

Inspection report for Hexham Children's Centre

Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	383449
Inspection dates	23 - 24 February 2012
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	122203 Hexham East First 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.

Report Published: March 2012

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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 co-located first school 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 senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with parents and service users and representatives from the local authority. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Hexham Children's Centre is a phase two centre which opened in April 2009. It is managed by the local authority and based on the same site as Hexham East First School. It provides services from the main site and two satellite sites within the community to a population made up from a broad range of economic and social circumstances. The Hexham area is mainly rural. A large majority of families live in areas within the 70% least deprived in the country, with pockets of relative deprivation.

The proportion of children aged under four years of age who are living in households where no-one is working is low. The vast majority of families within the area served by the centre are of White British heritage.

The centre provides a wide range of supporting services, incorporating a crèche, outreach and home visiting, drop-in health support, parenting courses, volunteering opportunities and workshops. The centre has an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and parents. Most children enter early education with a range of skills higher than 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Hexham Children's Centre meets the needs of its users well. A large majority of families in the Hexham area are registered with the centre. Attendance rates at the centre and its many other early years services in the community are good and increasing steadily. The centre's main site is used to its full capacity and the centre leaders recognise there is a need to create more space so that more families can benefit from the provision. The centre offers good support to families and young children. The staff team understand thoroughly the needs of each individual and make it their highest priority to use this information skilfully and sensitively to improve outcomes.

Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. Staff are very well trained and experienced in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. This is used very effectively to ensure families feel safe at the centre, at home and when out in the community. Families who face the greatest challenges and those with complex needs are very well supported because staff work very effectively with health partners and the local authority. The centre and its key partners engage very well to provide high quality services to families with children subject to child protection plans, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and those looked after by the local authority.

Families are attracted to the centre because it is a busy and exciting place to be. The centre has become well established and has a positive reputation in the community for making real differences to people's lives. Families visiting the centre enter a warm and inviting atmosphere, where they are welcomed and made comfortable. Families who use the centre are empowered to make important decisions and changes which have significant, lasting benefits.

The centre offers well-coordinated support to families living with disability. Staff, volunteers and partner professionals meet each week to provide structured play and development activities for children with Down syndrome and support for their parents. This group is very well attended and has established a positive reputation across the region.

The local authority provides the centre with detailed information and data about the population it serves, which it uses well to prioritise work. Careful attention is given to seeking the views of children and using this information creatively to develop services. The centre improves the quality of what it does through careful analysis and by listening to the families and partners it works with. This analysis reveals that outcomes for an overwhelming majority of centre users and the community are improving because of their contact with the centre. The centre has exceeded many of the measurable targets set for it by the local authority.

The well-trained staff team have a good understanding of the needs of families experiencing challenges and are positive role models. A high priority is given to the promotion of health, well-being and development of communication skills. Early intervention with additional support is provided effectively where the need is identified. Each activity is well planned to ensure outcomes for those using the centre are improved. The centre has a fleet of custom built play vans which are used well to ensure families in rural isolation can engage and benefit from the centre's work.

The wider community support the work of the centre through attending outdoor events and open days, volunteering schemes and well coordinated health promotion campaigns. The centre successfully supports parents to become mentors for new parents as part of its valuable long-term strategy to promote sustainable benefits, improved outcomes and greater social cohesion. The centre is a very effective partner in the local regeneration project which has significantly reduced crime and anti-social behaviour, and improved the quality of life in Hexham. Equality and diversity are promoted effectively.

Partnership arrangements are strong and effective with all key partners. The local authority and health partners use their expertise to ensure all services are thoroughly integrated and very well coordinated. The centre provides a broad range of courses and programmes to stimulate further interest in child development and parenting. The centre gives a satisfactory level of service to adults interested in seeking paid work, training and education and recognises this is an area to improve further.

The centre has good capacity to improve because there is a sharp focus on performance to ensure families with the highest needs receive high quality support. In addition, the whole staff and leadership team are self-critical and constantly search for ways to do things better.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase registration and user participation through more effective promotion of the centre's provision and by extending the space available to accommodate larger groups and activities.
- Improve the level of service offered to adults interested in seeking paid work, training and education.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Strong collaboration with health visitors enables users to receive immediate, professional advice on many issues including breastfeeding and weaning. This has resulted in a substantial increase in the sustained breastfeeding rate since 2009, with over four times as many mothers continuing to breastfeed than the Northumberland average. Effective working with many partner organisations ensures the obesity rate in Hexham is decreasing and is slightly lower than the county average.

Children are well prepared for school because they make good progress from their starting points in developing skills that will help them in the future. Transition is supported well and Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores show steady improvement. The gap between the lowest 20% of children's scores and the rest is successfully being narrowed. The centre works effectively with speech and language experts helping parents increase their awareness of the importance of listening and talking to their children.

Services are accessible to all users and are well attended. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well at the centre in sessions such as 'Fake-aways' where parents learn to make healthy meals. One parent told us, 'We have made really tasty food which is good for you and much cheaper than take-aways.' Parents and the wider community benefit from effective encouragement and guidance from the centre staff which helps them make important decisions about immunisations, exercise and diet. The centre has successfully obtained several community grants to develop outside areas for activities, such as growing vegetables and flowers.

The CAF is very well understood by the staff. Evidence shows there are sustained improvements in the engagement with young parents and fewer accidents in the home. There are significant improvements to the quality of life for all users and particularly so for groups with circumstances that make them vulnerable and for disabled children. Services for users who have complex needs are precise and effective. Fathers are targeted effectively and become positive role models in the community. Initiatives have been introduced to ensure the centre remains attractive to fathers, such as the 'Dads audit' and the very popular monthly 'Saturdads' group.

Children learn to manage and take risks safely through play and exploration. The centre is a particularly safe place and children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and each other. The majority of parents improve their parenting skills and have confidence to share any concerns with staff.

Parents make good progress in their personal development, well-being and self-confidence. Adult education and family learning sessions enable those who participate to make positive and significant improvements to their lives. The 'Moving on up' course is very effective because it has helped parents consider their options for the future. However, although the number of adults achieving accredited qualifications is improving, it remains low. Opportunities for volunteering at the centre are well structured and parents are able to gain very useful work experience.

Parents who felt isolated within the community thrive at the centre and begin to demonstrate positive behaviour and develop positive relationships. Parents are well supported to express their views about how the centre is managed and are very active in their work on the advisory board and parents' forum.

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	1
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.	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre and its partners work effectively to ensure assessments of the challenges faced by families or individuals are precise and well informed. Support is tailored well to meet individual need and family circumstances, and staff carefully measure the impact and value of the separate courses and programmes. The centre has well-integrated services which are effective in ensuring arrangements to monitor and promote good health and help children learn and develop are of high quality.

Programmes and services are coordinated very well so that parents can access them at a time that suits them best. The centre has high expectations of all users and provides a good range of services which match the changing needs of the community. Staff are very successful in engaging users, particularly those whose needs are greatest. They ensure that programmes are available for users with additional needs or disabilities. One father said: 'The centre has helped me understand my child's disability. The support we get is very positive and just what we need'.

The centre and its staff have a significant impact on the improvement of early years services throughout the community. They share their expertise and provide strong support to help other providers and childminders develop and improve. Participation rates are good and increasing and evaluations are very positive.

Outreach work is very well organised and there is valuable work undertaken to support families in their own homes, particularly families with a new baby who are provided with fully comprehensive details of the services offered through the centre and its partnerships, including a short promotional film. The centre ensures families in remote areas benefit from the very attractive play-vans and the activities they provide. The whole staff team are well-regarded by those who use the centre because of their determination to recognise and understand users' needs.

A culture of respect is common across all of the services offered by the centre. One parent said: 'The staff here do not judge you but they understand the type of support you need and they make sure it improves things for the whole family'.

Staff are trusted and users have confidence in their professionalism and the effective support they give. Families using the centre receive good care and the staff team and their partners provide personalised support which is effective. All users at the centre are recognised for their individuality. They are made to feel special and this supports the development of individuals and families.

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 has effective governance and accountability arrangements, which are highly visible, well established and understood. Operational management is effective and fosters a 'can-do' spirit which underpins the centre's success. Strategic planning strongly reflects local

and regional priorities and is heavily influenced by a determination to ensure everyone succeeds. The local authority provides good support to ensure the centre continues to improve.

The centre manager is a determined and inspirational leader who pays close attention to improving outcomes for users. She makes sure everyone knows how well they are doing and what is to be done to improve. Very close attention is given to measuring progress and performance.

All staff and volunteers receive high quality training and support in their work. Appraisals are effective and professional supervision is used to ensure child protection and counselling services are of the highest standards. The centre is performing well and is making good progress towards exceeding the majority of targets set for it by the local authority.

The use of data for target groups facing the greatest challenges is effective and well developed. There is effective evaluation, careful analysis and self-challenge. The centre fulfils all of its statutory duties, has full support of the community and provides good value for money. The effectiveness of partnerships to integrate services and improve outcomes for families is strong. The vast majority of partnerships have well established quality assurance and improvement initiatives which make sure they remain effective.

Safeguarding arrangements are thoroughly well developed and very effective. All staff have been subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check and have excellent levels of awareness and are trained well in child-protection procedures. The centre works in partnership very effectively with a range of agencies to protect children and vulnerable adults. Strong partnership working with the local fire and rescue service has given many families practical help to make their homes safer. In addition, staff provide very good advice and access to expert help for those experiencing domestic violence.

Everyone is made to feel very welcome at the centre. Equality and the inclusion of all children and their families are promoted effectively. Users with high levels of need are targeted very effectively and become the focus of well coordinated support.

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 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	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	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

The findings from the most recent inspection of Hexham East First School contained a judgement for overall effectiveness of good, and this has been taken account in this inspection report.

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 Hexham Children's Centre on 23-24 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We enjoyed our visit to your centre and wish to thank those of you who helped us with our inspection work.

The children's centre provides a good range of services which help children and families to learn, play together and have fun. Throughout our visit the people we met were very enthusiastic in telling us how the centre had helped them.

The centre holds many open days and community events where everyone is invited to visit and learn about the many different things you can do, including the stay and play sessions, activities to help with speaking and listening and the wonderful art and crafts produced. The wider community supports the centre because they can see that it works well.

We were particularly impressed by the case studies that showed the difference that the centre is making. We really enjoyed speaking to you about the ways that things you do at the centre have changed some of ways you do things at home.

We found the centre to have many strengths, including the opportunities for so many of you to get involved in helping your children read, and the actions taken to support you and your

children's safety and well-being. The centre is working very closely with many organisations such as health, schools and social care professionals to improve the range of services that are available to you.

We also saw how effectively you are helping to run the centre, both as volunteers and through 'Our Voice' and the advisory board. The centre also helps many people to make better choices about diet and exercise which has had a major impact on improving lifestyles.

Children make good progress because there is a wide range of activities. This helps them to be ready for their move to school. The centre staff make sure they check whether you have enjoyed any courses or sessions in the centre and they respond by making changes based on your comments.

The centre offers an increasing range of programmes aimed at improving the health of people in your local communities. It is very good at helping new mothers who choose to breastfeed their babies. It tells them about the help available on breastfeeding from parents who have successfully breastfed their own children and know the good things and the concerns from experience.

Some parents explained just how important the centre is in their family's lives. They told us that staff listen to them and help them to get the right help and support. The support is provided quickly and professionals and others work closely together to support families and children. This includes teenage parents and families with disabled people.

We found the arrangements to keep you and your families safe to be outstanding. The parents we spoke to describe the centre as providing a safe and welcoming environment; they are confident that their children will be secure and well cared for.

We found that the care, guidance and support provided for families are good. The centre leader has very strong procedures to make sure that staff and volunteers are well trained and suitable to work with you and your children.

We have asked the centre to provide more opportunities and advice for those of you who want support to get a job, learn new skills or increase your education. We have also asked them to look at ways of making more space at the centre so that more families can benefit from the good services on offer.

The centre has shown that it is successful and has made big improvements to the lives of many people. The staff at the centre do whatever they can to make sure that families enjoy themselves and benefit from the courses and groups.

Thank you once again for sharing your views with us. We wish you and your families all the best for the future.

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