

Inspection report for Hesters Way Children's Centre

Local authority	Gloucestershire
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Linked school if applicable	Rowanfield Infant School URN 115591
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Hesters Way Nursery EY263932

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.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

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

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers and leaders, members of the advisory board, health, social care and education professionals, representatives of the local authority, adult learning services, Citizens Advice Bureau and Jobcentre Plus, community family workers, parents and carers.

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

Information about the centre

Hesters Way Children's Centre is a phase one centre and was designated in March 2005. The centre provides the full core offer through a range of integrated services that include health, family support, adult training, and childcare provision. The head of centre reports to the board of governors and the local authority which are responsible for the governance of the centre.

Statistical data for the area indicate that it is ranked within 30% of the most socially and economically disadvantaged in the country. The percentage of workless households and those dependent on benefits is above average. Children start nursery with skills and knowledge that are below the expected levels. The population is predominantly White British with a growing population from minority ethnic backgrounds, predominantly from Eastern Europe.

A 60-place day-care nursery is located within the centre. The nursery was last inspected on 6 December 2006, it was not inspected as part of this inspection.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Hesters Way is a good children’s centre. It is well established and effective and users say it has changed their lives for the better. The effective leadership and management inspire trust and encourage and promote high-quality services. The excellent use of resources, the considerable commitment to maximising service provision through shared initiatives and the effective use of cost unit analysis mean that they provide outstanding value for money.

Parents and carers make a significant and positive contribution to the governance of the centre. The centre’s Partnership Advisory Board is a recent development and includes good representation from parents and carers, some of whom are keen to be involved in the life of the centre. Parents play a significant role as governors taking lead responsibilities for key areas including safeguarding and nursery education. They receive high-quality training and induction to ensure they take on their responsibilities with increasing confidence and skill.

The centre’s development plan includes well-targeted key areas for priority which stem from the centre’s good quality assessment of user need. Whilst it does not clearly indicate specific timescales, designated levels of responsibility or measures for success, all leaders at the centre are aware of the priorities for the service and they have a firm understanding of the centre’s strengths and areas for development.

Outcomes for children are good overall. The centre provides a highly secure, safe and child-friendly environment. Parents commented that they feel safe and well cared for and they are very confident that their children’s safety is given every priority by staff. Children are making good and, in many cases, outstanding progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Their enjoyment and achievement are outstanding. These are reflected in the learning and development provision for parents and carers which is also outstanding. High-quality interventions provided by speech and language specialists and the excellent implementation of the ‘Every Child A Talker’ programme have resulted in outstanding progress in children’s communication, language and literacy. The centre has created a significant culture of learning for children, parents and carers, staff and partners. The provision of high-

quality training courses has led to many parents and carers achieving nationally recognised qualifications. Remarkably, the centre has been recognised three years running for its high-quality learning and development provision. This encourages and supports further training for users and an increased uptake of voluntary work and paid employment.

Highly effective multi-agency partnerships and the sterling work of the centre's community family workers ensure that there are positive improvements to the well-being of children and their families. These are supported through the delivery of a highly cohesive package of integrated services. The success of the work of the Citizens Advice Bureau has reduced users' debt and increased the take up of welfare entitlements. However, evidence from partner agencies to demonstrate improving outcomes for the local community and service users is not consistently shared. As a result, the centre does not always have the local knowledge from its partners to help it evaluate its own effectiveness and to demonstrate improved outcomes.

Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and thorough. The centre intervenes swiftly in response to the needs of children and their families and is quick to recognise mental and emotional health issues and take appropriate steps to safeguard users. Children on child protection plans receive timely support and the whole family is supported and included in improving outcomes for the child. Inclusion and equality are firmly placed at the heart of the centre's vision, policies, procedures and practice. Families with English as an additional language, teenage parents, parents and children with mental health concerns, and families living in workless households are all strongly represented within the centre. As a result of the excellent care, guidance and support they receive, parents and carers report a substantial increase in confidence and self-esteem and a sizeable reduction in their feelings of isolation.

The existing strong infrastructure provides a platform to drive forward improvement and the capacity for improvement is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the evaluation of the effectiveness of the centre by working with partners to gather information about outcomes for children and users and use this to inform future planning.
- Improve the centre's development action plan by ensuring that there are agreed timescales, levels of responsibility and clear measurable targets against which to measure success.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Children and their family's health is well promoted as they are provided with invaluable support and detailed information. There is clear evidence of improving outcomes and the increased uptake of health promotion groups including 'Mellow Babies' and the IF Cooking Project. The BAPS breastfeeding support group is particularly well attended. Health visitors and midwives provide well-integrated services within the centre with the excellent support of community family workers. Many staff and volunteers are experienced and trained in breastfeeding support. The Midwifery Project has been running for just over six months and is proving very successful in identifying potential breastfeeding mothers during the early stages of their pregnancy. Breastfeeding rates at birth are showing signs of improvement, the number of mothers still breastfeeding at six to eight weeks is above the national average.

The arrangements to ensure the safety and well-being of children are outstanding, being understood by all partner agencies and highly effective. Risk assessments are skilfully completed and parents and carers receive high-quality advice on safety. Many use home safety equipment such as fireguards and stair gates. Parents and carers undertake paediatric first-aid training and this helps to ensure that children receive appropriate treatment when they hurt themselves. Users report that they feel safe at the setting and that they have a strong sense of belonging.

Safeguarding arrangements are meticulous, with minor exceptions, and children are very secure within the centre. The use of the Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child processes are firmly embedded throughout the centre and its partner agencies. The effective use of these assessment processes and the sensitive arrangements that support information sharing between agencies ensure that children and families receive excellent help and as soon as possible. Children on child protection plans are skilfully monitored by staff and, as a result, most children are successfully removed from those plans.

Children are making good or better progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and there is clear evidence that the gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers has continued to narrow for the last three years. According to the centre's own data, children have made outstanding progress in physical development, and also in communication, language and literacy, as a result of targeted support including speech and language therapy and the use of 'Every Child a Talker' initiatives. The 'Mellow Babies' group encourages and supports attachment between parent and child. This is a particularly valuable and well-attended group and is closely linked to the work of the infant mental health (Secure Start) professionals who support the development of bonding and trusting relationships between parents and their children.

The economic well-being of many families, and in particular those who are made vulnerable by their circumstances and those who experience isolation, is greatly improved because of their engagement with the centre's services. Several parents and carers have engaged positively in the well-established volunteer programme.

Volunteers are supported well and receive professional supervision on a regular basis. Many parents and carers have access to training and courses which lead to nationally accredited awards. A local childminder has been supported within the centre to become a trained leader in the Forest School. They have used their skills and expertise to train and support other childminders who have extended the provision of Forest School to children in the care of childminders in the area.

The ethos of the centre is to celebrate success and create an environment and conditions where aspirations are raised and children, parents and staff are empowered to make choices. There is strong engagement at individual child and family level and through groups and services offered. Parental involvement in governance is being further developed and parents are already making valuable contributions as link governors taking on key responsibilities such as safeguarding and nursery education.

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

How good is the provision?

1

Assessments in the Early Years Foundation Stage are skilfully used to produce clear and effective learning plans. Children are making good, and in some instances outstanding, progress. Effective and established relationships with private, voluntary and statutory services and regular network partnership meetings are used to share information and develop best practice. Together, they ensure that parents are engaged and contribute to the effective assessments of needs, and services are flexibly adapted to make a positive difference.

The centre provides a good range of outreach services and activities including baby massage and 'Excellent Explorers' and stay and play sessions are extremely popular. The centre has worked hard to engage with fathers and male carers with some success. For instance, a 'Dads Group' ran for a year until January. During that time the group made significant changes to the children's outdoor play environment and several dads were involved in the development of the Forest School.

High-quality adult learning and activities are significantly improving parenting skills, the economic well-being of children and families and their life chances. Parents and carers express very high levels of satisfaction with the range and quality of learning and development opportunities provided via the centre.

Successful outreach work has been instrumental to many of the achievements of the centre. Experienced and skilled staff employed at the centre provide a wide range of on-site and outreach support to children and families. The work they do is easily understood by the majority of parents and families and is helping to reduce isolation and supporting positive outcomes for families and the community.

The growing Polish community is well supported within the centre. A dedicated Polish families group was established in response to identified need. Members of this group and the 'Social English' group access English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes and level 1 and 2 literacy and numeracy classes. Translation services are available to support communication in the languages of the community. These aspects of provision are supporting those families new to the area and those new to English to become established within the community and to improve their employment opportunities.

The centre is successful in engaging with the teenage parents, some fathers, a growing number of minority ethnic families, parents and carers with special education needs and/or disabilities, families with recognised mental health problems, and, increasingly, with survivors of domestic abuse. The membership of the centre has increased year on year and outcomes for the most vulnerable children and families are improving.

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	1
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 centre manager provides clear direction to the staff team. Leaders at all levels make valuable contributions to the success of the centre and share ambitions and expectations. The governors and the local authority provide clear lines of accountability and share ambitions for the centre. Aspects of their management include regular audits and inspection. However, the centre's development plan is not sufficiently rigorous in its target setting or setting measures to evidence improvement so that the centre is always sure of the success of its provision or monitoring. There are high-quality systems for the effective governance, professional supervision and day-to-day management of the centre. Users play a key role in the governance of the centre as they have key roles and responsibilities. They participate in the centre's decision-making process through formal membership of the Partnership Advisory Board, Children's Centre Board and the Board of Governors. The 'Have Your Say' initiative is commonly used by parents and carers to air their views and make suggestions. These are used to influence the work of the centre.

The inclusion of all children and families is well promoted through a range of good-quality policies to promote equality and diversity. These are used as part of the induction process to promote the understanding of the importance of inclusion for staff, students and volunteers. As a result, diversity is celebrated and staff challenge discrimination of any kind. The centre takes opportunities to celebrate different cultural festivals including Eid, Chinese New Year and Christmas. Stories, photos, books, resources and planned themes are used well to raise awareness of different countries and cultures within the centre. Through its equality impact assessment, the centre takes seriously its responsibility to promote community cohesion. The centre's commitment to providing crèche services, funding and the subsidy of training courses all help to break down barriers to inclusion and create an inclusive service.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities have their needs well met at the centre. Services are well coordinated and staff from across agencies have developed excellent inter-agency working arrangements to ensure individual needs are met. Every child attending the nursery has an individual educational plan and all children receive an initial speech and language assessment so that targeted support is provided as soon as possible and in partnership with early years workers and parents. This has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of children with identified speech and language delay.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are rigorous and child protection strategies are highly effective. Staff recruitment procedures are very comprehensive and are designed to ensure all staff employed at the centre are suitable to care for children. Excellent multi-agency partnership working arrangements including the good use of Common Assessment Framework and Team Around the Child processes securely safeguard children. There is some pioneering work being done within the centre by the Secure Start professionals. The much-valued and well-used infant mental health service results in early interventions and sensitive support for the most vulnerable families, many of whom are experiencing domestic violence in their lives. Staff

receive regular high-quality training opportunities to develop their expertise and skill in safeguarding and child protection including in-house training.

There is some effective use of the available data to analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of the services provided and to identify any gaps in provision. However, there are gaps in the information collated which means that the centre does not routinely have all the data it needs to chart improved outcomes for service users over time and to make the centre's development action plan fully effective.

Strong and trusting relationships have been established through the 'soft federation' of children's centres in the area. They have worked collaboratively, and to great effect, to reduce any duplication of work and to decommission costly services which have limited impact on the most vulnerable families, targeting resources and reducing costs without compromising the high quality of service provision.

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	2
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	1
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	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	2

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

The inspection report of Rowanfield Infant School was used to explore the effectiveness of the governors who are also responsible for Hesters Way Childrens Centre. The inspection of the school took place in October 2009. The report explained that the governance of the school was good and provided effective challenge and support to the leadership of the school.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Hesters Way Children's Centre on 19 and 20 April. We judged the centre as good overall.

Your children's centre is highly valued and is relied upon for the well-being of large numbers of people. The strong leadership and highly successful teamwork mean that families are provided with a range of good services tailored to meet their particular needs.

The centre is making a very positive difference to children's well-being and learning. It is particularly making a significant difference in helping children to experience a safe start to childhood. Children are making good or better progress in their learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage and this is helping them to prepare for their next phase of their education.

Thank you for contributing to the inspection. Your comments proved invaluable to the inspectors. You were unanimous in your praise of the work of the centre and, in particular, the community support workers. You were really keen to tell the inspectors about how well staff have supported families, helped to raise your self-esteem and confidence and have encouraged you to achieve. The care, guidance and support of families and children are excellent. This is largely as a result of the extremely successful close partnerships that staff forge with you and the way they engage you in the work of the centre. The fantastic partnership the centre has forged with staff from across different agencies ensures that you access good-quality services as quickly as possible. Several of you believe that your contact with the centre has been life changing. Professionals working in multi-agency teams and voluntary organisations, who spoke to inspectors, all hold the centre and the work of its staff in very high regard.

Leaders and managers understand the needs of the families extremely well. They have effective systems to monitor that staff are doing a good job and that the

services on offer are making a positive difference to people's lives. They show that they are determined to improve the lives of users even more.

Inspectors have no doubt that the good work will continue but we have asked the centre to make some further improvements to the good work that is already done. Firstly, we have asked the centre to find out from all the partners that it works with just how well children and users are doing so that they know what else they need to provide. Secondly, we have asked the centre to set itself clear goals to work towards so that it can check how well it is heading towards them and whether it is making a difference.

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