

Inspection report for Holme Hall Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	365799
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Christopher Moodie

Centre governance	Derbyshire County Council
Centre leader	Alison Lancashire
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Taddington Rd
	Holme Hall, Chesterfield
	S40 4RL
Telephone number	01246 271834
Fax number	01246 207432
Email address	alison.lancashire@derbyshire.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Holme Hall Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Promises Day Nursery

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre coordinator, the district manager, staff members, members representing the advisory board, local authority staff linked to the centre and a range of partner agencies and users. They observed the centre's work and looked at sessions in operation at the children's centre and in nearby locations. They also looked at a range of documentation including the centre's development plans and evaluations, local authority data, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Holme Hall is a phase two children's centre in a selection of wards within the Chesterfield district, some of which are among the 30% most deprived within the country. It is situated on the Holme Hall Primary School site. The centre offers a range of services including health support, adult courses, outreach services, a nursery provider, regular 'Stay and Play' sessions, early learning intervention programmes, training courses, fathers' sessions, childminder networking and a fruit and vegetable cooperative. When children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage, their knowledge and skills are well below those expected.

The children's centre is run directly by Derbyshire County Council and has its own advisory board made up of partner agencies and community members. The proportion of families receiving state benefits is high, as is the proportion of users who live in workless households. Most families are from White British backgrounds. The centre is managed by a centre coordinator who has responsibility for one other centre and a Chesterfield-wide team comprising volunteer coordinators, a parenting worker and a 'dads' worker'. A district manager has overall responsibility for these services along with a further six children's centres.

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

The centre serves the needs of its community well. Clear leadership has created a committed team which work effectively towards a common goal. The centre makes good use of the data provided by the local authority to provide services that meet the needs of the reach area. This is supplemented by ongoing feedback information provided by users and allows centre leaders to reshape their plans appropriately. Inter-agency relationships are very strong. Good communication between these agencies supports strong outcomes for many users. As a result, the centre makes a clear difference to the lives of children and their families. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous. Centre workers are vigilant and sensitive when assessing the risk of activities and those families who are engaged in them. The centre's commitment to providing a safe, attractive environment and to meeting users' individual needs is highly valued by parents and carers, one of whom said, 'I wish I could come here every day – this place is a life line'.

The centre has significantly increased the numbers of families that it is in contact with over the past two years. This trend is continuing and results from targeted support and a growing reputation within the local area. Some users are prepared to travel considerable distances to make use of the centre's facilities. For example, one young mother spoke of catching two buses to attend a 'Stay, Play and Weigh' session with her baby, because she felt welcome and valued the opportunity to talk to the centre workers. As the centre has reached more families, its impact has been more clearly felt. This has led to improvements in many key areas but the cessation of smoking during pregnancy has not improved, because resources have not been specifically targeted at this issue. Achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage in local primary schools has risen in the past two years. Headteachers of local primary schools attribute this improvement in part to the centre's focus and support for children before they reach school age. In one school, where the centre has been very active through the delivery of the 'ready for nursery' programme, improvements have been dramatic and training is being prepared so that other schools can deliver a similar programme. These successes, coupled with effective leadership at senior and

middle levels, mean that the centre is demonstrating good capacity for sustained improvement.

Centre leaders supervise the centre workers effectively, ensuring that tasks and cases are allocated according to expertise and aptitude. A comprehensive programme of training is in place for staff. This helps to ensure that the centre has the capacity to respond to a diverse range of needs. The advisory board provide valuable support for the centre leader, using their knowledge of partner organisations and user circumstance well to enhance the range of services that the centre provides. The advisory board is keen to secure the views of centre users but only one parent is currently amongst their membership. Their role is not yet strategic and challenging, and this means that the advisory board have yet to sufficiently hold the centre to account for the effectiveness and impact of its services.

The centre celebrates equality and diversity well, and has been successful in substantially increasing the number of contacts for users from minority ethnic groups. Users report that they feel that they are listened to and the centre is responsive to their views. One example of this is the extension of training sessions so that users can informally discuss their own circumstances with centre workers and fellow trainees. Parents' views are actively sought through a forum, which centre leaders have used to good effect when planning for future provision. In particular, hard to reach groups have benefited from this and have often been individually contacted to encourage their use of the centre's services.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the strategic role of the advisory board, so that the children's centre is held to account for the effectiveness and impact of its services.
- Provide further opportunities for reducing smoking during pregnancy.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre offers a broad and increasing range of services to the families within its reach area. These are having a positive impact on many outcomes for these users. The centre has a clearly defined focus on the six areas of learning for the Early Years Foundation Stage. It strives to ensure that all sessional activities and training courses that include children or parenting have an emphasis on communication, language and literacy. This is very apparent in sessions such as 'Young and Proud', where teenage mothers and their babies or young children are supported in developing routines, early speaking, mark making and reading. One mother commented that she had not considered reading to her baby until she had joined the group, and now enjoys this part of their daily routine. This focus has contributed to the rise in attainment in early reading skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in the local schools. Although this rise in the reach area is not consistent across all groups, children who are eligible for free school meals have made considerable

progress when compared to their peers. Headteachers have also commented on the positive behaviour of children who have been involved with the centre's pre-school provision. Children attend calm and well organised environments where they enjoy play and learning on equal terms. This, coupled with effective transition programmes, has enabled children to make the move into school a much more positive experience for families. This focus on calm and positive behaviour is evident in much of the work that the centre does with parents and carers. Centre workers identify informal opportunities to discuss and support positive parenting wherever they occur, including when supporting carers such as childminders.

Specific courses are provided to target better outcomes for children's health and these have been popular and successful. One parent who attended baby massage said: 'I believe that it has helped my child's digestive system. When I used the technique at home I noticed how calm and relaxed she became, so I built it into my night time routine. We enjoyed it so much that we are looking at other baby therapies'. All sessional groups have a focus on healthy eating, and this has had a clear impact on several users, one of whom commented on how much her child was enjoying the 'mango surprise' that the centre had promoted. Obesity levels in the reach area are stable overall, with a small decrease in the Reception Year data in 2010. Encouragingly, a greater decrease occurred in Year 6, where data indicates a year-on-year decrease of over 5%. The centre's resources have not been as actively targeted at reducing smoking during pregnancy, although this features in their future plans.

The centre is a significant partner in supporting children who have a child protection plan. Staff work closely and effectively with partners such as social services and health visitors to provide services, contacts and supplementary guidance and advice where necessary. As a result, the centre has been successful in reducing the time taken for support to be implemented and have monitored progress against plans efficiently. Because of this vigilance, children's welfare and safekeeping have improved. The centre is also very active in instigating and leading the processes of the Common Assessment Framework and can point to examples where this has quickly made a positive difference to a child's outcomes. The centre's environment is safe and well monitored. Basic rules are applied with sensitivity and kindness. For example, parents and carers are reminded gently of the 'no mobile phones' policy of the centre.

Adult training and education courses are well attended. Retention rates are good amongst all courses and some are over-subscribed. Jobcentre Plus workers report that the employability of adults in the reach area has increased. The national economic climate is mirrored locally and there are very few jobs available for a large number of job seekers. As such, despite enjoying success on courses and training, few adults have secured employment. Nevertheless, there have been incidences of success; for example, a local mother has been employed in a childcare position because of the first-aid training that she had attended at the centre.

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
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

The centre assesses the needs of its user families well, and provides services, training and guidance that are appropriate. Data supplied by the local authority is analysed effectively and this supports the ongoing provision of targeted activities. A wide range of agencies are active within the centre and this enables users to access outreach support which is appropriate to their individual circumstances. Partnership with, for example, the North Derbyshire Women's Aid has led to targeted services for women who suffer from domestic abuse and/or violence. Very effective work with the local library service has supported the rise in children's early reading.

The range of adult learning opportunities that the centre facilitates or provides are leading to improved social and economic well-being. The centre provides a good range of guidance and signposting for other services. Their promotion of breastfeeding has been effective in raising the proportion of babies who are breast fed so that the levels are now above the national averages. Helpful leaflets, websites and telephone help lines are clearly displayed, and all centre staff are keen to help with any query. Support for smoking cessation is also well advertised but the centre's provision in this area has yet to yield significant improvements.

A particular strength of the centre is the care that it provides for all members of its community. In all interactions, users are treated with great respect, patience and sensitivity. As a result, users feel able to ask questions and seek confidential support. Centre workers are alert to the needs and circumstances of individual users and effectively encourage participation. One parent who received such support commented that 'I soon felt strong enough to tell the group about my situation', and later stated that she had, 'Learned how to deal with my son and to play with him more. I am not as impatient and I know how to talk to him.' Such examples of striking impact are not limited to parents. Childminders have a weekly network group

meeting at the centre which is highly valued by all. One regular attendee said that she had, 'Learned so much from the centre workers and from the childminders – I wish I could come here more often'.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre leader and her team leader provide good role models for all staff in their daily contact with users. This example permeates the ethos of the centre and all are prepared to work at every level in order to achieve their aims. Training is given a high status amongst the leaders and this means that staff are well qualified and keep abreast of new strategies, developments and approaches that may improve their provision. Current targets have almost all been achieved or exceeded. The centre leader's plans for future development have become much more focused on user outcomes and are designed to exceed all set targets. Staff roles within the centre are well defined and the accountability processes are clear at this level. Supervision of task is good and this is supported by the strong sense of team work and corporate direction. Morale amongst staff is high, and all feel valued and listened to by centre leaders.

The local authority provides good governance and support for the centre leader and her team, and is actively involved in the evaluation of the centre's performance. The advisory board represents a broad selection of stakeholders, and has users' interests and welfare firmly at the heart of its work. Its role as an independent body that challenges decisions and reviews the effectiveness and impact of its services is currently limited. The centre leader makes good use of information derived from users to inform and reshape provision, but the advisory board have yet to access and act upon this source of information. Self evaluation is accurate and is sometimes modest. Data arising from services is meticulously collated and recorded, and the local authority are using the centre to pilot new and innovative ways of measuring impact on users' outcomes.

Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and are well organised and managed carefully. Staff are appropriately trained in child protection, first aid and health and safety. Effective procedures enable early intervention on issues of child

protection and multi-agency work is very well organised. An increasing number of users who come from multi-ethnic backgrounds are accessing the centre and feel welcomed. The centre is aware of the changing nature of diversity with the reach area and is targeting particular groups accordingly. Leaders at all levels are aware that this will be an ongoing area for their focus. The centre is well resourced and facilities are well maintained. The room available within the centre is utilised well by a large number of agencies and a growing number of users from within and beyond the reach area. The centre provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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	2
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

Holme Hall Primary School was inspected at the same time as the children's centre. It was judged to be a good school.

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 Holme Hall Children's Centre on 16–17 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us during the inspection for your welcome and cooperation. All of you spoke positively about the centre. In particular, many of you recognised the positive impact that the centre is having on your children, especially with support for parenting, health and early education. You told us that the centre is a very welcoming place, and that you and your children feel safe and valued. Staff listen to you whenever you have a problem and that has made a real difference to some of you and your families. The parents' forum is an effective way for your views to be heard. The centre is making good use of your feedback so that it can improve what it does for you.

The activities and groups that the centre provides are well planned to meet the needs of the children and their families. This is particularly the case for early reading and social interaction amongst children. This has helped children to do much better in these areas at school. Local schools are full of praise for the way that children are prepared for school and are often delighted with how well they behave when they get there.

The centre staff provide a high standard of care for you and your families. They treat everybody with respect and try hard to make sure that your time in the centre is well spent and worthwhile. The leaders work hard alongside a wide range of agencies to support many services and training opportunities. These are often popular and sometimes over-subscribed. Many of you have been successful in improving your chances of employment by taking on the challenges of training and courses.

The local authority is doing a good job in supporting the centre and setting it challenging targets for the future. Part of the children's centre's leadership is a group of people from the local community called the advisory board. This group is very committed to making things better for the local area, but we have asked that it starts to ask more challenging questions of the centre leaders and checks the effectiveness and impact of its services. We have also asked the centre leaders to encourage more women to give up smoking during pregnancy.

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