

Inspection report for Heathfield Children's Centre

Local authority	Richmond upon Thames
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Linked school if applicable	Heathfield Infant 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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with staff and managers and talked to parents, children, representatives of the local authority and partner organisations. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The children's centre is located in a largely residential area of relative disadvantage to the west of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. It was designated as a children's centre in 2008 and shares a building with Heathfield Infant School.

The centre serves a more culturally, socially and economically diverse community than in the borough as a whole. The large majority of families are from White British backgrounds and a relatively high proportion are from minority ethnic groups, mostly of Asian origin. There is a high level of unemployment in the reach area, a high number of families claiming benefits and a high percentage of lone and young parents. Children who attend the centre show low levels of skills on entry to early years provision.

The centre provides a range of on-site and community-based 'Out and About' activities for families of children mainly aged five and under. In addition, a weekend session caters for children with social and communication difficulties aged three to seven. There is no on-site childcare provision. Core services are enhanced by others commissioned from the children's centre and those commissioned by the local authority.

The work of the centre is led by a centre manager. The staff team comprises one full-time and one part-time outreach worker, one full-time and one part-time children's centre coordinator and a full-time Way to Work apprentice. A multi-agency advisory board steers the centre's work.

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

Heathfield Children's Centre provides good support to families in the reach area, including target groups and those who are identified as in most need of intervention and support. Some aspects of its work are outstanding. Outcomes for families are good. Parents develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and children are encouraged to make healthy eating choices. Adults report feeling very safe in the centre and they know how to ensure the safety of their family. Children are safeguarded very well and they behave in safe ways. Children make good progress in their learning and parents feel confident in supporting their children to learn. The centre is an important part of the community and attendance is increasing. Children show good personal development, the views of families inform the development of services and the parent forum is involved increasingly in the management of the centre. Families are improving their economic stability and independence.

Provision of good quality meets the needs of families well. 'Out and About' sessions in the community engage isolated and vulnerable parents successfully and high-quality, consistent and free childminding secures good attendance. Skilful observation helps children to learn and develop well and sessions for adults are relevant and engaging. The quality and range of care, guidance and support for families is outstanding. Without exception, parents value staff who are highly approachable, sensitive to individual needs, treat them with respect, listen sympathetically and offer unfailing support.

The centre is uncompromising in its ambition to improve the lives of families in its reach area. Governance and accountability are clear and effective, as are the leadership and management of the centre. Priorities are well focused and services are matched well. Successful outreach work, effective multi-agency work using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), targeted sessions such as the Young Parents Group, and high quality professional supervision increasingly secure preventative action for the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach families. This reduces the need for intervention at a later stage.

The centre offers good value for money. It is used well and activities are well attended. Resources are managed well, commissioning meets stringent requirements, quality assurance is rigorous and the expertise of staff is used to good effect. Indoor and outdoor space is used effectively and creatively. Concerted action to promote equality has resulted in sustained improvement in the engagement of vulnerable groups, including from minority ethnic communities. Barriers to access are minimised through services that are promoted visually and good provision for disabled children or those who have special educational needs. The safeguarding of children and adults is paramount and the centre exemplifies high-quality practice. Partnerships with all key agencies, local services and community networks are well established and highly productive. Families are entirely convinced of the importance of the centre in the local community. Most express high levels of satisfaction and confidence in its work, and some report that it has changed their lives.

The centre has high ambitions for excellence. It has made good inroads into target groups and understands fully what still needs to be done. Its commitment and expertise to secure further improvement and to bring about sustainable change for vulnerable and hard-to-reach families is good, as is its capacity and that of the advisory board to do so. Rigorous self-evaluation, informed well by audit and feedback from families, shows a thorough understanding of strengths and weaknesses. A comprehensive action plan shows clear and well-targeted priorities, realistic and challenging targets and accurate analysis of the needs of families in the reach area. However, evaluation and planning for the future have not formally involved the centre's advisory board. The centre does not record interventions with parents or their longer-term impact on children; consequently, agencies are not fully aware of successful strategies for engaging individual families. Additionally, some health data held by the local authority are not readily available to the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should systematically share data on health outcomes with the centre.
- The centre should formally involve the advisory board in evaluating the impact of its work and in plans for its future development.
- The centre should include a record of interventions with parents, alongside the longer-term tracking of their impact on children, so that agencies are aware of strategies that engage individual families successfully.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Sessions such as Healthy Cooks and Cookie Tots promote healthy eating and equip parents to cook easy, cheap and nutritious meals. A wide variety of fresh fruit freely available in the reception area promotes healthy eating choices for children. Exercise classes for children improve coordination and Yoga helps parents to stay calm when

managing their children. Integrated health services, of which there is a wide range, show good outcomes for the health and well-being of parents and good progress in communication skills for children. Take-up of immunisation for children under five and for smoking cessation is promoted strongly but data on outcomes held by the local authority are not shared systematically with the centre. Advice on domestic violence and relationship counselling shows highly successful outcomes for some very vulnerable families.

Security on entry to the site protects families very well and useful information and advice on safety is readily available. The accredited parenting and nurturing course provides comprehensive coverage of safeguarding and safety within and outside homes. First-aid training equips parents to deal with emergencies well. Families who are experiencing difficulties in their lives develop confidence to manage difficult and sometimes threatening relationships to keep their children safe. The centre contributes strongly and successfully to improved outcomes for families supported by the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and children on child protection plans.

All activities for adults, for example, haircare, as well as activities for adults and children, for example, Stay and Play sessions, are highly relevant, engaging and culturally appropriate. Children make good progress from their starting points, in part from the inclusion of the early learning goals in activities on offer. They are increasingly well prepared for transition to nursery and are developing the skills that will help them in school. Parents using the centre report very positive and enjoyable experiences which have increased their confidence in their parenting skills and raised their self-esteem. Good support for re-engagement in learning results in good take-up of accredited courses.

Adults using the centre treat each other with respect and value new friendships. Children show good personal development and socialise increasingly well. For children with additional learning needs, Kidzactive portfolios show good improvement in communication and social skills. The views of parents are taken very seriously and result in prompt and effective action, such as in the replacement of a weak tutor for adult courses. Representatives on the parent forum are supported strongly by staff and show increasing involvement in decision-making, such as in community events.

Parents have good information, advice and guidance for continuing in learning, good signposting to relevant services and good access to accredited courses. Registered childminders enable parents to attend regularly in the knowledge that their children are receiving high quality and continuous care. The Wishes project for parents with low skill levels shows good progression to further learning or work. Some parents volunteer as a step to employment and work is well under way with a more formal programme of volunteering.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families.

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?

2

Successful outreach work and effective multi-agency partnerships result in staff knowing the needs of families very well. Good assessment of adults and children and robust quality assurance ensure that the range and quality of services meet, and continue to meet, their needs. Parents value ease of access to sessions held in community locations which include Messy Play and Singing Hands. All activities show good engagement of adults and children and good learning.

The centre promotes purposeful learning strongly. Skilful observation helps children to learn and develop well. Sessions for adults, for example for literacy, numeracy and language skills, are rated highly and others are valued for their practical and useful advice, for example, in promoting good tooth care. Personal development and achievement are celebrated well, for example in celebratory lunches and by attendance certificates.

The centre has gained the trust and confidence of some particularly vulnerable families. They show confidence in turning to the centre for help and they feel exceptionally well supported when doing so. Outreach workers provide exceptional levels of personalised support in times of crisis, for example in helping parents to contact council services in an emergency and for parents under extreme stress. This secures the well-being of many and steers them to sustained independence very well through outreach agreements which set clear and realistic goals.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre provides good value for money. A multi-agency advisory board, which includes parental representation, offers suitable advice although it has not been sufficiently involved in evaluating the overall impact of the centre or in plans for its future. The centre's priorities reflect those of the local authority and health agencies and clear links between strategic planning and service provision secure at least good outcomes. Partners offer a good range of high quality, integrated provision to meet local need. Services commissioned by the borough, for example domestic abuse advice and the national initiative to support children's language acquisition, are targeted very well, as are those commissioned by the centre.

Incisive leadership and the commitment, enthusiasm and considerable expertise of staff who are rightly proud of what they achieve, raise the aspirations of many parents. Comprehensive data, strong and productive links with partners, rigorous evaluation and regular and systematic feedback from families are used very well to provide services of good quality which secure good outcomes. Contracts for commissioned services contain clear and measurable outcomes and quality assurance of activities is robust.

Diversity is celebrated well, for example, when children make Mardis Gras pancakes. Specialist sessions, for example Kidzactive, target children with additional learning needs and parents of disabled children are signposted to two specialist children's centres. In some sessions, for example Singing Hands, spaces are reserved for targeted families and others, for example Move with Me, are closed to vulnerable groups. Outreach support includes an Asian women's refuge.

Strong partnerships with key agencies promote outstanding safeguarding. Procedures for safe recruitment and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks meet statutory requirements. Children's safety and well-being are assured, as is the safety of outreach staff when making home visits. All staff, including childminders who offer on-site childcare, have regular and extensive training in safeguarding. They are highly alert to incidents of bullying, to the safeguarding of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and of child protection concerns. Commissioned services demonstrate adherence to safeguarding procedures as part of tendering.

Protocols and practice secure effective safeguarding for children in need and those on child protection plans. The centre has excellent risk assessment systems for all services, activities and trips. Services are evaluated in line with safeguarding policies and procedures and service providers produce regular risk assessments.

Multi-agency work with families through the CAF is highly effective and shows at least good and sometimes excellent outcomes with particularly vulnerable families, for example in the prevention of family breakdown. Services are fully integrated, for example the inclusion of health in the parenting and nurturing programmes, and result in provision that impacts positively on all outcome areas. The centre is developing more formal links with childminders and independent and voluntary providers to promote its work further.

Parents who use the centre are involved routinely and well in decision-making and in the design of services, for example the sensory garden and the twins club. They regularly evaluate the effectiveness of what is provided and this is used to improve provision and to set up new services. High levels of engagement with target groups in the reach area, for example with young mothers, show thorough understanding of their needs. Considerable success in engaging them in well-targeted services both in the centre and in 'Out and About' outreach locations has reduced isolation and improved their confidence and self-esteem.

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 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	1
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	1

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Heathfield Children's Centre on 22 and 23 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall and some of its work as outstanding.

We would like to thank you for spending time talking to us. Here is a brief summary of what we found:

The centre supports you well. It helps to keep you and your children healthy. You told us that you feel very safe in the centre and that you know how to keep your family safe. We agree. Your children are also very safe and they are behaving safely. Your children make good progress in their learning and we heard that many of you are now confident in helping them. We saw that your children get on with other children well. We have many examples of the way that your views make a difference to what the centre offers so that you get the most out of your time there. We found that the group of parents who represent you are getting more involved in the management of the centre. We also found that courses you can attend help some of you to continue with other courses or to get jobs.

The sessions held in places near to the centre help those of you without transport to attend activities. You told us how much you appreciate the good and free childminding that lets you concentrate on your learning. We agree. We found that all sessions and activities for adults and children are good and that they meet your needs well. Staff observe your children carefully and this helps their learning and development. We joined sessions for adults which were very interesting and gave good and practical advice. We found that you are offered outstanding care and guidance and we agree with you that staff are very approachable and always offer you good support.

The centre provides good value for money and we agree with you about its importance in your community. It is determined to improve the lives of families that use it and it is having good success in doing so. It is well led and clear about what it needs to do to improve and how to do it. We found the centre very welcoming and very attractive.

To help the centre to improve further we have suggested that:

- the local authority shares information about what difference the centre is making to the health of families
- the centre formally involves the group of people that advises it in decisions about how good it is and in plans for its future
- the centre notes how successful it has been with families as it tracks the progress of your children so that it is clear how you and your children have been helped.

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