

Inspection report for Huntingdon Town Children's Centre

Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	362971
Inspection dates	13–14 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Christine Davies HMI

Centre governance	The governing body of Huntingdon Nursery School
Centre leader	Kay Dimelow (headteacher/ head of centre) Tracey Holliday (centre coordinator)
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Huntingdon Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY408157 St Johns Little Learners EY426709 Huntingdon Nursery School

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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff, managers, groups of parents and representatives of partner organisations and the local authority. They talked to children, parents, carers and staff as they observed the centre's work. The inspectors looked at a range of relevant documentation including case studies.

Information about the centre

The Huntingdon Town Children's Centre opened as a phase one Sure Start centre in the Oxmoor area in November 2005. It provides the full core offer of services to its community. The hub of services and administration are located with the Huntingdon Nursery School. Childcare provision and much of the centre's programme of activities take place, through partnership with other organisations, in seven other school and community settings within easy reach. The centre provides 60 full-time equivalent nursery places, including 12 childcare places for two-year-olds during term time. The centre provides a breakfast club in term time and full-day holiday childcare at the main site. It commissions 26 full-time childcare places in term time at St John's Little Learners. The governing body of the Nursery School manages the centre on behalf of the local authority. The headteacher leads the Nursery provision and has oversight of all of the centre's work, while the centre coordinator leads the community programme.

The boundaries of the area served by the centre changed in April 2011. The centre currently reaches an area of high deprivation including the North Huntingdon Ward, which is ranked in the lowest 1% in the Eastern Region. About 88% of the local population are of White British heritage. A wide range of language, cultural and ethnic groups is represented among the remaining 12%, of which the largest groups are White Europeans speaking Polish and Lithuanian. Deprivation is characterised by lack of qualification and skills among a majority of adults (53%). A significant

number of adults suffer poor health which is related to high levels of smoking, substance abuse and obesity. The main concerns related to children are the relatively high numbers suffering malnutrition, accidental injuries and the very high number of children subject to child protection plans. The proportion of teenage parents is higher than average. More than half of the children in the area live in workless or lone parent households, receiving benefits. One in three of the children in the area are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is above average. The centre serves a community with a high proportion of children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Children’s skills and understanding are often low on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage and many are at an early stage of speaking English.

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

Huntingdon Town Children’s Centre gives good support to young children, their families and parents and carers. It is held in high regard by users for the outstanding nursery education provided and for taking the extensive range of activities out to the locations that are convenient for young families around Oxmoor. Leaders and managers work closely with key partners to make sure that the flexible programme meets the changing needs of the community. As one parent said ‘Nobody knows better than the centre what we need in the area. They give us a fantastic nursery, classes for adults and things like family fun days that are all on our doorstep.’

Good links with partner agencies ensure that young families in the area know about and can access the centre’s exceptionally wide range of provision. The views of the whole community have been influential in helping the centre to decide on locations for family learning and play sessions. The centre and partners focus strongly on inclusion of families faced with the most complex difficulties. As a result, the take-up of activities in the areas’ most deprived neighbourhoods is good and increasing. However, the centre and its partners do not collate information about all outcomes for adults and children as they move on, in order to fully assess the impact of the programme of provision.

Safeguarding is a priority for the centre. Good procedures are in place to ensure that all premises are kept safe and secure for users. Close work between the centre and children’s services ensures that effective steps are taken to prevent family

breakdown and protect children at risk of abuse.

Most children learn and develop well in preparation for starting school by taking part in the centre's activities. Parents and children are beginning to take up healthy lifestyles and take up more health services as a result of guidance from the children's centre. Services for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and parents with disabilities are effectively integrated, with particularly good effect in the Nursery School.

The confidence and wellbeing of parents improves as they learn in parenting courses. Staff and tutors from partner agencies provide good advice, guidance and support, often over long periods of time, to improve the lives of families that stay in the area. There are notable examples of the centre users moving on in their lives. Information about impact of its programme on outcomes for all groups in the community is not collected systematically and analysed by the centre.

Enjoyment of activities is evident and often commented on in feedback from users. Many families attend different toy library, play, learning and crèche activities throughout the week. Most of the provision is good or better. The centre keeps excellent records of the progress that children make in Nursery and knows about the outcomes for children in the commissioned childcare at St John's Little Learners and for some adults who take courses that lead to qualifications. While most of the work is of good quality, the centre does not have a monitoring system in place to ensure consistency of quality throughout all its provision. The centre does not track the achievements of all attendees to drive improvement in children and parents' learning overall.

Leadership and management and the use of resources are good. Strong links exist between strategic planning, management and provision. Governors and the steering advisory board have the skills to hold the centre to account. The centre has a strong reputation for striving for inclusion and excellence among partners and the support of families in the community is growing discernibly. The centre is implementing new performance data management systems. Given the centre's strong reputation among partners, its achievement of excellent nursery provision, good contribution to inclusion and safeguarding in the area and successes for some users in moving on to employment, the centre demonstrates good capacity to further improve outcomes.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Monitor and evaluate all provision systematically to promote consistently high quality in all activities
 - ensuring that the planning and outcomes of all activities, crèches and play and learning provision for children are monitored and evaluated regularly with the involvement of a suitably qualified early years practitioner
- Work with strategic and local partners to assess the impact of the programme

of provision by:

- gathering more detailed information about all outcomes for children and adults who use children’s centre services regularly
- collating and analysing information about users’ uptake of health services, outcomes for adults who go on to further training, qualification and employment, and the achievement of all children by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The warm individual welcome that the centre’s staff give to each child, parent and carer supports the emotional and mental wellbeing of users well. Parents are beginning to choose healthier food for themselves and their children, following the good example set by the centre’s staff and crèche workers. Some families are encouraged to take up more active lifestyles including walking between venues, although there are no clear results in terms of reducing adult obesity. Most parents and carers with young babies that use the centre attend baby clinics and get expert help on routine issues such as weaning. However, rates of breastfeeding and take up of immunisations in the area are low.

Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their parents and carers have good access to integrated care, education and health services through the work of the centre. Young children with developmental delay, whose difficulties are newly diagnosed or emerging, and their parents, enjoy attending the weekly Little Stars group at Spring Common Special School. Parents learn about how to help their children progress as well as they can and children thoroughly enjoy the use of a specialised soft play environment and a sensory room. Speech therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists work with the children while they attend the centre and their health needs are supported promptly. Transition into the centre’s nursery school or into the special school is well supported so that the children quickly make good progress from their starting points.

Children settle in quickly to all the centre’s activities because of the personal attention they are given and their behaviour is good. They make outstanding progress in their learning and personal development in the Nursery School and very good progress in the childcare nearby at St John’s Little Learners. Many of the centre’s regular users do not attend nursery school or childcare and, although they may take part in several sessions each week, details of their progress are not always known by the centre. Children enjoy and take part enthusiastically in all the activities set out for them, in breakfast club, at the toy library, in Moorplay session and in some of the crèches, although the centre does not keep track of how well they are progressing. Play provision with a focus on language development is very popular with parents and carers, particularly for the growing numbers with English as an additional language, or who care for children with disabilities. Families enjoy the singing and rhyme times, for example at the end of toy library, as children make rapid progress in gaining new words and ideas. Parents and carers in one group said,

'It's great joining in with our children while they learn their colours and numbers in song time. It's the best bit of the group.' Most children have good experience of playing and learning in a group and are well prepared for moving on to full-time school.

Parents' and carers' evaluations show that they gain confidence in the skills they need for looking after their children well. One said that 'The parenting course on managing my child's behaviour made me much more confident in drawing the line with my child'. Parents and carers say that the English and mathematics courses have helped them update their knowledge so that they are able to help their children learn through the early years and into primary school.

Users say they feel safe and secure at the centre. Many parents and carers show in their feedback to the centre that they trust the staff and there are good examples of families turning to the centre for help in keeping their children safe from abuse. The centre works extensively through the Common Assessment Framework and local multi-agency referral meetings to protect children at risk of harm. The centre offers extended care and emergency places for children when families are at risk of breakdown. Outcomes in this aspect of their work are good.

Parents and carers forge links of friendship through attending the centre which carry on into their wider life in the community. Parents and carers such as childminders, who have benefited from courses often return to the centre, help out in groups and on the advisory board, and go into local schools to help as volunteers. Some users have put their good ideas into action, for instance when parents formed their own weekly group to support the growing number of parents of children with Downs' Syndrome and planned and funded their own trip to the fire station.

Many parents take their first steps in formal learning through family learning groups such as 'Make and Mend' and 'Party Planning'. One young woman who had no formal secondary schooling said 'I have learned to use the computer and tackle more maths from coming to the knitting group.' The centre can point to some notable examples of 'parents' learning journeys', for example through family cooking activities to professional catering courses and on to employment.

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	3
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	2

governance of the centre	
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 gets to know each user well as an individual when they register with any of the centre's provision. Staff work very closely with health visitors and health and children's services professionals through monthly local assessment referral meetings to make sure that they can meet individual adult's and children's needs. Assessments for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are robust. Individual education plans are reviewed regularly. Staff make suggestions of activities for families to try out, taking into account each user's circumstances. As one parent put it 'They really know what we want and how far we are able to go to get it.'

Provision to promote children's learning and development is of a good quality overall. The progress of children in the Nursery School and in the childcare setting is monitored very closely and the quality of provision is observed in detail. In contrast, the centre does not do so much to ensure that all provision in the crèches and play sessions is consistently high quality and to ensure that the best outcomes for all users are always promoted. The achievement of learners is celebrated throughout the setting and parents and carers support and encourage each other to do well. Nearly all parents and carers taking taster courses in family learning return to study more.

The range of services and learning programmes provided by the centre is excellent. Staff and managers understand the greatest worries facing young families in the area, such as lack of training and employment and poor health in families. They recognise that the greatest concerns for children's wellbeing are the high numbers of children suffering injuries from accidents, who are malnourished or at risk of harm from abuse. Activities aim to support parents in tackling their economic needs and help their children to develop safely and well. The most pressing of children's needs are supported at every opportunity throughout the range of provision, for example the centre ensures that the food provided is always nutritious and that premises are secure for young children. Partners add significantly to range of accessible and specialist premises so that more than one activity can take place at a time. A mark of the success of the extensive range is that user numbers from the area are growing year on year.

The extensive range of activities includes good guidance and support to individuals as well as activities for groups. Skilled professionals support very young teenage parents and carers and those with specific health difficulties. Jobcentre Plus information is available to all and some parents get additional helpful advice to find

childcare, courses or training to help with going back to work.

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	1
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

Governance and accountability arrangements are very well established and understood. The centre has a steering body that acts to give independent support and guide the centre to meet the needs of the community. The centre's relationship with the local authority is set out effectively in a memorandum of understanding so that the centre has a clear sense of purpose. The centre's motivation to improve lives in the area is strong and the management team's dedicated drive forward is evident.

Good operational management and strong partnerships ensure that a richly varied programme of individual and group, play and learning activities is planned and takes place. The partnerships that the centre has forged with training providers, schools, community groups, children's services, health professionals and the Jobcentre Plus ensure that families know about the centre and can access the services. Partners help the centre to get to know about the needs of the community, and to evaluate and adjust its programme overall. Outcomes for users are good and improving, particularly for children and parents and carers with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The centre is in the process of changing its performance management information systems. At present the information that is gathered and that from partners is broad and does not give much detail.

Management roles within the centre work well on a day to day basis and provide some flexibility for the centre's ambitious plans. Leaders and managers focus strongly on inclusion of an increasing proportion of young families in the area by matching the programme to their needs.

Safeguarding procedures for vetting staff and visitors are good. A comprehensive range of policies to support child protection, health, safety and equalities is in place and they are updated on a satisfactory rolling programme. The networks that the centre has established with other agencies ensure that users are referred and receive effective services. Staff take up good quality training and are knowledgeable about

safeguarding matters in the area. The delivery of the Freedom Programme for those suffering domestic abuse is a good example of collaborative work that is having a great impact in keeping users safe.

Value for money and the use of resources are good. Space in the main hub is intensively used. The centre makes the best of resources in the community to ensure they are welcoming and suit the users' needs. Centre users' views are sought and acted on in a variety of ways. Users feel confident to speak out about the type of provision they would like and where they would like activities to be held.

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	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

An inspection of the maintained Huntingdon Nursery School was carried in January 2010 under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspectors looked at the childcare that was provided at the Nursery School, which was the care and learning for two-year-olds and the breakfast club provision. The children's centre inspectors who visited for this inspection in July 2011 took account of the findings of the

nursery school inspection. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The last childcare inspection report for the childcare that is commissioned by the centre at St John's Little Learners that was available to be seen by the team for this children's centre inspection was carried out in 2009. The management arrangements at St John's Little Learners changed in May 2010 and the setting, so that a new inspection under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006 was necessary. An inspection of the childcare at St John's Little Learners took place on 19 July 2011. At the time of the children's centre report being published, the findings of the childcare are not yet published on our website.

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 Huntingdon Town Children's Centre on 13–14 July 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you very much to parents, carers and children that we met during the inspection for taking the time to tell us about the work of centre. I would particularly like to thank those that came in to meet us when they would not normally use the centre and made time available to speak to us on the phone.

Here is a short report of what we found:

The Huntingdon Town Children's Centre provides you with good support and gives outstanding nursery school education, of which you are all justifiably proud. The centre has good potential to continue building up the services it provides for you.

The range of activities that the centre puts on is very wide. The centre works closely with other organisations to make sure that they always know about the difficulties your families are faced with in the local area, such as your training and employment needs and family health needs, so that the activities are planned to support you.

The centre puts a high value on helping you and your children to learn and develop well. The leaders and managers aim to include as many young families in the area as possible and focus on helping those who might find it hardest to improve their lives to join in. They give good support, for example, to parents and children with disabilities and young parents.

Your views have been influential in helping the centre to decide where to put on activities such as Moorplay and the family learning 'Make and Mend' courses so that they can run a crèche to suit your needs.

The centre has done a good job in finding the right tutors and the right locations for courses and play sessions to be convenient for you to get to. This has made it possible for the centre to put on the courses and play sessions that you want. As a result, you and your children attend regularly. As one parent put it 'We love to have something different to do, nearby. We love everything and we would go all weekend too if the sessions were on.'

We were very pleased to see how well your children progress in learning to talk and communicate. You told us how much you enjoy learning with your children, especially in the singing and rhyme sessions at toy library and play sessions. An enthusiastic group of parents told us, 'It's great joining in with our children while they learn their colours and numbers in song time. It's the best bit of the group'.

The centre's staff know each of you very well as individuals. You told us that you appreciate the personal welcome that you get when attending the centre. Many of you that we spoke to said that you trust the staff at the centre to help keep you safe and you would turn to the centre in times of crisis in your family.

You told us that you enjoy meeting families from different backgrounds and learning a few words in each others' languages. Some groups of parents and carers get together to arrange more groups and outings, which helps increasing numbers of families in the area to join in with the centre's activities.

You told us that you feel safe and secure in the centre. Only suitably vetted staff are allowed to work with you. Visitors are signed in and out and wear badges for your security. Staff take every opportunity to make sure children have healthy snacks and get plenty of opportunity for physical exercise in groups.

We found that you become healthier and more confident as parents when attending the centre. Many of you told us how much you had learned about helping your children behave well and keeping safe at home.

We found that the centre keeps much more detailed records about some activities than others. Some activities are better planned and more exciting for the children, especially in the nursery and childcare at St John's Little Learners, than others in the crèches and play session. The centre sees you and your children very often when you come to the toy library, play sessions and classes but does not keep track of your children's progress, or use the information as well as it could when making plans. We have asked the centre to find a simple way of keeping track of your children's achievements so that all work is as good as it can be, and all children will learn and develop as well as they can. We have asked staff to work more closely together to take note of individual children's progress, under the guidance of a suitably qualified early years' worker, and share their best work with each other.

Perhaps you can help the centre to keep track of you and your child's learning by giving them your comments.

You get sound, helpful advice to find schools and childcare, courses and training. You get good advice and guidance in partner organisations like St Barnabas. You appreciate the help in taking the first steps to qualifications or employment through attending classes and using the crèche.

We found that the centre does not always know about the lasting impact of its programme of activities as you move on in your lives. We have asked the centre to work with the local authority and other organisations to gather information about how well you get on when you go on to training or work (if you want to) and how well your children do when they start school.

At the time we inspected the children's centre we took into account the Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare provision at the Huntingdon Nursery School and provided by the centre nearby at St John's Little Learners. We did not write separate reports about either of the settings. You may be interested to know that St John's Little Learners was inspected on 19 July 2011. At the time of writing this report about the children's centre as a whole, the report about St John's Little Learners has not yet been published. When it is published it will be on our website, www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The full report about the children's centre is available from your centre or on our website, www.ofsted.gov.uk.