

Inspection report for Hilltop Children's Centre

Local authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	362498
Inspection dates	27-28 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Marian Thomas

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Mrs Barbara Kelly
Date of previous inspection	N/A
Centre address	Bedford Close Huyton L36 1XH
Telephone number	0151 443 5301
Fax number	0151 443 5309
Email address	Barbara.kelly@knowsley.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Mosscroft Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Mosscroft Childcare

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 additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings and discussions with senior managers from the centre, parents and carers, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners, health, education and employment professionals. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Hilltop Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre which has been open for two years. It is one of three children's centres in the North Huyton Area which are led and managed by the local authority. Services for all the centres are provided by one team of staff. This is in line with Knowsley Council's area core model. The centre is located on the campus of Mosscroft Primary School and has on-site a 59 place nursery which includes before- and after-school club, which are currently run by the school. The school was inspected in July 2010. The inspection report for the childcare provision can be viewed at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre has an advisory board with representatives from partner agencies, the voluntary sector and parents. Hilltop provides a wide range of services for 421 children up to five-years-old within its reach area. The centre is situated in an area of high deprivation with a significant number of families in the category of 'hard pressed'. A small but significant number of families with children with additional needs attend the centre.

Around one in three families with children up to the age of fifteen in the North Huyton partnership area are dependent on workless benefits. The percentage of families with children under four who are dependent on benefits is slightly lower than the percentage of families with children aged five to fifteen. The area has a very small population of families from ethnic minority groups and represents

approximately 2% of the population. There are significant health challenges among the population with poor oral hygiene, obesity problems and a high level of teenage pregnancies. Many children who access the children’s centre and nursery have levels of achievement significantly below those expected of their age group.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Hilltop Children’s Centre provides an outstanding quality of service for all its users. The centre is exceptionally well led and managed. Evidence of this can be seen in the warm and friendly welcome which centre staff give to all users. A typical view expressed by a parent is ‘Staff are like my family’. This lively centre offers an exciting array of activities which meet the needs of many groups most effectively. Its highly inclusive approach ensures that the many drop-in sessions offered are full to capacity with enthusiastic parents and carers and their children.

Close links with community midwives ensure that new and prospective mothers benefit from a full range of services, which are effective in promoting their health and well-being. The centre runs many targeted group sessions, including ‘stay and play’ sessions, a crèche which support parents on courses, drop in advice sessions, baby massage sessions and a fathers’ group. These groups provide excellent opportunities for social and emotional support and further education. Many centre users came to talk to the inspectors and said how much they enjoyed the activities offered and how exceptionally well the caring staff supported their needs. The inspection team agreed with their views.

The centre makes a very good contribution to improving the health of families. Centre staff, health care professionals and nursery staff work very closely to promote health. Family cookery classes, weaning support groups, growing vegetables and active play sessions for all children help to promote and support a better understanding of healthy lifestyles. As a result, health outcomes are improving from a very low baseline particularly for younger children. Centre staff recognise that older children do not always make healthy eating choices and have introduced a healthy eating swap option for out of school club members. Staff also

recognise that further work is needed to engage parents and carers to ensure healthy lifestyles for all families. Children who attend the day care and nursery provision, including those with additional needs, make very good progress and are well prepared for further learning.

Parents and children say that they feel very safe in the centre. High priority is given to the promotion of safety and welfare, and excellent safeguarding arrangements are in place. All staff are subject to suitability checks. Risk assessments are thorough and rigorously undertaken and the site security is excellent. Children are very well behaved and interact confidently with staff and each other. They settle quickly and grow in confidence because their contributions are valued and encouraged by staff.

Family relationships are very well supported. The centre makes an excellent contribution to the economic stability of parents and carers through provision of a wide range of accredited courses including childcare, literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT). The views of centre users are requested frequently and have a direct impact on the type and level of courses offered.

Partner agencies work particularly well together to deliver support and a full range of services. Representatives from different agencies, including health and social care, who spoke with the inspectors praised the centre's open and proactive approach. The excellent care, guidance and support offered to all families, including those who are hard to reach or facing difficulties, is reflected in comments from parents who felt staff 'Have supported me and helped me to sort out my life'. Many families benefit from the full range of provision offered by the centre. Parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are exceptionally well supported in all aspects of the provision and are very appreciative of the highly inclusive approach of all staff. Whilst childminders currently use the centre, an effective support network for them is only in an early stage of development.

The centre manager and the senior staff team provide highly effective leadership and vision that puts the needs of the community at the heart of the centre's work. As a result, staff are enthusiastic and committed in the pursuit of these shared goals. The local authority and advisory board have an excellent understanding of the needs of the wider community and of the centre's strengths and areas for development. Self-evaluation is accurate and takes full account of contributions from users, staff and partners. It is very well supported by data provided by the local authority. Plans for improvement are well defined and driven by ambitious targets. The success of the centre is demonstrated very well by the improving outcomes in children's health and educational achievement. As a result, the centre has an outstanding capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- To continue to work closely with families in order to ensure that they all have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet.
- To continue to develop an effective support network for childminders

How good are outcomes for users?

1

The outcomes for children and families who use the centre are excellent and are continuing to improve at a fast pace. Improving outcomes in health are the result of excellent partnerships between midwives and the outreach team. Together they consistently promote healthy lifestyles in family sessions. The wide variety of activities and 'stay and play' sessions make a strong contribution to both the physical and emotional health of parents, carers and children. One parent told the inspection team: 'Coming here has changed my life and helped me to be a much better mum'. The centre is proactive and innovative in its engagement with many different initiatives including developing a library which families are using with increasing confidence.

Staff are exceptionally supportive of families in need and help to ensure that children are safe. Early intervention strategies are highly effective at preventing difficulties escalating. Parents who spoke with inspectors had a very good awareness of how to keep their children safe as a result of safety awareness initiatives delivered by centre staff.

Children who attend the nursery provision and/or 'stay and play' sessions make very good progress in their learning. Parents' and children's enjoyment is evident through the very high attendance at drop-in activities and 'stay and play' sessions. All children are happy and confident in their interactions with adults and each other. Despite the low starting points and additional needs of many of the children, an increasing number are beginning to achieve 78 or more points on the Early Years Foundation Stage profile. Due to an increased emphasis on communication skills across the provision an increasing number of children are now nearing age appropriate levels in communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development. This ensures children are well prepared when they transfer to school. The high uptake and quality of accredited courses demonstrates the success of the centre's excellent contribution to the economic well being of its users.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
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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 users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	1

How good is the provision?

1

Centre staff have an exceptionally sensitive approach to assessing the needs of parents and carers and ensure that the services needed to support them are provided in a timely manner. An individual approach is the key to many of the centre's success. One user explained that she is no longer on benefits and now works in a job she enjoys thanks to centre staff who tailored support and training to meet her needs.

Cookery, basic skills, and working with children are just some of the courses running at the centre, many of which are accredited. These, combined with close links with both Connexions and Jobcentre Plus services help users parents and carers to maximise their skills and help them to improve their employment prospects whatever their level of need. One previously jobless family described how they had all taken basic skills courses which had helped to prepare them for work 'When my daughter was taking the course I looked at the work she was doing and realised I could do that, so I came down and joined too', explained one grandmother.

Staff frequently play a leading and influential role in implementing the common assessment framework (CAF) starting whenever they feel a family is in need. Analysis of case studies during the inspection showed an excellent level of engagement with partner agencies and parents. A highly effective child protection plan is in place, which ensures centre staff work closely with social services and the child protection team. The centre provides an excellent resource for these services and for families in crisis.

The centre has very strong working links with the school on-site. Staff from both units work closely together to ensure assessment is used most effectively to record children's progress and to inform teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Whilst childminders currently use the centre, an effective support network for them is only in an early stage of development.

The highly effective approach by the centre to provide care, guidance and support is clearly demonstrated in the very high uptake by users from the more economically

challenged districts of their catchment area. Very close working relationships between the centre’s link health visitor and midwives ensure that hard to reach families are identified and supported. Trained volunteers work alongside centre staff to deliver an excellent outreach service, which is proactive in taking services to groups who are hard to reach and known to be vulnerable due to their circumstances. For example, centre staff and volunteers deliver baby massage sessions in individual family homes.

The learning and personal development of all children is promoted very effectively. Parents and carers praise the centre’s ‘stay and play’ and family activities highly. Play sessions are popular with dads, who feel the fun activities help them to strengthen relationships with their babies and children.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
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?

1

The visionary leadership of the centre’s management team is continuing to improve the centre and is providing excellent value for money. Leaders have very high expectations for the community and this aspiration is at the heart of the centre’s work. The local authority, advisory board and staff work closely together and are motivated and proactive in taking services out to hard to reach and vulnerable families within the community. The advisory board has excellent representation from partner agencies and parents. As a result, they have an excellent understanding of the centre’s strengths and areas for improvement and are constantly looking for ways of improving the centre’s role within the community. Ambitious future targets have been set, based on excellent self-evaluation, data analysis and input from staff and users. This has resulted in high quality action planning supported by excellent partnership working.

The inspection team spoke with representatives from a range of agencies, all of whom spoke very highly of the centre’s open approach to working in partnership for the benefit of the community. There are active partnerships with health professionals, social care and the children’s disability team, local schools, early years settings, Connexions service, the local college and the police. The strength of these relationships secures the health, safety and achievement of families and children

very well. Families of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported particularly well through strong links between the local special school and the centre staff.

Excellent safeguarding arrangements are supported by the strength of communication and collaboration between agencies to ensure children are safeguarded at all times. Staff checks, vetting and recruitment processes meet and exceed current guidelines and all staff have up to date training in safeguarding, child protection and first aid.

The centre is highly inclusive and promotes equality and celebrates diversity to an excellent standard. Staff are very sensitive to the needs of those who use its services. There is a high level of registration from all groups. For example, although ethnic minority groups represent just two percent of the centre’s catchment they represent five percent of centre users. The centre is a highly cohesive community where positive relationships flourish. The key groups including families of children with special educational needs/and or disabilities receive excellent support which is tailored to their needs and delivered through strong partnership working.

The local authority very effectively supports the centre’s self-evaluation and action planning by providing a comprehensive data set based on national indicators and local data.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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	1

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

Information from the most recent Ofsted inspection of Mosscroft childcare has been taken into account to a limited extent when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children.

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 the Hilltop Children's centre on 27-28 October 2010. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked to the professionals who work with you. Many of you went out of your way to tell us how exceptionally well you feel the centre supports you and your children.

You told us that staff are very friendly, hard working and give you excellent support. We agree with you. We found the centre to be welcoming to all families with lots of different activities for everyone. We really enjoyed joining you in the excellent 'stay and play' and sensory baby sessions. We feel the staff have a high level of expertise and are very good at offering excellent practical and emotional support to families who need it.

The centre does many things particularly well. Professionals from the different agencies work exceptionally well together to make sure you receive the right advice and support. Those of you who are facing difficult or complex problems receive excellent support and staff provide excellent care, guidance and support for all centre users. Their highly inclusive approach means that families from different parts of the community are all welcome. The nursery, and 'stay and play' sessions provide very good support for all children including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

We feel the centre makes a very good contribution to improving families' health and children's educational achievement. It does this through the many 'stay and play' sessions, the nursery, baby and toddlers' provision, as well as visiting some of you at home. As a result of the good work of the centre, health outcomes are improving rapidly and children make outstanding progress in their learning and personal

development. This means that they are very well prepared for school. You told us that you feel very safe at the centre. This reflects the excellent work the centre does to promote safety and welfare through its safeguarding arrangements.

We were very impressed by the excellent behaviour of the children we met as they confidently explored their learning environment. We were also very impressed by the positive and supportive relationships you have with one another and with your children.

The centre makes an excellent contribution to help improve the economic stability of its users. Some of you that spoke to us told us how much you were gaining from opportunities for further training and work experience. Many of you told us how much you had gained from meeting other parents and carers in similar circumstances through groups and activities at the centre. The centre manager provides strong and effective leadership. She is very well supported by the local authority and the advisory board. We feel all staff have high ambitions for everyone in the community and all work exceptionally hard with great enthusiasm. They have a really good understanding of your needs and are constantly striving to improve and make things even better. Because of this, we think they have excellent capacity to bring about further improvements.

We have asked centre leaders to do two things to further improve the work of the centre.

- To continue to work with you to ensure that everyone has a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet.
- To continue to develop an effective support network for childminders.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We really enjoyed talking with you and seeing the work of the centre. We wish you every success in the future.

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