

# Inspection report for Sunderland Children's Centre Highfield

Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	362581
Inspection dates	2 – 3 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Judith Elderfield

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Tracy Hassan
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Highfield Community Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY349466 Sunshine Daycare

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.

An inspection of the primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre. The report of this inspection is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, parents and carers, representatives of the local authority, representatives of the statutory, community and voluntary organisations and the advisory board working in partnership with the centre.

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

## Information about the centre

The Highfield Children's Centre is located on the Ford Estate in the west area of Sunderland. There are three further children's centres in the west locality and all four centres are under the leadership of one management team and one children's centre advisory board. The children's centre was developed from Ford Sure Start centre. The new centre has been developed with the new Highfield Primary School, a council customer services centre and a local voluntary organisation, Pennywell neighbourhood centre, who run the Sunshine day care. The new building was completed in April 2007. The children's centre provides the full core offer.

The majority of the area served by the centre falls within the 20% of most deprived wards in the country. The reach population of the centre is 712 and the centre regularly engages with 65%; in addition, 371 parents from neighbouring communities outside the catchment area currently visit the centre. Recent figures show that 30% of children live in families with two parents in receipt of child tax credit, income support or job seekers allowance and 28% of children are living with

one parent receiving the same allowances. These figures are above the Sunderland average of 20%.

The majority of local families are of White British heritage. However, 95 children from a minority ethnic background are accessing the children's centre. Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills below expectations for their age. The proportion of children with special educational needs and /or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is above average.

Governance of the centre is by the local authority who employs the leadership team.

## 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 provides good support to children and families who live within its locality. Parents, carers and children enjoy coming to the friendly and welcoming centre. Children are happy and well behaved. Parents told inspectors that they are happy, safe and well looked after at the centre. They describe staff as really helpful and say that they '...make you feel welcome'. Programmes for 'Baby Massage' and 'Time for Rhyme', are very popular, with parents reporting better sleep patterns after the baby massage sessions and parents re-acquainting themselves with the traditional nursery rhymes in 'Time for Rhyme' sessions. A particular strength of the centre is its strong partnership working which provides wrap-around care for families. As a result, users stay safe, gain confidence and develop parenting skills. The centre continuously seeks the views of the users, through surveys, evaluations and their involvement in the advisory board. Parents do not hesitate to articulate their views. In response to feedback from users, the centre adapts its provision to meet their needs.

The vision for the centre is shared well between partners, and services are fully integrated, particularly the shared actions to support, involve and improve outcomes

for parents and carers and their children. Knowledgeable and skilled staff provide good advice and guidance during activity sessions in the centre or in families' homes. Referrals from partners lead to support workers providing one-to one support for vulnerable families with complex needs. The centre provides parenting sessions, which are well attended and the parents speak highly of the difference this has made to themselves and their children. One parent said 'It's nice to know you're not on your own with the problems'. A successful volunteering programme has helped to raise aspirations amongst local families and parents say it has created a good network of supportive friends. However, the centre has not been as successful with the breastfeeding and smoking cessation programmes in spite of the excellent quality of provision in these areas.

The leadership team are outstandingly successful in bringing together services to meet the needs of the community. Equality is promoted sensitively and discrimination challenged. Safeguarding is managed extremely well. The centre runs smoothly and calmly, which is reassuring for the children and families who use it. Partnerships are strong and leaders have expert knowledge of partnership working. They work very effectively across the range of partner organisations. The senior team has the confidence of the advisory board and a good working relationship with health services and the local authority. However, the local authority has been slow in updating its data to help the centre focus on certain areas such as the transient nature of some groups of users. Staff morale is high despite local council cutbacks. The leadership team is very effective in evaluating the success of what is achieved and is reflective and creative about strategies for further improvement. However, in spite of the centre's excellent work, evident in its outstanding provision and founded upon outstanding leadership and management, factors beyond its control, principally limitations in the data supplied by the local authority about families moving into the area, are preventing the overall outcomes for users from being even better. The governance of the centre ensures its adaptability to the changing needs of the community. The centre is in a strong position to maintain and improve its effectiveness.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- The local authority should work more effectively with the centre to provide accurate data relating to families moving into the reach area to ensure that all families are able to take best advantage of the centre's provision.
- Continue to use available data to further enhance the delivery of targeted services in order to improve outcomes for families, particularly with regard to increasing breastfeeding rates and reducing smoking.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2

Children enjoy their learning and play and they achieve well. They are eager to join in activities and interact well with others, both indoors and outside. Their behaviour is very good.

Evidence through case studies, discussion with partners and parents and carers all reflect the positive impact of partnership working to promote children's and families' emotional well-being and their physical health. This includes the good work and dedication of health visitors, outreach workers and services commissioned by the centre. The support and advice offered to teenage parents through the young parents group is good and many of the mothers involved go on to attend other programmes offered in the centre such as healthy eating, 'Whoops' workshop and benefit advice. 'The Dads and Kids' programme is well attended and has had a positive impact on increasing the number of men who attend activities, many of whom commented on how included they now feel, and how much more confidence they have in their very important role as a father. Bosom Buddies is an effective peer monitoring scheme and is at present is working well with 12 mothers accessing the programme. However, this area has not, historically, had high breastfeeding rates and the centre struggles to keep the six week sustainability rate: figures for 2009/2010 for the locality are 16.5%, which is well below the Sunderland area figure of 25%. Smoking cessation is not as successful as the centre staff hoped and data show that smoking rates are higher in this locality at 29% than the city overall, which is 23%. Low uptake of programmes in the centre to support pregnant women has resulted in all pregnant women who smoke being referred via the midwife to the smoking cessation service. The centre is hoping that the introduction of carbon monitors, showing the many chemicals babies are breathing in. Early indications are that this measure is helping pregnant women to stop smoking.

Excellent procedures ensure children are well safeguarded. All parents and carers say they feel safe in the centre and have confidence that if there were concerns they would come to the centre as they are trusted. Good multi-agency support to families referred to the centre in times of acute crisis is helping to minimise the number of children entering care or moving on to child-protection plans. Requests for more direct services through the Common Assessment Framework provides support from a range of services, including child and family support, early years mental health and a community paediatrician. Parenting programmes are very successful in providing parents and carers with the skills and knowledge to promote safety by means of consistent routines and boundaries for the children.

A number of parents and carers spoken to by inspectors, including young mothers, commented on how their confidence as parents has improved as a result of their participation in a number of activities offered by the centre. A visit to a baby massage centre provided compelling evidence of babies and their parents bonding well, with opportunities provided for mothers to share concerns and tips about dealing with issues such as feeding or sleep patterns. Children are at the heart of all

that the centre does and as a result they develop very positive relationships with adults and each other. Parents and carers feel that they have a voice within the centre and through the well established local parents' forum and their views are represented to the advisory board and the governing body very effectively. Parents said that services provided meet their specific needs and for some the centre is a lifeline. Parents have good access to training and children develop their social skills well, both of which demonstrate the good extent to which the centre promotes skills for the future.

*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>2</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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</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>1</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>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**1**

The centre provides an outstanding range of services for its users. All centre staff, partners and the local authority share a very good understanding of the issues and challenges facing the community. This ensures well-targeted support for local children and families, helping them to make the best of those opportunities available. The centre can identify numerous examples where families have been supported, helping them to re-engage in everyday life and enjoy their families again. The work of the centre, particularly with its more vulnerable families, is a key strength, a clear reflection of its caring yet aspirational ethos. The dedication and commitment of all involved in the centre ensures a continued focus on community development and engagement. The recent introduction of a birth registration office within the centre has proved very popular. It improves early engagement and the sharing of information under its 'Tell it once' service, which supports users to receive faster and easier access to government services. This encourages early engagement with the children's centre.

Very effective partnerships with local professionals mean that the assessment of individual cases is robust and the Common Assessment Framework is successfully implemented, ensuring teams can be gathered quickly to support children and

families identified as in need. The role of the children's centre in the establishment of effective exit strategies is good, ensuring parents can build their confidence and parenting skills, supporting them to independence at a pace that is appropriate to them. A focus on developing effective channels of communication has also helped to strengthen multi-agency working and has streamlined the process to ensure that meetings successfully and efficiently identify and assess those children and families who need immediate support. Families benefit from home safety visits and advice. As a result, they have better understanding of how to keep their families safe. Participation in immunisation programmes is currently 97%, which is high; as a result the centre may be considered to have herd immunity.

There is good evidence of how the centre has helped parents and carers into training and employment. A wide range of volunteering opportunities is available to support parents and carers towards further training and education. Effective referral routes are established with training and education providers who deliver courses, such as training for teaching assistants and working with children with special educational needs. Thirteen parents undertook a level one British Sign Language course which they all enjoyed. Many parents and carers, as a result of support received through the centre, had increased aspirations for themselves and their children.

As a result of good provision, children develop a good range of early learning skills. For example, they learn to listen carefully to story-telling and nursery rhymes, through this also developing their language skills. They develop observational skills by looking at wildlife and using magnifying glasses to look at worms. They practise these skills through observational drawing and other art work. The rich and stimulating outdoor area does much to promote the development of their skills.

*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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>

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

**1**

Leadership and management are outstanding at most levels. The centre manager and senior leadership team provide excellent leadership with high expectations for the community firmly at the heart of the centre's work. The advisory board and staff share their aspirations and are motivated and proactive in taking services out to the hard to reach and vulnerable. The advisory board has a good understanding of the

centre's strengths and weaknesses and of ways in which they might extend their challenge role. Together with the centre's leadership team they set ambitious targets based on good self-evaluation and the available data. This leads to good quality action planning which is supported by excellent partnership working.

Inspectors spoke with representatives from a range of partner agencies, all of whom spoke highly of the centre's open approach to partnership working to the benefit of the community. There are high quality partnerships with health professionals, social care, schools and early years settings. These active partnerships do much to secure the health, safety and achievement of families and children. Constructive links with the local authority and health care secure good quality services for children who have special educational needs and /or disabilities, such as visits to the hydrotherapy pool and the soft play area in the centre. The centre can also be accessed during weekends and evenings and also provides activities during school holidays for a range of ages.

Highly effective safeguarding arrangements are supported by the clear lines of communication and collaboration between agencies to ensure children are safeguarded. All checks, vetting and recruitment processes meet current guidelines and staff have up-to date training in safeguarding, child protection and first aid. All managers and coordinators and any staff on interview panels have attended safer recruitment training. Policies and procedures are strong and there are good systems in place to maintain and update these. The centre has completed appropriate risk assessment to ensure the safety of children and their parents and carers.

The centre uses its resources very effectively to provide a warm and welcoming environment. Vigorous financial management systems are in place to monitor day to day expenditure and delegation of responsibility for resources is at an appropriate level to ensure timely and effective packages of support to families. Staff are well deployed and utilised, ensuring good value for money. The views of parents, carers and users are collected through evaluations of individual activities and interventions in order to check quality, usefulness and to support improvement. The centre is aware that more work needs to be carried out on the breastfeeding and smoking cessation programmes and this has been included in the service improvement plan.

Equality and diversity are promoted well. The centre makes a good contribution to promoting community cohesion and tackling unlawful discrimination. Everyone who attends is integrated well. Any family experiencing exceptional hardship, for example, with respect to debt, receives support to cope with legal issues and to budget more effectively. New migrants are welcomed into the area and immediate needs identified quickly. Leaders ensure users and community groups make maximum use of the facilities.

The local authority effectively supports the centre's self-evaluation and action planning. It provides further support and challenge through regular visits and an



annual conversation that summarises the centre's achievements against ambitious targets. However, up-to date data is not always available, particularly with regard to families moving into the reach area who may benefit from the targeted services. The centre manager is aware that more could be done in this area.

*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>1</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>1</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>1</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>2</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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>2</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>1</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>1</b>

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

At the time of this inspection the Sunshine day care had not been inspected since 2007. Information arising from that inspection was considered to be out of date and so was not used to inform judgements during this 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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Highfield Children's Centre on the 2 and 3 March. We judged the centre as good overall with several outstanding aspects, including the quality of provision and leadership and management.

During our visit we looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you and the professionals who work with you. Many of you went out of your way to tell us how much you enjoy the activities provided through the centre. You told us staff are friendly, hard working and give excellent support. We agree with you. We found the centre to be welcoming to all families and buzzing with activity and children's happy laughter. The staff have a high level of expertise and offer excellent practical and emotional support to families who need it.

The centre does many things especially well. All the professionals from the different agencies work exceptionally well together to make sure you receive the right advice and support. Families who are facing complex or difficult times receive excellent support. In fact, 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 centre makes a good contribution to improving families' health and children's educational achievement.

You told us you feel safe at the centre. This reflects the very good work the centre does to promote safety and welfare and the outstanding safeguarding arrangements. Children are well behaved and confidently explore their learning environment. You play a part too. We were very impressed by the positive and supportive relationships you have with one another and with your children.

The centre manager provides strong and highly effective leadership. She is well supported by the local authority and the advisory board. All staff have high ambitions for everyone in the community. They all work hard with great enthusiasm. They have a really good understanding of your needs and are constantly striving to improve the quality of provision.

There are two things we have asked the leadership team to work on in the immediate future:

- the local authority should work more effectively with the centre to provide accurate data to relating to families moving into reach area to ensure that all groups are effectively targeted
- continue to use available data to further enhance the delivery of targeted services in order to improve outcomes for families, particularly with regard to increasing breastfeeding rates and reducing smoking.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you. We wish you every success in the future.

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