

Inspection report for Hollies Children's Centre

Local authority	Somerset County Council
Inspection number	366349
Inspection dates	19–20 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Jane Burchall HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Sara Hollock
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school, if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Hollies Children's Centre 142841

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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 registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the centre's management group, the local authority, the advisory board, partnership agencies, members of staff and users of the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its development plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre and the local community.

Information about the centre

Hollies Children's Centre was designated in September 2004 having developed from a social services family centre and centre of excellence. It is governed by Somerset County Council. The centre serves the Blackdown, Neroche, Blackbrook and Holway, Eastgate and Killams, and Mountfield areas of Taunton. It is located in a densely populated urban area. When originally set up, the centre served an area which was one of the 30% most disadvantaged in the country. Recent housing developments have altered the demographic nature of the local area and as a result of the changing community, the centre's reach area is now less disadvantaged. Despite this, there remain pockets of significant deprivation where families are either dependant on workless benefits or on low incomes.

Children's attainment on entry to both the Foundation Stage and school has typically been low, particularly in regards to their communication and language development

and their emotional development. The local population is mostly White British, with much smaller percentages of other minority ethnic groups such as those from Eastern European countries. Early years and childcare provision is provided by the centre and was inspected as part of this inspection.

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

Hollies Children's Centre provides satisfactory support to children and families accessing its services and, as a result, outcomes for users are beginning to improve. This is because staff work well as team and with partner agencies in order to provide integrated and cohesive services. The centre's management team are supported by an advisory board which recently evolved from a children's centre forum. Membership of the board reflects the range of key partners well. Although well placed to offer the centre support and advice, the board has yet to develop an approach which challenges the centre and drives improvement.

Centre staff have taken positive steps to include groups of the community known to them, including young parents and those from minority ethnic groups. They have used translation services in order to ensure some of their key publications are accessible to those who do not speak English, linking with local churches in order to distribute this information. Users receive high levels of care, guidance and support from staff. They truly value the advice and guidance provided by staff and report that they can turn to staff whenever they need to and are always listened to.

The safeguarding of children and vulnerable users is given good attention. Staff are well trained and knowledgeable in safeguarding issues. They monitor vulnerable children and adults well, enabling them to identify early where support is required. Through close working with social care partners, centre staff have successfully supported families to remain together. Parents' understanding of how to keep their children safe at home and on the road is well developed by activities provided by staff. For example, regular visits from both the fire department and the local police community support officers (PSCO) inform parents about the steps they should take to keep their children safe. Children in the nursery provision make extremely good progress as staff use their excellent knowledge of children's individual needs to plan

activities and experiences which effectively promote their development.

The local authority has recently undertaken significant work to improve the range of data they provide to support the work of children's centres. Currently much of this data is at local authority level which means it is not sufficiently linked to the centre's reach area for it to be meaningful. As a result, staff do not have a clear and accurate picture of the make-up of their community, which hampers effective strategic planning of services and the evaluation of success. Centre staff are successful at identifying the needs of its users and developing services to meet these. The number of families known to the centre, however, is only a small proportion of families in its reach area. As a result, staff do not have a comprehensive picture of the needs of families throughout their locality and families are not being given the same level of access to services.

Management and staff have a good understanding of where they need to focus their efforts in order to develop provision. Plans for the future are generally well targeted to bring about improvements, showing a satisfactory capacity for future development.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop the role of the advisory board so that they offer appropriate challenge to secure further improvement.
- With the local authority and partners, improve the quality of data to enable effective strategic planning and the measurement of success.
- Implement strategies to improve the numbers of families in the reach area who register with the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Parents are beginning to understand how to promote a healthier lifestyle for their families. The 'Cook and Eat' programme provides parents with guidance on diet and children's well-being through healthy eating recipe ideas and suggestions on how to keep active. Children in the nursery provision are also developing an understanding of healthy lifestyles; they have frequent access to a well-equipped outside play area and learn about where food comes from as they plant and grow their own vegetables. Staff support health professionals in their monitoring of children who present as being at risk from obesity. However, levels of obesity remain high within the locality and are increasing. Staff are aware of this and are developing provision further. For example, plans are in place to implement the 'Health, exercise, nutrition for the really young' (HENRY) programme.

Good attention is given to supporting the emotional development of both children and their parents. Users report increased levels of confidence because of the support

they receive from staff and the activities they engage in such as 'Positive body image awareness' and 'Making your experience count'. Those who are vulnerable to domestic violence receive good support from staff. Staff sensitively recognise where a user may be at risk and offer appropriate levels of help and support. Information is readily and discreetly available to users, for example, within toilet cubicles to enable information to be accessed privately.

Users' understanding of how to keep their children safe is developing well because of the good attention paid by staff to this outcome. Many users have successfully reviewed the safety of their home environment and paediatric first aid training is well received. Children in the nursery are becoming increasingly aware of their own safety. For example, they know that in order to gain entry into the setting a bell has to be used, and are keen to find out who is entering the building as they look at the closed circuit television (CCTV) images. Good use is made of circle times for children to explore with staff how they can keep themselves safe. Effective security measures within the centre mean that both children and users are kept safe; several users report that they choose to use Hollies Children's Centre as they feel safe and welcome.

Parents and children enjoy learning together in the 'Stepping Stones' and 'Tiny Toes' stay-and-play sessions. Centre staff, alongside the early years advisory team, have accurately identified a need to focus on developing the communication and emotional skills of children in their reach area. To respond to this a comprehensive strategy which includes baby signing, the implementation of the letters and sounds programme and the use of 'Somerset Total Communication', a local programme to support communication development, has recently been introduced. A good focus on supporting children's transitions helps them to settle well into school life. Some users have successfully accessed opportunities to engage in training and adult education programmes such as English, mathematics and first aid courses. Staff work hard to develop users' confidence in order that they are in a position to move on to achieving formal qualifications. In the most successful cases, this has led to users moving on to undertake university courses, improving their potential for future employment. Users report that their engagement with the centre is enjoyable, including those who were previously hard to engage.

Users say they feel valued by staff and are included in making decisions which affect the running of the centre. For example, they have been actively involved in the recruitment of a temporary nursery manager to cover maternity leave. However, opportunities for them to be further included in the day-to-day running of the centre, such as through volunteering their services, are currently limited. Users' economic stability is improving with the support they receive with managing their finances. Young parents learn about how to effectively budget through their involvement in planning and costing a trip to a local aquarium. However, relationships with Jobcentre Plus, through their local agent Maximus, are not yet sufficiently developed in order that users are provided with consistent guidance on seeking employment.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and 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	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	3

How good is the provision?

3

Centre staff know their families well. They are sensitive in their approach to engaging parents within the centre's activities. Good partnerships exist with a range of key agencies such as health and social care. This means that families who are identified as being in need of support are effectively referred to the children's centre where they access an appropriate range of services. However, a lack of data at local level means that the services offered by the centre are not based upon a sound analysis of the needs of the whole community.

Centre staff and outreach workers develop good relationships with users. Centre staff place much emphasis on celebrating the achievements of users and support users well in their educational and personal development through the provision of appropriate courses. This includes good opportunities for users to develop parenting skills through the peer early education partnership (PEEP) sessions, 'Triple P', a positive parenting programme, and the centre's 'nurturing programme'. Users speak highly of these opportunities; 'attending the courses made me a better parent' reflects the view of many users.

In times of crisis families feel well supported by the centre. They know that they can confidently turn to staff, who go out of their way to help. Users also value the opportunities the centre provides for them to make friends and socialise. One user reflected that without the centre she would have remained isolated at home and would possibly have become depressed. She reported that she believed she was 'truly lucky' to have made contact with the staff and users at Hollies Children's Centre, and has made 'friends for life'.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents	3
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and other users	
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre is led by a senior management team who are focused on seeking to improve and recognise the priorities for those who access their services. Leaders and managers know the centre's major strengths and areas for development. They have implemented satisfactory plans adequately aimed at improving relevant outcomes. Clear governance arrangements exist. The local authority regularly monitors the centre's progress against the areas for improvement and the advisory board provides appropriate levels of support. The board are aware that they currently rely too heavily on the senior leadership team to identify areas for development and need to develop their role as 'critical friend'. The local authority has recently placed significant emphasis on improving the quality of data it collects to support the work of the centre. They recognise that data is not yet sufficiently refined in order that centre staff have a rounded picture of the needs of the whole community or are able to monitor trends to help measure their success. Systems are in place to supervise the performance of centre staff through a defined line management structure.

The centre is a welcoming and safe environment for users and their children. Resources are suitably used to ensure outcomes for users are at least satisfactory. This includes the provision of outreach services, which have been effective in engaging some hard-to-reach members of the community. The centre is realistic in the way they allocate funding to ensure that users are provided with underpinning skills, knowledge and experience in order to improve their life chances, providing satisfactory value for money. For example, they recognise that users need to develop confidence and self-esteem before accessing return to work programmes. Staff are well trained in order that they can be effectively deployed to deliver a range of programmes. Users' views are sought in order to develop the range of provision within the centre and they have regular opportunities to evaluate the services. Staff and agencies act upon the lessons learnt and adapt services in order meet users' needs more effectively. For example, staff have made good links with local schools in order to improve the accessibility services within the community. However, staff have yet to fully exploit these links so that they are more successful in reaching out and engaging with a wider range of families.

Staff sufficiently focus upon promoting equality and diversity. Young parents are supported to access services through groups designed specifically for them. Adults

and children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive relevant, targeted support in order to improve their skills and life chances. Staff make appropriate use of the common assessment framework (CAF) when they consider a family may be in need of extra, targeted support. They contribute well to both the multi-agency information sharing in early years group (MAISEY) and the action review for vulnerable children in early years group (ARCHEY); ensuring children with particular needs obtain relevant services. Good relationships with social care and close working with families who are at risk result in children being effectively safeguarded. Those subject to a child protection plan receive good support and services, which has improved outcomes for children and enabled many to remain within their families. Robust recruitment procedures means that those working with children and their families are suitable.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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	3

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

This inspection took account of the inspection findings from the concurrent inspection of the early years provision at Hollies Children's Centre.

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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 Hollies Children's Centre on 19 and 20 January 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall, with some good aspects.

We agree with you that a great strength of this children's centre is the care, guidance and support that staff provide for you. You told us how much you value the support you are given; you can always rely upon staff to listen to you and help you when you most need it. The centre manager and staff work well together in order to provide you with services that make a difference to the lives of many of you and your children. They are committed to supporting your children's development and to developing your skills and confidence. Staff clearly know the families who attend the centre well and are able to ensure that the services they provide are suitable for you. However, the information given to them by the local authority does not yet provide enough information about the local area to enable staff and management to understand how they could help and support those people who do not yet come to the centre. At present, only a small number of families who live in the area access services at the children's centre and this number needs to increase.

Staff have developed some very strong partnerships with other professionals and organisations so that they can offer you the correct advice and guidance. They do all they can to make sure you and your children remain safe. This includes providing you with opportunities to think about how to make your homes safer and by ensuring that the centre is a safe and secure place to visit. Staff are well trained in how to safeguard children and management have taken the correct steps to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable.

We noticed that you make a contribution to the running of the centre. For example, you help make decisions through the parents' forum and have recently helped with the recruitment of a new temporary nursery manager. Staff and management listen to and value your ideas. Leaders and managers of the centre are determined to make your lives the best they can be. They are supported to do this by an advisory board who advises them well. We have asked the advisory board to do more to ensure that staff and management improve the services at the centre as much as they can.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your thoughts about the centre. We are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

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