

# Inspection report for Highfield Children's Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	365684
Inspection dates	13–14 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Sheelagh Barnes

Centre governance	The Governing Body of Highfield Nursery School
Centre leader	Catherine McManus
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Highfield Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Dyson Gardens Children's 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.

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader, the centre manager, parents and carers, outreach workers, governors of the nursery, the project manager for network coordination of childminders, the senior practitioner of the care management team, health workers, a health visitor and family support workers.

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

## Information about the centre

This is a phase one children's centre that provides the full core offer for children and families who live in the reach area. The centre has been operating since 2006 and was fully designated in April 2008. It is funded by the local authority. The centre is open from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm, 52 weeks per year. It operates from three sites. The commissioned childcare is provided by Highfield Nursery School and also Dyson Gardens Community Day Nursery, which is designated for closure on 31 August 2011. There is provision for families and adults from St Kilda's Centre, which is nearby. The local authority has delegated governance of the centre to the governing body of the nursery school with which it shares a site. The headteacher of the nursery is also the head of the centre. Day-to-day running of the centre is undertaken by a manager. There are links with Jobcentre Plus, local childminders, health visitors and midwives, a government-funded agency to promote further education, East Birmingham Community Forum, Norton Hall and Hutton Hall. All sites are fully accessible to disabled parents, carers and children.

The area is within 2% of the most deprived and densely populated in the country. The proportion of families where no one is in work in the reach area is above the national average at over 40%. The proportion of families who have children under five and who are in receipt of benefits is also high. Mobility in the area is high as families move into and out of private rented accommodation. The very great majority of the families in the area are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the highest proportion being of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin. There are a small, but growing number of families with Sudanese backgrounds moving into the area. Children enter early years provision with a range of skills and knowledge which is below that expected for their age. In the reach area, there are currently nine children with a child protection plan or who are in care. Five children have had an assessment under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

## 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

The centre provides satisfactorily for the children and families in the reach area. The provision for some groups, such as young mothers or those who have experienced domestic violence, is good. Parents and carers who use the centre are enthusiastic about it and make remarks such as, 'I have learned so many things that help with my self-confidence.' They are encouraged to let the centre know what they would like. For example, parents say what courses they would be interested in and what trips they would like and are confident that their wishes will be considered. There is less contribution from parents and carers at a strategic level. There is a committee, which reports to the governing body; however, few parents regularly attend.

There is a strong emphasis on safety and keeping families safe, and staff are well trained and alert. Systems for safeguarding and child protection are good. The centre is highly responsive at times of crisis, and the care, guidance and support it offers are good.

Information from analysis of data to indicate the impact of actions is not readily available. Various members of the children's centre staff gather a significant amount

of information about a wide range of aspects of the centre and its work. However, this very large amount of data is not collated and analysed systematically. As a result, the overall picture is not clear and information about the profile of those who use the centre and the needs of the wider community are inconsistent. The development plan lists a large number of areas to act on, but gives little indication of how progress will be measured.

Information held by different partner agencies is not systematically shared in the whole group staff meetings, which are held two or three times each week. Consequently, there is sometimes confusion about the numbers accessing different services and the outcomes they attain. There is a strong belief in providing services which will lead to equality of opportunity for all. Diversity is celebrated and cohesion within the centre's community is good. However, gathering information, such as on families who cease to attend or the successes of those who are signposted to other providers is inconsistent. As a consequence, it is difficult for leaders to measure the success rates of adult users and the impact and value for money of the sessions they have provided. As a result, the centre's self-evaluation is satisfactory. The extent to which the centre has the ability to accurately measure its accomplishments and improve outcomes and its overall capacity to improve are satisfactory.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Conduct a rigorous analysis of the needs of families in the reach area and use all the information gathered from various sources to create a simple strategic development plan which indicates measures for success and which is shared with all of the staff at the centre.
- Involve more users from all groups in the wider community of the reach area to a greater extent in the governance of the centre and in influencing its strategic direction.
- Accurately measure the impact of activities undertaken to determine their effectiveness and value for money.
- Improve communication between partner agencies about the outcomes for different users.

## **How good are outcomes for users?**

<b>3</b>
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Parents and carers who use the centre regularly are enthusiastic about its benefits. They appreciate the hard work of all of the staff. They know that their comments are listened to and several improvements have come as a result of their suggestions. However, only a few parents and carers are actively involved in the strategic development of the centre.

Health outcomes for users of the centre are satisfactory. There are a number of health issues in the area around the centre. Centre leaders have set up a number of health-promoting activities to help in these matters, including advice on eating, baby massage, diabetes awareness and a ladies' gym. These are much enjoyed. Parents

say, 'I like coming to stay fit and keep healthy!' and, 'Massaging my baby has made our bond stronger.' There is a significant incidence of smoking in the area, but this is mainly in private. This makes it difficult for the centre to accurately identify need or to measure success in running smoking cessation courses.

Safety and safeguarding of children and families are good. The centre has made use of the RoSPA scheme to provide safety equipment in the homes of those who need it to good effect. The centre provides a safe and welcoming place for children and adults alike. Adults who attend a course for victims of domestic abuse say their self-confidence has grown considerably as a result. The care and support offered to families are good. There is particularly effective care for families and individuals in times of crisis. In the past, the centre has helped with emergency housing issues and also in supporting disabled users to access facilities for their children and themselves, such as respite care through local childminder services. Children with a protection plan and those who are subject to the Common Assessment Framework are supported securely.

The proportion of children who reach expected levels by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved steadily since 2008, but is still not at national levels. Although progress in the day-care nursery is good and that in the main nursery excellent, the gap between the lowest-achieving children and the rest by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has not decreased.

The centre runs some accredited courses and English speaking courses to help parents and carers increase their qualifications and confidence. One parent, typical of a number, said through her interpreter, 'Since I have been coming to classes it makes it easier for me and my child because I can speak to him and understand him much better.' The centre has worked with a fifth of the families where no-one is in work. As a result, about half of these have gone on to employment and just under a half to further education. Around 1% of users have benefited from advice and guidance on claiming benefits. Parents, carers and children enjoy opportunities to work and play together at the centre.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including</b>	<b>3</b>

<b>access to training</b>	
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## How good is the provision?

<b>3</b>
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Leaders have a broad, overall picture of the needs of families in the area. The centre gets appropriate information from the local authority and health services, which is helpful in assessing what needs to be provided. It has an adequate understanding of the needs of its users and can demonstrate some improvement in outcomes. Mothers who attend the gym say, 'The people here do their best to support us.' Those who attend English classes say they do so to help with their children's homework. However, because the centre does not have an incisive overview of data, it is not possible for the leaders to plan more than satisfactorily for the needs of parents and carers and the wider community. The extent to which the centre enables individual users to progress to further employment, education or training is developing satisfactorily. The quality and range of services offered, including outreach, are adequate and meet the needs of most of the targeted vulnerable groups. However, some groups, such as lone fathers and teenage parents who are not in employment, education or training are not supported as well.

The centre promotes purposeful learning for infants. Staff plan crèche sessions according to the needs of the children attending and support the children's learning well. As a result, children are involved, happy and engaged. The bright environment and atmosphere are effective in promoting purposeful learning. A number of fathers used to attend sessions at the centre, but this number has declined. Parenting courses and child behaviour training courses are greatly appreciated. One father stated that the course he was attending was the best thing he had ever done.

Outreach services meet the needs of the wider community satisfactorily. The quality of advice about universal preventative treatment is appropriate. A number of centre staff are now fully trained in using the Common Assessment Framework. The centre has the means currently of measuring the impact of sessions it has facilitated for users on accessing support and benefits or seeking work, but too little use is made of this information. Families known to the centre, who have experienced crisis, are wholehearted in their praise for the support they received at these times. For them, the support from the centre staff has made a real difference to their lives.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre leader provides good professional support for staff. She has high aims for the development of the centre, which she communicates through her energetic and positive presence to staff and users alike. Governance is satisfactory. Financial oversight is sound. Governors are supportive and enthusiastic about the centre. They are given regular reports on the work of the centre by the centre manager but monitoring lacks challenge and rigour. There is, in addition to the governing body, a children's centre committee which has parental representation. This representation is small and not all parents know of the committee's existence. However, the centre seeks and takes great account of the views of users expressed through written and verbal suggestions or through the website.

The management team has a satisfactory understanding of different vulnerable groups. The services provided generally deliver cohesive provision for users. However, the centre leaders do not have precise enough data to ensure that users accurately reflect all groups in the community that the centre serves or to evaluate in detail the impact of the centre's work. The centre has established satisfactory relationships with partner agencies although the links and communication between various groups are not yet as effective as possible. Agencies evaluate the outcomes of their services and provide this information to the centre manager. The centre has a great deal of paperwork on various aspects and services. However, information from this paperwork is not then gathered and shared regularly in a simple way with others on the team. As a result, it is not easy to make quick evaluations of the successes of the centre as a whole. Self-evaluation is generally systematic and supported by some evidence of impact.

There are suitable links between the priorities in the centre's development plan and its evaluation of the services it provides. Development planning lists a very large number of areas for the centre to work on in the coming year, but lacks measurable targets to evaluate the impact of activities undertaken. Some areas which remain acknowledged priorities for the centre, such as tackling increasing rates of smoking, drug and alcohol abuse in the locality are listed in the written plan as not needing any further work.

The centre works to ensure equality and celebrate diversity. All cultures and faiths are respected. Disabled access to the centre allows all users ease of access. The centre contributes satisfactorily to developing and implementing partnership activities which include statutory, private, voluntary and independent providers.

The centre's leaders have ensured good resources for users. For example, the gym allows women, who may otherwise find accessing such resources difficult, the opportunity to exercise regularly with friends. The centre's sites are welcoming and bright. The accommodation is used satisfactorily. Staff have good knowledge and are well deployed. Outreach provision is developing steadily and the centre's leaders are placing appropriate emphasis on trying to make contact with, and support, the most

vulnerable. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Safeguarding procedures are good. Records of criminal record checks and qualifications are fully in place and maintained effectively. The centre has clear and appropriate policies for health and safety, child protection, risk assessment and safer recruitment, which are all up to date and reviewed regularly. Risk assessments are undertaken for all activities and visits. Centre staff are alert to and aware of the importance of early intervention. There are regular multi-agency meetings to work to resolve issues swiftly.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>3</b>

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

The inspection of Highfield Nursery School and the inspection report of Dyson Gardens Children's Day Nursery were taken into account. The provision at Dyson Gardens was judged to be good. The links with parents and provision for healthy development were found to be outstanding. The provision at Highfield Nursery was judged to be outstanding and children were found to make rapid progress in the nursery.



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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Highfield Children's Centre on 13 to 14 July 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

I would like to thank those of you who spoke to us during the inspection of your children's centre. We could see how proud you are of the centre and how much you value the support of the staff. We agree with you that the accommodation is good and the resources attractive and well chosen to meet your needs and those of your children. We saw how happy your children are at the centre and how confident they are growing as a result. We know that some of you already use the gym.

We have judged that the extent to which centre keeps you and your children safe is good. It is very effective in its support of you, especially at times of crisis. We know that you are asked for your views on the activities and that some of you have already made suggestions about what you would like. A few of you are on the governing body or the children's centre committee, but others of you that we spoke to did not know that there was a committee you could join. We think it would help the centre if more of you could be involved in this way in developing the provision still further.

Provision is satisfactory and leads to satisfactory outcomes overall. We have asked the centre leaders to look more carefully at the range of information about all the different groups who need the centre's support. This way they can plan to meet everyone's needs more efficiently. We have also asked those agencies who work together to share information better between the different groups. This will help centre leaders to have a clearer picture of how many families from vulnerable groups are being helped and to what extent. We think this information should also include what sessions you like and how many of you complete or do not complete the activities offered. This will help the centre to evaluate more easily the cost-effectiveness of the different things it does.

Leaders are keen to make the centre even better. Currently leadership and management are satisfactory. We have asked centre leaders to focus on a few new things at a time and use the information about what you really need to guide their planning. We have asked the leaders to build in ways to measure how successful these activities are and when they should be reviewed. So, for example, instead of planning to do 'more' of something, we have said leaders should say why it is needed, how much more they hope to attain and by when. Thank you again to those of you who came to speak to us. We wish you all the best for the future.

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