisfactory. One parent said: 'The health and well-being course was fantastic; it gave me a real insight into portion control and helped prevent my child from becoming obese.' The level of obesity for Reception Year children, in the area, has declined from 9.25% in 2010 to 8.3% in 2011.

Families who previously had low confidence told inspectors that engagement with the centre has helped increase their self-esteem and belief in themselves. This is because of the carefully planned parenting programmes and good parenting support. As one parent said, 'There is always someone who will listen to you.' Another parent commented: 'The centre is a safe place to bring your children and in 'Toddler Chef', children learn about healthy foods and the importance of using knives safely.'

Families feel safe when using the centre and are confident to approach staff for support with a range of needs, including parenting, social isolation and personal safety. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework effectively to assess and plan support for individuals. The effective partnership with health visitors is successful in identifying those in need of early intervention and is increasing engagement with families, who may be vulnerable due to their circumstances. Outcomes for children on child protection plans and looked after children, are good because of the effective multi-agency working and carefully planned support.

Early Years Foundation Stage data show that outcomes have improved and at the same time, the gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers has narrowed. However, boys achieve less well than girls in particular in their communication, language and literacy. Many children make good progress from their starting points including disabled children and those with special needs. Most adults using the centre are developing their skills through adult learning activities. Parents report that this has increased their parenting abilities and their own educational achievement. One parent said: 'They have helped me set my own personal development goals; I am doing courses and gaining points so that I can go to university in the future.'

Families using the centre have positive relationships and treat one another with respect. The centre makes extensive use of consultations and surveys to help shape the provision. For example, parents were recently consulted regarding the introduction of a booking system for sessions. Most families say that they are happy with the centre and feel listened to when they suggest improvements. However, few users are currently involved in making strategic decisions, although the local authority plans to include parents on the recently formed multi-agency locality team, this has not yet been implemented.

Support provided by the centre helps to promote economic well-being. Children are encouraged to be active, inquisitive and independent learners in the range of activities provided. In addition, parents receive good advice and support in securing benefits, budgeting, accessing local training courses, volunteering and in seeking work. Case studies demonstrate that the centre has supported parents to gain new skills and subsequent employment. However, there is little evening or weekend provision to enable working parents, particularly fathers, to access the good advice and support available.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

<p>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</p>	<p>2</p>
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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?

2

The centre uses assessment well to identify the needs of the children and adults in the reach area. In the last year, it has prioritised increasing outreach into homes and targeting sessions to meet the needs of its key groups. Staff know the local area well. The centre has increased registrations, which includes most local children living in workless households. Involvement of other target groups is also good. For example, the majority of families from minority ethnic groups access activities within the centre. Effective planning, across the area hub, means that services and activities are well distributed to meet families' needs. Good partnerships with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies mean that assessments of child and family needs are comprehensive. The strong partnership links with health services means families receive early intervention and support. Each family visited at home or attending on-site groups or clinics receives effective tailored care, guidance and support. At times of crisis, families feel well supported. One parent commented, 'The support from the centre has helped me manage my children's behaviour in a more positive way and not lose my temper.'

Learning and development are at the heart of the work of the centre. This is because staff have a good knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage, which results in careful planning and monitoring of children's learning. Child and parent activities, such as the 'Learning through Play' group are effective because they are purposeful, engaging and make use of the excellent environment. The centre celebrates the personal development and achievements of all children and parents as they learn a range of new skills and/or gain qualifications. Retention rates on literacy and numeracy courses are excellent at 100%.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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?

2

The centre is moving forward because of the determination of the coordinator to improve outcomes for local children and their families. Teamwork is effective and accountability arrangements are clear and understood by the whole staff team. High expectations are clearly communicated to staff who are inspired to drive forward and improve services. The local authority provides an extensive range of data on the centre's priorities. The centre uses this well to plan and evaluate the delivery and impact of its services.

The centre actively seeks partnerships with parents, statutory, private and voluntary groups in order to enhance opportunities for local families, particularly the key target groups. As a result, partners contribute effectively to centre priorities and services are cohesive.

Inclusion is central to the centre's work. Consequently, gaps in attainment, such as that between the achievement of children in disadvantaged areas and those in more affluent areas are narrowing. The centre promotes the inclusion of disabled children and demonstrates a clear understanding of how to support their learning.

The centre has an effective safeguarding policy, as well as clear policies regarding a range of related safety issues such as home visiting and lone working. Clear information sharing protocols are closely adhered to and links with social care are effective in safeguarding children. Effective vetting and criminal record bureau checks for staff are fully in place and consequently, they are suitably qualified and experienced. Managers and all staff have undertaken appropriate safeguarding training. In addition, there are regular discussions about child protection within the staff team, at senior management and locality team meetings.

Members of the multi-agency locality team and the senior management team play an increasingly effective role in supporting, monitoring and developing the centre. Senior leaders, including those from the local authority, systematically monitor and evaluate practice and outcomes. The centre seeks and uses the views of parents and children to develop the provision. However, the local authority has not yet implemented plans to include parents in strategic decisions through representation on the recently formed multi-agency locality team.

Effective use of resources and engagement with the majority of families, which is leading to good outcomes for families, represents good 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	2
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The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures 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	2
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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Highgate Children's Centre (Thrunscoe) on 6 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for talking to us, particularly those of you who came in especially to see us, your views helped the inspectors learn about the difference the centre is making to your lives.

The local authority is providing the centre with detailed information about the needs of the area. The centre uses this, and its ongoing assessment, to provide a good programme of activities, which meet the needs of the families in the area well. The centre provides good value for money.

The staff are well-trained professionals dedicated to getting the best start for your children and helping you do the best for your families. They help you to keep your families safe and work well to help get you the support you need in times of crisis. Staff and volunteers in the centre are carefully checked to ensure they are suitable to work with you. As case studies show, staff are good at helping families to cope with serious problems. The centre has built up strong relationships with its professional partners, such as midwives and health visitors,

which ensure that those of you in particularly difficult circumstances get the support you need. You praised the good care, guidance and support you receive at the centre, and we agree it is good.

You told us about the difference the centre is making to your children's learning and how you enjoy the many courses that are available to you. Inspectors agree that your children's achievement is good and that the centre is making a good contribution to this because of the enjoyable sessions it runs. Children's achievements in your area are increasing each year but boys do not achieve as well as girls. We have asked the centre to find ways to help boys increase their achievements especially in communication, language and literacy. Some of you told us that you have gained qualifications for the first time, which has boosted your confidence. Some parents have become volunteers and some of you are working towards going to university in the future.

The centre provides good support for breastfeeding, which is helping to increase the numbers of babies that are breastfed. The immunisation rates for babies and children in your area are high. Baby massage is helping to form even closer bonds between mums and babies. The 'Toddler Chefs' group helps children learn about healthy foods and to use equipment, such as knives safely. You enjoy the healthy living and parenting courses and this in turn has a good impact in helping you keep your families safe and healthy. The number of children that are obese by the time they are in Reception Year at school is reducing.

The local authority provides good information and data to the centre so that they can plan their provision and make sure they reach the families most in need of support. The centre uses this information well and the number of families accessing the centre is good. The centre successfully engages with teenage parents, lone parents, minority ethnic groups, disabled children and workless families. However, few fathers engage with the centre. We have asked the centre to look for new ways to increase the number of fathers that access the good support and opportunities it offers.

The centre listens to you and consults with you extensively in order to plan its activities and improve its provision. Some of you attend the parent's forum to share your views. However, few parents are involved in making strategic decisions, as the local authority has not yet implemented plans to include parents in the recently formed multi-agency locality team. We have asked the centre to find ways to address this. Thank you once again.

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