

Inspection report for Hob Moor Children's Centre

Local authority	York
Inspection number	367813
Inspection dates	8-9 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Joanne Smith HMI

Centre governance	York City Council
Centre leader	Paula Richardson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Green Lane, Acomb, York, North Yorkshire, YO24 4PS
Telephone number	01904 555066
Fax number	NA
Email address	Paula.richardson@york.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Hob Moor Primary School Hob Moor Oaks
-----------------------------	--

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior centre staff, front line workers, parents and carers, local authority representatives and partner agency representatives. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Hob Moor Children's Centre is located in one building to the south west of York. This phase two children's centre shares a site with a primary school and a special school and serves seven other local primary schools. The centre manager is responsible for service delivery across the reach area and for three other children's centres in the locality cluster. The centre serves an area in the top 30% of the most disadvantaged areas in the country. Services, delivered by an integrated team and partners, include health services, family support, employment and training support, targeted support for vulnerable families and family learning. These are delivered from the centre and from community venues. Governance is provided by the local authority.

The centre covers a wide geographical area and is close to the reach area boundary in one of the more densely populated super-output areas. There is a large rural area within the reach area of the centre. The area served by the centre has a range of housing, including private and local authority rented properties, private housing and a homeless persons' hostel. There are pockets of social disadvantage surrounded by areas of less need. The centre reach area has the highest birth rate in the local authority. The vast majority of the population in the reach area is White British. Within the community served by the children's centre, few children aged under five years are living in families dependent on workless benefits. Take up of the childcare element of Working Tax Credits is slightly below national averages. Children enter

the Early Years Foundation Stage provision across the area with skills and abilities that are lower than those typically found nationally.

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

Hob Moor Children’s Centre has a significant impact on the lives of families who use it. Parents and carers speak positively about the centre and a typical view is, ‘The centre has changed my life around’. Central to the success of the centre are the excellent relationships that have developed with partner agencies. These partnerships and the work of the highly skilled centre staff lead to outstanding outcomes for families. Parents and carers are highly aware of the different means of keeping their children safe and healthy and apply this knowledge well. In groups, children’s behaviour is safe and very young children are happy and comfortable in the centre’s environment. The centre’s safeguarding policies and procedures are well matched to the local safeguarding children’s board procedures. They are very well understood by staff and partners at all levels. Very close working with partners has been instrumental in preventing some families from needing more intensive interventions through a highly effective sharing of information and skills.

Strategic oversight of the centre is the responsibility of the local authority. Clear and well-understood monitoring systems are in place. As a result of monitoring, managers have recognised that they do not yet have refined target-setting structures in place to enable the centre or the local authority to measure the centre’s impact effectively. The monitoring systems are underpinned by a well-thought through, but still-developing evaluation process. However, these systems and structures clearly illustrate the centre’s good capacity to improve because leaders have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to further improve the centre. Recent changes to the local authority’s approach to governance in children’s centres are yet to become firmly established. However, the rationale behind the changes and the minutes of meetings from the previous structure show a strong commitment to including parents and carers and partners in decision making and providing challenge in the centre. Currently, however, this is a weaker aspect of the leadership and management at the centre. Secure knowledge of the reach area and the location of families whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, demonstrate the centre is

accurately assessing local need. Alongside this, very sensitive assessment of individual need supports the centre's commitment to promoting equality and inclusion for all families in the reach area and beyond. This is demonstrated in their excellent work with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families.

Learning and development are at the heart of the centre's work. Groups, including drop-in sessions for parents and carers, have a clear purpose and the centre's dedication to promoting adults' and children's development is clearly apparent. Excellent work by the Early Learning Leader with the childminders and private and voluntary Early Years Foundation Stage providers promotes children's development and enhances their learning environments. This is paying dividends, particularly for those children registered with the children's centre, as focussed work is carried out in the areas where they live and improves outcomes well for these children. Excellent partnerships are fostered by the Early Learning Leader and is a good indication of how well the centre uses its resources to maximise their impact. Community venues and voluntary partners are also very well used to extend the range and reach of services in the area, illustrating the centre's delivery of an outstanding range of provision while providing outstanding value for money.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - sharp, measureable targets are set to develop the monitoring and review process
 - parents and carers involvement in the advisory board and shaping service delivery is increased and developed
 - evaluation processes are embedded to further enhance service delivery.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

The centre works highly effectively to improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. One parent commented, 'My daughter has come on so much in the last five weeks', following a programme of support from the Portage team. Children who use the centre make good progress and many achieve in line with expectations at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. In addition to this, the achievement gap between those children whose circumstances may make them potentially vulnerable and their peers is visibly narrowing. Identified areas of learning where children's development is weaker are targeted and evidence shows that there is good improvement in these areas.

Health outcomes for users are outstanding. For example, there is a reported reduction in the number of teenage parents who go on to have second and third pregnancies, which demonstrates their growing ability to make informed life choices.

A significant number of parents and carers are developing a very good understanding of the constituents of a healthy lifestyle. Their take up of immunisations for their children is high. Parents and carers are actively engaging with professionals and groups at the centre and early intervention work is making a noticeable difference in the progress parents and carers and children make. Sessions, such as the 'Dads' Breakfast' and 'Bubble and Stir' are highly effective in enhancing parents' and carers' awareness of the importance of sharing family time, alongside boosting their knowledge of how to provide satisfying, healthy meals at an affordable price.

Parenting courses are used very successfully to help parents and carers improve outcomes for their families in a wide range of circumstances. Parents and carers continue to use the parenting techniques they learn on these courses, such as Dinosaur School, many months after finishing the course, which demonstrates the significant impact the course has on them and their children. Parenting courses in particular are very much valued by those who attend, as reflected in the comment, 'The course made me feel fantastic'.

When using the centre parents and carers say they feel safe and they are happy that their children are safe. Excellent joint working with partner agencies, through the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is helping parents and carers and children in families identified as potentially vulnerable to stay together as a unit. Excellent work is done with a range of services for children and families who have had a child protection plan or who have accessed the Portage scheme, in order to aid children's development through individual and realistic targets for families to work on together. The highly effective approach to joint working, when families are moving from support by one service to another, enables children and families to maintain their progress and reduce the need for re-referral.

Relationships at the centre are very strong and there is a clearly visible mutual respect between all the partners in the centre and the parents and carers who use it. Many users are reluctant initially to engage with the centre, but the centre's nurturing environment is an excellent vehicle for staff to sensitively work with families and develop parents' and carers' confidence to go beyond where they ever thought they could. Parents and carers who have accessed the small nurture groups, having come from unsettled living arrangements, are now settled and more confident. As a result, they actively promote the centre in the community, volunteer their services and some move into further and higher education or employment, and demonstrate outstanding progress towards economic security and independence.

Parents and carers are empowered to influence the work at the centre. The groups, such as Multi Tots, a group for parents who have had multiple births, and the support group set up by families living in the hostel for homeless people are excellent examples of this in action. Parents and carers lead and plan for the groups and are effectively supported in this by centre staff.

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	1
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	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	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

Assessment of users' needs is very robust. Assessment is not seen by the management team as an activity based on one source of information, but as a holistic overview of the information available to them. They make excellent use of the staff's knowledge of the locality, conduct secure interrogation of the data held and use a variety of consultation methods, all drawn together to provide an extremely well-matched range of targeted and universal services suitable for the community.

Community venues are very well used to take centre services out into the reach area. The Gateway weekly drop-in session is an excellent example of this. It is an extremely popular session that is heavily supported by childcare and family workers, development workers and health partners. It used highly effectively as a tool to introduce families to wider centre services, to register families and to offer support, advice and guidance in a non-threatening environment. The Toy Bus visits the area fortnightly and is also very well used by parents and carers who borrow good quality play equipment and receive child development advice and guidance during its visit. Individual assessment is pivotal in the centre's work. This is carried out in a sensitive way and very much seen as team work. The result is expertly tailored packages of support for families delivered in many different ways. For example, they take speech and language activities into the family home to ensure that children receive their entitlement and also support young parents practically to enable them to attend activities with their children.

Centre staff are highly skilled at delivering important messages to users and their families. They take on board parents' and carers' concerns and incorporate learning into the group sessions. For example, parents and carers told centre staff that they had difficulty in encouraging some of their children to use cups rather than a baby bottle for drinking. The skilled centre staff devised activities, such as making

milkshakes, to effectively encourage children to drink from a cup. There is also skilful introduction of other important messages, such as the damage that can be done to children’s teeth if they drink sugary drinks from a bottle, and the impact of this and use of dummies on speech and language development. The centre is rich in easily accessible information for parents and carers. Much of this is thoughtfully displayed and positioned to deliberately catch parents’ and carers' attention. A life-sized baby doll is positioned in a waiting area and dressed in a 'babygrow' splashed with red liquid. This is a stark reminder to parents and carers about how far half a mug of warm tea or coffee can spread and the scald it can cause a child.

All groups and sessions offered by the centre have a clear purpose and a planned learning intention, heavily influenced by parents and carers and children in the groups and designed to meet their needs well. Children are observed closely and their interests are used to shape the next session. For example, children enjoyed experimenting with fruit in one session and this information was used to plan a healthy eating activity in the next. Alongside this, parents and carers can request help, for example, with leaving their child at the group for short periods in preparation for starting nursery. These requests are also taken into account when planning sessions.

There is a wide range of adult learning opportunities that are closely linked to local need. Courses are quickly provided to small groups with similar needs, rather than the centre waiting to put a course on until enough learners want it, or because it is what the adult learning provider can offer. Children’s learning and progress are tracked well but the tracking of adults’ learning and development is less so. There is, however, strong case study evidence to demonstrate that adults who access level one English and mathematics courses progress onto level two courses.

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	2
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?

2

The centre manager is central to the highly successful coordination of services delivered from the centre. The centre works hand-in-hand with voluntary and statutory partners to deliver well-tailored services throughout the reach area. Co-location of all key partners into the children’s centre building is a development that has only served to strengthen the already exceptionally close partnerships that exist

between agencies. Work with social care partners has developed very positively. The benefits of this have been felt by the staff who have more time to devote to families who are more in need of intensive support. As one partner said, 'It has never been about the building, but the team work in the community for the families'. The result of this is an excellent approach to multi-agency working. This is facilitating an efficient use of the centre's valuable staff resource, through a sharing of skills and training to deliver services appropriately in targeted families' homes. This illustrates the centre's ability to efficiently deliver services that are outstanding value for money.

The mechanism for ensuring the suitability of adults to work in the centre is very strong. An excellent record of criminal record bureau checks is held for all staff and volunteers and the systems for ensuring partner agency workers suitability are equally robust.

Clear and well understood management and monitoring structures are in place. Within these structures are well received and appreciated staff supervision and development systems. These are professionally appropriate for staff and have case load management discussions built into them. Recent changes to the structure of the centre advisory board have resulted in parents and carers having a reduced understanding of their role in the centre's accountability and governance. The new structure, which uses a variety of methods to consult with centre users, has not had time to become established. However, evidence shows that parents and carers have regularly been involved in a parents' forum in the past, and the centre manager is a passionate advocate for the voice of the centre user being heard.

Evaluation methods in the centre are developing. Recently, good quality information from sessions and courses has been gathered from a wide variety of sources to ascertain users' views. However, the impact of this very recent work is not yet evident. While the management team have a clear picture of where the centre is and where it needs to go next in its development, it is not reflected in the targets set in the action plan. This has been recognised by managers and is a reflection of their knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre.

Inclusion of all is a common thread that runs through the centre's work. Staff are dedicated to ensuring that their services are accessible to all and their 'never give up' attitude towards hard-to-reach families is testament to this. There is a strong sense of respect shown in the way that groups are formed. It is recognised that some families find it harder to join large groups, so they are invited to smaller groups where parents and carers and children can experience being part of a group without feeling threatened or overwhelmed. Sessions, such as the 'Dads' Breakfast' are held at times when working fathers can access them, acknowledging the importance of their relationship with their child.

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

None.

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 Hob Moor Children's Centre on 8 and 9 June 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you to those of you who came to speak with us. We also spent some time reading the comments you made about the activities and courses you attend at the centre. Using this information, we know that you really appreciate the help and support that you get from the staff at the centre. We found that the care, guidance and support you have from the centre staff and other agencies are excellent. It is extremely well matched to your needs and to those of your children. The centre works hard to make sure that all who want to use it are welcomed and able to do so. They are particularly successful in this for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The managers at the centre work hard to make sure that the activities and services provided by the centre are very well placed in your community. They also make sure they are useful to you and delivered by the best people for the job. They do this very well because they have extremely good relationships with the other agencies involved in families' lives, such as health and social care partners. Their excellent relationships with these partners are also helping families who need extra support to receive it.

There is a strong focus on your learning and development at the centre. We found that staff take every opportunity to provide you with relevant information either on courses or in drop-in groups. This is having an outstanding impact on how well you learn to keep your families safe and healthy. We were pleased to find that some of you volunteer at the centre, supporting staff in groups or running groups yourselves. This has helped some of you find work or to get extra training to help you in your role. We think this is a very positive outcome for you.

We found that children who use the different services the centre offers make good progress in their learning and development. We also found that children who find it harder than others to learn are catching up. This means that when they get to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage many of them are doing as well as they are expected to.

The managers at the centre and in the local authority are doing well in making sure that the centre provides outstanding value for money. They ask you about the centre's work and use that information to help plan for the future. However, the centre should do more to use this information better. Therefore, we have asked them to make sure you are more involved in helping to decide what services the centre should offer and to get better at how they ask your opinions and how they use the information. We also found that the managers and the local authority have a good idea about how they want the centre to develop. However, the way in which they plan for this is not clear enough. We have asked them to improve how they set their development targets so that they know clearly how well they are doing towards meeting them.

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

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