

# Inspection report for Heath Lane Children's Centre

Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	362462
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Sheelagh Barnes AI

Centre governance	Heath Lane Nursery School Governing Body
Centre leader	Mrs Anita Harris
Date of previous inspection	N/A
Centre address	Heath Lane Hemel Hempstead HP1 1TT
Telephone number	01442 261043
Fax number	01442 255939
Email address	manager.heathlane@hertschildrenscentres.org.uk

Linked school if applicable	Heath Lane Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with centre manager, the head of the centre, and representatives of the local authority, parents, outreach workers, childminders and health workers.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Heath Lane is a phase 2, children's centre that offers full core provision. It shares a site with Heath Lane Nursery School. The head of the centre is also the head of the Nursery School and has been in post for just over one year. There is also a centre manager, who is responsible for the centre's organisation. Levels of attainment of children on entry to the nursery are broadly in line with those typical for their age. The great majority of the families who use the centre are from White British backgrounds. Levels of deprivation in the area range from the bottom 30% nationally, to relatively un-deprived families. Around 10% of children who use the centre come from homes where no one is in work and families receive benefits. The centre is funded by local authority and children's centre monies. Space for activities at the centre base is limited. Some services are run on site, but the majority are at a range of different venues in the children's centre area. During holidays and at weekends the Nursery building and gardens are used by the centre for stay and play and 'dads' and children's' groups. The range of activities overall, include local community baby clinics, child development checks, links with health visitors, speech therapist, breast feeding support and special needs support groups. The local authority has allocated overall responsibility for running the children's centre to the governing body of the nursery. This is done through a Children's Centre board.

## 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

The centre meets the needs of children and families in the area satisfactorily. Those who use the facilities, including holiday activities, are pleased with the work the centre does and are enthusiastic supporters. The venues are bright and attractive and staff are friendly and welcoming. Links with the full range of the community, including hard-to-reach and vulnerable families are identified areas for improvement by centre leaders.

The work to ensure equality of opportunity is satisfactory, as is the work to promote safeguarding. The proportions of children in the area and surrounding parts of the county with child protection plans are high, compared to national percentages. However, the numbers to whom the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) applies is relatively low. The centre is leading the way towards using CAF assessments amongst the adjacent children’s centres and outreach support workers. The centre does some good work to promote health and safety, such as running healthy eating courses and a greatly appreciated first aid course for parents. However, some other aspects of improving health for children, such as courses for parents to help with cessation of smoking are not run by the centre. Instead, parents are sign-posted to other providers for this. Similarly, advice and support in building skills to get back to work, such as links with Jobcentre Plus or training to get accredited qualifications are not run from the centre, but parents are guided towards the provision elsewhere.

The centre has a satisfactory capacity to improve provision still further. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate. However, it lacks rigour to provide information for strategic development. This is known to the centre leaders. In addition, there is too little systematic measurement of the impact of the outcomes of activities and advice to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness. For example, routine checks are not made to follow up on the outcomes for families signposted to other services. Plans for improvement are satisfactory, but do not always build upon careful evaluation of the most vital aspects that need to be addressed in order to raise standards further. The centre manager is working to resolve this and has identified use of tracking

information as an area for further development. Leaders are proactive and take swift action to address identified shortfalls, such as in documentation for health, safety and safeguarding, which has been recently reviewed and updated following the inspection of the Nursery School. Those who work at the centre are determined to improve provision and all work together well as a team. They have identified the need to gain views from a wider range of the parents and carers that live in the area. Very few parents, as yet, have attended the advisory board or parents' forum to give their views on how to improve the centre further. The centre's development plan highlights the forthcoming focus on enlisting more parents to the board and parents' forum, so that decisions are more representative of the needs of the whole community.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Collect and collate data systematically to measure the impact of the centre's work.
- Use information from this to plan strategically to ensure greater efficiency.
- Involve parents more actively in planning the work of the centre.
- Match services more effectively to the needs of the vulnerable and hard to reach.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>3</b>
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Those who use the children's centre regularly are emphatic that the friendly atmosphere and approachability of staff are key factors in encouraging people to come back. Parents say such things as 'The people who work here are easier to approach than those in other agencies when you want help and advice'. Those who attend activities are routinely asked for their opinion of how useful these have been. However, opportunities for parents and carers to make a positive contribution to decision making is too limited and an area already identified for improvement by centre leaders.

Health outcomes for children and families that the centre serves are satisfactory. The sessions that are run promote healthy lifestyles, through activities such as breast feeding and healthy eating, and are much enjoyed. The safety and wellbeing of children is at the heart of the centre's work and care is taken to ensure that policies are put into practice. One of the outreach workers has recently trained to run a Family Links parenting programme. Parents who attended the first course say they feel 'calmer and better prepared' as a result. The numbers of children in the surrounding areas with a child protection plan is high. However, there is no data to indicate if any of these are in the area served by the children's centre itself.

Enjoyment and achievement is satisfactory. Children in the nursery make good progress. However, the progress made by parents and carers in developing skills and qualifications is not as strong. Support for parents who wish to extend and further develop their skills and qualifications is mainly in the form of sign-posting to other agencies. Some of these directions have positive outcomes and the centre hears back from a small number of parents with whom they have continuing links. However, on many other occasions, the outcomes of advice remain unknown.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>3</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>3</b>
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Assessment is used satisfactorily to identify the needs of those who use the children's centre and evaluate their progress. Centre leaders are aware, however, that there are sections of the community, particularly the most vulnerable, who would benefit from the services that are offered, but who are reluctant to come to activities. Outreach sessions with individual families are beneficial and appreciated greatly. Those who have been supported in this way speak emotively of the value these services have been to them and their children.

For children in the Nursery, the assessment of their progress is good. The information is then used to plan activities to meet children's individual needs well. There are a number of success stories of parents and carers who are now frequent visitors to the centre and who talk enthusiastically about the different sessions the centre runs. The achievements of those who attend courses, such as first aid, are celebrated. Activities are popular and matched to the interests of parents and families who know the centre and its work. Attendance numbers are high at some events, such as those during holidays and on a Saturday. However, at other courses, registration is low and in some cases not all those who sign up for activities attend. The parents and carers who do attend enjoy courses and fill in evaluations positively.

However, the centre does not seek evaluations from those who choose not to come. While the staff signpost parents and carers to other agencies for help in seeking work or gaining qualifications, the outcomes for these groups are not tracked systematically to see what works well and what does not. As a result, leaders are aware that they have minimal information to use in modifying or improving services.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

The leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory. There are satisfactory links with other agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus. Staff training is targeted towards developing skills and services further. One of the real strengths of senior leaders is their honest evaluation of the current strengths of the work being done and the areas for improvement. Governance is satisfactory. Some governors are awaiting further training to help them to fulfil their role with greater confidence. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory, including those for child protection. The review and improvement of policies and practice are given suitably high priority. All required checks are made to ensure safe recruitment and regular updating of health and safety training undertaken. Centre leaders ensure sound use is made of skills of staff and resources of the centre.

Both the head of the centre and the centre manager are aware that more could be done to evaluate the impact of the centre's work and to use data to plan to meet the needs of all groups in the area. Senior leaders ensure a satisfactory range of enjoyable services are matched to the wants and needs of the families who use the centre. They are aware, however, of the need to extend the range of users to include more from vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups, such as lone parents and members of the growing Polish community. The centre provides satisfactorily for equality and diversity. Equality of opportunity is given suitably high regard and all staff work to ensure that activities are inclusive. The welcoming atmosphere is something parents are particularly pleased with. Provision to ensure disabled access is good. The centre has strong links with the support centre for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, with which it shares a site. The proximity and

ease of access to this provision is much appreciated by parents and beneficial to the children who attend. Celebration of cultural diversity is satisfactory.

A great deal of effort has recently been put into trying to advertise the centre's work to a wider part of the community, with little visible effect. The centre leaders are aware that plans to tackle this need to be reviewed, including plans to extend the numbers and range of parents and carers who contribute to evaluation and decision making. Value for money is satisfactory.

*These are the grades for leadership and management<*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

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

The inspection of Heath Lane Nursery School.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Heath Lane Children's Centre on 6–7 October 2010. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to those who gave up time to meet with us and tell us about your experiences at the Children's Centre and how it helps you. It was a great help to us. We agree with you that the activities are enjoyable and valuable for those who attend and that all of the staff involved in the centre work hard to help you and your children. You told us how friendly and approachable everyone is and how happy your children are and we agree with you. We could see how much those of you who use the centre regularly enjoy and benefit from all that it has to offer, such as the 'Dad's den building' in the garden area and 'hartbeeps'. We judge that the overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory, because many of the more vulnerable families in the town are not yet benefiting from the centre's work. One of the things we have asked the centre to do to be even more effective is to try to reach out to those people who live in the area who do not yet know of all that it does. I am sure some of you could help with this, as I know how enthusiastic you are about the centre's work.

We think that the range of things that the centre plans for you and your children is satisfactory. The centre helps you in many ways, by giving you advice on where to go to resolve any problems you have. We know the staff have even given practical help to some of you, to make your homes safer places for you and your children. We know that a small number of you, including some of you who spoke with us, already contribute to decision making at the centre through the parents' forum. We agree with the leaders of the centre that it would be a good idea to widen this group and for some of you to be on the advisory board as well. We agree with centre leaders, that your input into what the centre does is extremely important to make sure that what is planned really matches what you want.

All of the people who work at the centre are working hard, supported by the governors of the Nursery School, who have ultimate responsibility for the centre. The work that they do to assess what is needed and to plan to make things even better is satisfactory. They are helped by the local authority which provides comparative data to let the centre leaders assess how well things are doing. As yet, the centre is not making as much use as possible of this and other information to plan to meet the needs of everyone in the area that the centre serves or to measure the impact of what it is doing. The new leader of the centre and the centre manager have identified that these things could help the centre be even more effective in the future.



It was a pleasure to meet you during inspection and to hear your views. We hope that you, your children and many more families who live in and around the Heath Lane area will continue to enjoy and benefit from the many services the centre offers. Thank you for contributing to our evidence base by sharing your comments and thoughts so openly.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).