

Inspection report for Highfield Nursery School and Children's Centre

Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	365685
Inspection dates	13–14 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Miller

Centre governance	The Governing Body of Highfield Nursery School
Centre leader	Josette Mallon
Date of previous inspection	NA
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Linked school if applicable	Highfield Nursery School 121784
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	NA

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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher of the nursery school as the head of the centre, a representative of the local authority, the centre's early years advisor, members of the governing body, parents and carers, a health worker, outreach and family support workers, the childminding development worker, a teacher of the deaf, and a representative from Jobcentre Plus.

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

Information about the centre

This is a phase two children's centre which opened in September 2007 and started operating fully from April 2008. It shares its site and premises with Highfield Nursery School. The headteacher is also the centre's manager and the provision for young children is integrated fully. The accommodation has been expanded recently so that most services may be run on site. In conjunction with other agencies, the centre provides the full core offer, but not on-site childcare.

Children who attend the centre have levels on entry to early years provision which are below those expected for their age. The majority of the families who use the centre are of White British heritage; the remainder come from a wide variety of other ethnic heritage backgrounds. An increasing proportion of the children speak English as an additional language, the main home language being Polish. Levels of deprivation in the area are broadly average, but range from the lowest 15% to the highest 82%. A few children who use the centre come from homes where no one is in work. The proportion of families in receipt of benefits is broadly average. Very few children who attend the centre have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The centre is funded by the local authority. Responsibility for governance of the centre has been delegated to the nursery's governing body. There is no advisory board, but action is being taken currently to involve parents, carers and professional partners in a Community Forum users' group.

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's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. In practice, it meets the needs of the parents and carers who use its facilities regularly. However, it is not yet fully effective in engaging with the wider community in its reach area in order to enable all families to make use of its services. Consequently, the centre's capacity for further improvement is satisfactory. It is establishing a firm base upon which to build, but the impact of its various initiatives has still to be seen in improved provision overall. The centre is just starting to make use of a new data analysis system. The new 'Rainbow Room' has only recently provided facilities for expansion, and formal consultation with users and professional groups is still being established.

Discussions with users and professional partners alike highlight important strengths, such as the friendliness and support provided by the staff. Those using the centre feel confident they can walk through its doors and the needs of their children and families will be met. Working relationships are often excellent. Outcomes across the range of activities on offer are good for those families actually making use of the centre and its outreach facilities. There is a strong sense of enjoyment and achievement on the part of those attending the various activities. Evidence from case studies shows that families receive well-integrated and sensitive support in times of difficulty; outcomes are particularly good in this respect.

The centre is also proactive in its initiatives to combat child poverty. The centre's growing reputation for such matters in the community helps its workers to gain the confidence and meet the needs of hard-to-reach families. Those using the centre reflect a good cross-section of the local population; equality and diversity are celebrated well. A number of parents from different ethnic and cultural heritages

commented on the centre's positive contribution to community cohesion and multicultural understanding; in this respect the centre meets the needs of the families in its local area well.

There remain certain issues for the centre to resolve fully in order to improve its effectiveness. All three recommendations for improvement have been recognised already by the centre's leaders as key targets in their own improvement and development planning. First, it does not always receive sufficient data and feedback from its professional partners to enable it to evaluate its successes. For example, the centre may refer users to its partners in the health, training or employment services, but it does not always receive sufficient information about success rates. However, discussions with a local authority representative show the agreements with partner services, negotiated by the local authority, do not always require such feedback. This hampers the extent to which the centre can analyse and evaluate its effectiveness. Secondly, leaders recognise the centre is not sharp enough in its use of data. A year ago the centre adopted a software programme to enable it to become more effective. It is now beginning to build up independently its own information to use to target its services. Finally, the centre appreciates that its users and professional partners are under-represented on its governing body. To resolve this, the centre is in the process of establishing a Community Forum.

Safeguarding is satisfactory. The centre has good procedures for child protection and all requirements for this are met. Leadership and governance are satisfactory and have been effective in the ways the centre has responded to securing additional funding, sometimes at very short notice. The new extension is a good example. The building works interrupted and restricted the centre's services from October 2010 to March 2011, but the additional facilities are excellent and used well. The centre's re-launch through its 'Looking to the Future' initiative is seen by staff and users alike as providing them all with exciting and realistic opportunities.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- That the local authority works with the centre manager and its professional partner services to ensure sufficient data is made available to enable the centre to evaluate more effectively the impact of its provision.
- Develop the centre leaders' and managers' understanding of the use of data about families in the reach area.
- Encourage the governing body to involve users and professional partners more actively in shaping the direction of the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

In all the sessions observed, adults and children of all ages were thoroughly enjoying their learning and improving well their skills and understanding. There was a strong sense of achievement during all the activities observed. Especially successful and popular are the 'Stay and Play' sessions where parents and carers work alongside

their children. In such sessions, children from different cultural backgrounds play together creatively and imaginatively. They behave and interact well; this enables them to develop well socially. Discussions with users show such sessions and parenting classes help them considerably in contributing to their children's learning and development. There is good development of children's speaking and listening skills; story and rhyme time and the use of musical activities are particularly successful in promoting these key skills. A variety of languages are spoken; parents support each other well by teaching and sharing key words from their home languages. Family friendship groups have formed, and discussions confirm how useful this proves when users meet in the park or supermarket. Families for whom English is not their first language find this especially important in helping them integrate successfully. There is a clear appreciation of the ESOL courses provided at the centre.

The presence of a representative from the Citizens Advice Bureau at one 'Stay and Play' session was also supportive of the centre's approach to help users improve their economic stability and independence. Case studies for families whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable, including teenage mothers, show consistently good outcomes as a result of the centre's work with and support for them.

Discussions with parents and the centre's assessment records, including those made under the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes, confirm that children using the centre make good progress in their development. Assessment records show this stands most children in good stead when they transfer into the school's nursery class or move to other areas. Outcomes concerned with the health of children and their families are good. For example, the centre is particularly successful in the promotion of breastfeeding; the percentage of mothers sustaining this is high. Children's physical development is good as a result of a wide range of activities to promote exercise and coordination skills. Data the centre is able to collect independently shows it is successful in the promotion of users' sexual, emotional and mental health. Health and hygiene have a high priority and, in this, the centre and its staff offer good role models for users. Children respond well to the focus of the staff on their personal hygiene. The centre's inclusive approach is evident in the impact of workshops such as 'cooking on a budget'. These enable families from the least to the most deprived reach areas to develop healthy lifestyles and prevent obesity.

While safeguarding is satisfactory overall, children and their families say that they feel safe while attending activities and in their dealings with its staff. The centre staff are suitably vigilant in matters of child protection and those regarding children whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable.

Leaders have always tried to consult with users, but until now their approach has been informal. The first stage in establishing the Community Forum as an advisory, user group has been completed successfully. A constitution has been drawn up and agreed, and a group of users has been elected. Professional partners are due to join in September 2011. It is expected that the new advisory forum will be fully operational from next October in order to ensure users have an improved voice in

decision making processes and the governance of the centre.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
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	3
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?

3

There are outreach activities at a local community centre, a partner infant school, a local hospital and medical centre. The range of services and activities provided by the centre's staff include one-to-one family support and 'Stay and Play' sessions for the under-fives and babies from birth to 18 months. There are workshops for well-being, health and cooking, and those focusing on the Early Years Foundation Stage. There is also a support group and sessions for childminders and the children in their care. In addition, there are links to on-site services through Jobcentre Plus, health visitor and breastfeeding support, oral health and first-aid classes, anti-smoking advice and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes. The centre commissions Home-Start services and there is signposting to baby clinics, the Citizens' Advice Bureau and speech and language 'drop-in' sessions.

The centre's leaders make positive efforts to reach out to the various community groups within its area. However, their success is impeded by a lack of feedback information from some professional partners. For example, the centre has data to say how many live births there are in its area but, unless families are already connected with the centre or have siblings at the school, staff do not always have sufficient information to approach the families and offer the centre's services. Leaders continue their efforts to make the families in their reach area aware of its services through the distribution of leaflets, attendance at local clinics and through school publicity and word of mouth.

Outreach services and drop-in provision serves those users who access it well; signposting to other services supports the needs of individuals effectively. Despite this, the lack of some key data impacts on the ability of the centre to assess local requirements and ensure its services meet the needs of its wider community in addition to those of its regular users. Nevertheless, discussions with users show that

courses such as parenting for those with babies from birth to 18 months have proved particularly helpful. One parent of an older child felt that the advice given by the centre on dealing with a toddler in a tantrum was a particular 'life saver'.

Although the centre is starting to collect and analyse its own data, it does not have sufficient facts and figures to provide it with a clear enough picture as to whether it is meeting fully the needs of minority ethnic families or children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The centre is popular with families representing a wide range of cultural heritages. Where children who may have special educational needs and/or disabilities have been reached, the specialist services the centre has been able to provide have proved most valuable. In such cases, multi-agency working is coordinated consistently and effectively. Assessments carried out for the CAF processes are thoroughly professional. Some case studies are exemplary in providing a clear picture of need and the actions taken to support individual users and/or their children. Such approaches ensure resilient working partnerships between staff and users, and provide a sturdy foundation for action planning. Day-to-day assessments of children are often carried out in partnership with their parents. The notes recorded by staff prove valuable to both parties when discussing and planning purposeful learning activities both at the centre and in the home. This underpins the good care, guidance and support offered to users' families and enables good purposeful learning and development.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
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	3
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?

3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The leadership of the centre manager, ably supported by the senior family worker, has ensured good and committed teamwork on the part of the centre's staff. Self evaluation is satisfactory and the centre currently gives satisfactory value for money. Leaders and managers are ambitious for the future and have made good progress recently through their 'Looking to the Future' initiatives. Improvements to the building and the additional room provided are already helping the centre to expand and sustain its services and increase the numbers attending its activities. Resources, including financial arrangements, are used well for the benefit of users.

Governance is satisfactory but, in partnership with the local authority, some aspects of the service level agreements regarding the feedback and provision of data to the centre are unclear. The centre manager is taking steps to develop the effectiveness of data gathering and the subsequent use of the data. The governing body is also taking appropriate action to ensure user groups and the centre's partners become more involved in decision-making processes. One wall in the new 'Rainbow Room' is already covered with users' notes and ideas for the centre's further development which indicates a growing involvement of users. Accountability is also improving; development and review planning recognises the key aspects for improvement, including the centre's obligation to ensure the needs of the wider community are met fully.

Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory overall. Some documentation and staff training records have not been updated to ensure they meet fully the very latest requirements. Nevertheless, the centre is particularly effective in cases of child protection and in helping families who may experience difficulties such as domestic violence. Case studies also show a sensitive and supportive approach to ensuring the health and safety of teenage mothers and their babies. Criminal Records Bureau and recruitment checks for the centre's staff have been undertaken properly.

Practically all the users spoken with commented upon the ways the centre provides a friendly, welcoming and attractive environment. This is not only as a result of the care the staff take to make it so, but also due to their effective promotion of equality and diversity throughout all of its activities and good engagement with parents and carers. Children attending the centre who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are integrated completely into the activities offered, aided by good partnerships with external agencies. Users and their families value the centre and compare it favourably with others they may have attended. Parents and carers whose circumstances make them more vulnerable also value the ways the centre enables them to grow in self-confidence, independence and self-esteem.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
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	3

The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
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	3

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

The inspectors considered the findings of the Highfield Nursery School inspection, which took place on 12-13 July 2011 which judged the school to be good.

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 Highfield Nursery School and Children's Centre on 13–14 July 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank all of you who took the time to talk with us during our recent visit. The discussions we had about your experiences and those of your children and families was most helpful. You will be aware that the nursery school was inspected at the same time, and we were pleased to see how effectively the school and the centre work together. The staff work well as a team. Our judgement is that the outcomes for both the adults and children who actually make use of your centre are good. You have confidence in the staff and the centre has clearly led to important improvements for your families and aided your children's development. Your centre is an inclusive one and many of you spoke highly of its good contribution to the community and multicultural understanding in your area. You see this as an important outcome which enhances your lives. It was good to hear so many different languages being spoken and find out about the ways you share and learn each other's languages. You explained how this helps those of different faiths, ethnicities and cultural heritages to get to know and appreciate each other. The centre's new courses to enable the learning of English by speakers of other languages is greatly valued.

You are full of praise for the help and support the staff give you. We saw that staff work together well to help keep your children and families safe and healthy.

Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and are satisfactory. There is good attention to health and welfare and in the ways the centre helps you and your families to develop and promote healthy lifestyles. For example, it was good to see your children learning to put this into practice with both oral and personal hygiene when bathing dolls. Your centre staff are particularly good in the ways they support those of you whose circumstances may make you more vulnerable or when you and your families find yourselves in a time of difficulty.

Your centre is relatively small in size, but the staff help you to make good use of the facilities available. During the last few months some activities have had to be limited because of the building works. However, the new 'Rainbow Room' is a good addition to the main 'Family Room' and, together with the developing outside area, has more than doubled the potential for future activities and facilities the centre has to offer. We saw how much your children enjoy coming to the various activities. It was good to see so many of you, male and female, working alongside your children during the popular 'Stay and Play' sessions. Your children also enjoy the story and rhyme time activities; together with the music, these clearly help your children to develop the important speaking and listening skills which will prove valuable in the nursery.

There are some good things about your centre, and especially the fact that you feel confident that you can walk through its doors and know that you will receive help as well as a warm welcome. The centre manager and the governors have recognised the centre's effectiveness can be enhanced further. We have asked them to work together more closely with you to help shape the future direction of the centre. In the past you have been consulted informally; a new Community Forum is in the process of being established to put this on a more formal footing. Some of you have already volunteered to become involved in this new venture; the next stage, during the autumn, will involve the centre's professional partners. We have also asked the centre leaders to evaluate fully the success of what it does by obtaining some additional data and information. We want it to understand fully the needs of your local community and go out and advertise more efficiently what it has to offer. The centre appreciates the good messages you spread about your experiences and this helps it tremendously. We have asked the centre's leaders and managers to work more closely with the local authority and professional partners to ensure that the centre has the full range of information to enable staff to provide the services needed in the reach.

Finally, we trust that, as a result of the centre's good 'Looking to the Future' initiative, many more families from your communities and local area will be able to join you and benefit from the centre's services and activities. We thank you again for all your contributions to the inspection.

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