

Inspection report for Highfield Children's Centre

Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	362497
Inspection dates	11–12 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Elaine Clinton

Centre governance	Lancashire County Council
Centre leader	Alison Hindle
Date of previous inspection	NA
Centre address	Wright Street Chorley Lancashire PR6 0SL
Telephone number	01257 262441
Fax number	01257 262441
Email address	head@highfield-nur.lancs.sch.uk

Linked school if applicable	Highfield Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY257768 Highfield Cool Kids Club EY278407 Highfield Early Years Centre

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers from the centre, parents and carers, members of the children's centre sub-committee and of the governing body, partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners; health, education and children's social care professionals. The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre.

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

Information about the centre

Highfield Children's Centre opened in 2006; it is one of eight designated children's centres in the Chorley area. The centre serves a community which is in one of the 30% most deprived wards in the country. Nearly all local families are of White British heritage, although increasing numbers of the centre's users are of Polish and Asian heritage. Highfield is a Phase 1 children's centre providing the full core offer of services. It is a purpose-built centre and operates as a 'one-stop-shop' model. A multi-agency team which includes health visitors, midwives, speech and language therapists and mental health workers delivers services at the centre.

The centre provides Early Years Foundation Stage provision across the campus under the registration of Highfield Early Years Centre. A maintained nursery school, Highfield Nursery School, offers provision for children aged three plus. Highfield Cool Kids Club provides before-, lunch-time and after-school care. Highfield Early Years Centre and Highfield Cool Kids Club are run and managed as separate businesses, under the overarching governance of the nursery school. All services operate from within a new build, known collectively as Highfield Nursery School and Children's Centre. This integrated provision cares for a maximum of 134 children aged from birth to five years at any one session. The nursery, day-care and wrap-around-care

were all last inspected in the autumn of 2007. The centre provides additional childcare facilities in a registered crèche for parents attending activities and training at the centre. A headteacher manages all aspects of the provision supported by a senior leadership team. Governance of the children's centre is provided by the governing body of the nursery school, in conjunction with a children's centre sub-committee and includes providers, members of the local community and users who attend the children's centre. The only provision inspected during this inspection was the provision offered by the children's centre; because of the integrated nature of the provision, all aspects of the provision were taken into account when making judgements about the breadth and quality of the provision.

The proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is significantly above the national average, as is the proportion of children under four years of age, who are living in households where no one is working. Most children enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that 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 users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Highfield Children's Centre meets the needs of users well. Parents, carers and users of the centre value the inclusive, welcoming, environment that it offers. They appreciate the friendly, approachable staff who build high levels of trust among families. The view, shared by all who are connected with Highfield, that the needs of each individual child and their family are of the highest importance, underpins the outstanding care, guidance and support it provides. The site supervisor is particularly flexible and responsive and goes out of her way to ensure that all users are welcomed and respected. One parent, reflecting the views of many, said 'My whole life has changed, I don't feel alone anymore. I know I am not a "bad" parent because sometimes it all gets on top of me.' Relationships between staff and children, parents and carers, are excellent, promoting positive cohesion in the community. The child and their family is at the heart of the centre and this is evidenced in the wide variety of activities that families, particularly who are

vulnerable due to their circumstances, can access. It is well led and managed and provides high quality activities for children and families.

The headteacher successfully shares her vision of how integrated services can improve lives. The result is a senior leadership team and staff who work tirelessly to provide very effective services. Morale is high and relationships between staff and users strong. Outcomes for users are good. Multi-agency partnerships are well-established and responsive to meeting the needs of families. The centre provides a wide range of services that are effectively raising the knowledge of parents and carers about healthy lifestyles and keeping their children safe. Relationships between agencies are highly productive and transfer of information between key partners is prompt and effective. The centre is an inclusive setting and promotes equality well. Provision is carefully adapted to meet the needs of all members of the community, including those who are vulnerable due to their circumstances and is impacting positively on their lives. The centre is working very effectively to keep users engaged and increase the numbers of parents and carers who are taking advantage of the good range of opportunities. Comprehensive assessments ensure outstanding support is provided to those who are vulnerable due to their circumstances and those who need support in times of acute need or crisis, through the particularly effective outreach support team. Staff and other adults consistently give the highest priority to safeguarding all children and their families.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the strengths in provision and how the centre could improve. For example, they are well aware that further work could be done to reach all families in the area served by the centre. Whilst the centre evaluates the quality of provision regularly and uses the information to determine its priorities, they do not consistently measure success; monitoring and evaluation identify qualitative outcomes more clearly than quantitative outcomes. This is mainly because the centre does not have sufficient data to measure some of its outcomes, for example, smoking cessation. As a result of this, it is difficult for self-evaluation to consistently demonstrate the impact the centre is having on making a difference to users.

The centre has successfully raised outcomes for users since opening, has strong and dynamic leadership and an active sub-committee that is well supported by the governing body. The local authority is increasingly providing robust quality assurance. This provides the centre with good capacity to build on these successes in the future and further improve outcomes for families and children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve action planning and self-evaluation by:
 - working with the local authority and other partners to ensure there is sufficient data, for example, from health and education services, to be able

- to show precisely its impact on outcomes for the whole of the children's centre reach
 - ensuring that self-evaluation clearly reflects the difference that the centre is making.
- Continue to develop outreach work and identify further local needs, accommodation and locations to ensure the needs of those in the reach area are clearly identified and met.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Across all five areas, outcomes are improving well. This is because the centre provides a good range of activities that are developed particularly well in partnership with other agencies and parents. The strong integration of this work, with the child being central to all activities, is at the heart of the centre's success. Children and parents are supported to make healthy choices through a series of well planned activities and by the excellent choice of food provided by the cook and her team. The very pragmatic approach of the headteacher and centre staff ensures that children and their parents and carers are supported to recognise the importance of balanced food choices. Programmes such as 'Food for Thought' and weaning courses help parents to understand the need for, and develop their skills in, preparing healthy food. Parents attending such courses say they are improving their own health and that of their children. Take-up is high and professionals take every opportunity to advise and support attendees, as well as signpost prospective mums, including teenage mums, to specialist services such as immunisations, dental care, smoking cessation and breast-feeding advice. Evaluations and discussions with parents and carers clearly identify the positive impact of these programmes, however, there is limited data to measure accurately the impact of some of these courses.

All services offered in the centre keep users safe. The centre's excellent relationships with families and their children allow staff to identify any safety concerns within families and intervene quickly. Case study evidence and discussions with parents and carers provide strong evidence that access to a good quality behaviour management support, with strong support from sensitive centre staff, improves relationships, behaviour and home safety for users with their children. Staff model safe practices well and the centre is a safe and welcoming place to be.

Observation of the early years provision showed that children are successfully developing skills for the future. They are well prepared for nursery and mainstream school due to the very effective delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children are provided with high quality learning experiences that are impacting positively on their learning and development. The centre's clear and detailed tracking information shows that children make good progress in their learning, both in the nursery and in the activities they attend across the setting. The centre provides a

diverse and inviting setting with stimulating outdoor provision that promotes children's physical health and allows them to take risks in a safe, well supervised environment. Children are interested and engaged in their environment and confidently initiate learning and try new activities. Their learning is carefully evaluated and future activities planned, ensuring all children achieve well and develop good personal and social skills. Parents' and children's enjoyment is evident through the consistently very high attendance at drop-in activities and the high take-up of nursery and crèche places. Children's behaviour is good as are relationships between adults and children across all settings. Transitions are particularly well managed. This includes daily transitions to the local wrap-around care in the mornings and later in the day and also into primary schools.

Several parents and carers spoken to felt that their economic stability and independence had improved as a result of the opportunities the centre has provided. Many have gained confidence from helping as volunteers in the centre and have gone on to further training and gained employment. English courses and the 'Friends Together' course are particularly valuable to Asian parents, helping them to make significant steps towards seeking employment.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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 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	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

A highly effective assessment process is identifying the needs of all children at an early stage and is ensuring that all children make good progress. Assessment of individual cases is robust and the common assessment framework is successfully ensuring teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families identified as in need.

The centre provides a good range of services. Well planned drop-in activities such as 'Jelly Babies' and 'Anxiety and Depression' are helping parents to enjoy parenthood. Courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) are frequent and well-

attended and are helping parents and carers to access the centre more easily and make friends. As one parent commented, 'The centre has helped me to be accepted where I live. Other parents have tackled those who have made unkind comments about me outside of the centre'.

Senior leaders and staff constantly seek ways to identify the needs of specific groups and to tailor activities accordingly, for example a 'Men Behaving Dadly' week attracted 136 fathers to the centre in June. Many of these are continuing to use the centre. The crèche and 'Tea and Toast' group ensure equality of access to all users and particularly those that are more vulnerable due to their circumstances. The centre recognises even more could be done to engage the hardest to reach families, and to ensure that all those who want to can access services. They are working with partners to gain the information they need to target these families and to identify other venues to ensure that all who want to can access programmes.

Parents report that the timeliness and quality of individual support is both outstanding and exceptional, and available for as long as needed. For those whose needs are greatest, support workers provide close, personal support. Careful strategies are in place to ensure parents can build their confidence, parenting skills, and be supported to independence, at a pace that is appropriate to them. As one parent said, the significant work done by outreach workers provides 'A constant light in the darkness; it doesn't flicker or fade, but is always there'. It very effectively supports those who may be lone parents, have drug or alcohol dependency, or someone who is new to the country. They give parents the confidence to attend the centre where excellent relationships encourage them to take part in activities, such as 'Incredible Years Parenting', which gives valuable help and advice in childcare and behaviour management. For the families involved, evidence suggests the support makes the difference between improving life chances and an inability to cope.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
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	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The headteacher is highly experienced and leads a well-motivated and enthusiastic team. They are all passionate about making a difference to children and families in

the local area and beyond. Inclusion of all is central to the centre's vision. Positive role models and resources, reflecting all members of the community, highlight the centre's determination to include all groups who may be subject to discrimination. The centre actively promotes equal opportunities and has many anti-discriminatory practices. Diversity is celebrated well and is implicit in all aspects of the work of the centre.

Secure procedures exist to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. Clear protocols are implemented by staff and other agencies working in the centre with regard to reporting any concerns relating to children's welfare or possible abuse. These procedures are used by a range of professional agencies to monitor children's welfare and to provide appropriate support where necessary.

The centre's development plan addresses local and national priorities effectively and is based on an analysis of regional data and information. It links to area-wide priorities in order to improve the provision and outcomes for its users and has high aspirations whilst ensuring realistic timescales and budgetary considerations. Although the quality of evaluation is good, it is not always well linked to the impact of services on the outcomes for users in order to inform future planning and development. The management information system supplied by the local authority is beginning to provide useful information about the reach area. Analysis of this, although at an early stage, is providing a clear starting point for further improvement. Some partners provide timely and relevant information to influence the development of the provision but this is not yet consistent across all providers.

Governance of the centre is good and the Chair of the Governing Body and the chair of the children's centre sub-committee play an active role in making decisions. The Chair of the Governing Body provides excellent support to the headteacher through well focussed individual meetings. As a police community support officer, the chair of the sub-committee provides an excellent role model to users of the centre. Their frequent visits to the centre enable parents and carers and children to feedback on the provision and any changes to ensure further improvements.

Partnership working is effective and good use is made of shared resources to develop services where needs are identified. The headteacher carefully uses the many budgetary strands across the settings to maximise provision for children and their families. She and the senior team deploy staff and resources well across the settings to provide flexible and responsive provision and ensure that the centre is used well, often from 7.30am to at least 8.00pm. As a result, the centre provides good value for money.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is	2

integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
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	2

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

Observations of the breakfast club and nursery and day care provision were undertaken as part of the inspection.

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 Highfield Nursery School and Children's Centre on 11-12 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you, your children, members of staff and other professionals who work with the centre.

The children's centre provides a good range of services that are helping children and families in Chorley. Throughout the inspection children, their families and other users

were keen to tell us how the centre had helped them. We were particularly impressed by the case studies that showed the difference that the centre was making. I really enjoyed speaking to mums and their children who were having their breakfast at 'Tea and Toast', then seeing some of the children on their way to school.

The centre has many strengths, including the actions taken to support you and your children's safety and well-being and the outstanding quality of care, guidance and support offered by all staff who work with you and your children. The centre is working very closely with many organisations such as schools, health and social care professionals to improve the range of services that are available to you. Using these partnerships it is helping many families and children, particularly those who are most disadvantaged, to have a good start in life. Parents and carers have given us many examples of how the centre has helped them to gain experience as volunteers and qualifications that are helping them get jobs.

The centre offers a good and increasing range of programmes and activities, including those aimed at improving the health of people in your local communities. It is very good at helping new mums who choose to breastfeed their babies and recent courses such as 'Food for Thought' are helping mums to help their children eat healthily. We thought that the early notification of pregnancy was good, particularly as it helps the centre let future mums and dads know about all the centre has to offer. It tells them about the help available on breast feeding, from mums who have successfully breastfed their own children and know the good things and the concerns from experience.

Parents and carers 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. The site supervisor and the cook were particularly praised for their warmth. The headteacher has very strong procedures to make sure staff and volunteers are suitable to work with your children. Some parents explained just how important the centre is in their and family's lives. They told us that staff listen to them and help them to get the right help and support. We found that the centre was excellent in helping families at times in their lives when they most need it. The support is provided quickly and professionals and others work closely together to support both families and children. This includes teenage mums and some of you who are fairly new to the country.

Children make good progress in the nursery where there is a wide range of activities. This helps them to be ready for their move to school. The centre makes sure they check whether you have enjoyed any courses or sessions in the centre and they respond by making changes to your comments. Those of you who take part in courses such as 'Jelly Babies' say how good it is in helping you to understand your children's development, in building your confidence and self-esteem and in helping you to develop good relationships with your babies. More of you are able to take advantage of other courses that are leading to experience and qualifications that will help you if you eventually return to work.

The centre is respected in the local community because of the good leadership of the headteacher and her team. She is well supported by the Chair of the Governing Body and the local community policeman, who is chair of the children's centre sub-committee. However, the headteacher knows that to make the centre even better she needs to make sure that she has even better information on the difference that the centre is making in your lives. She and her team want to use this to plan for more activities and also to ensure that even more people can use the good things that it is providing.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to speak with us, we are very grateful and wish you every success for the future.

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