

Inspection report for Hednesford Children's Centre

Local authority	Staffordshire
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Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Hednesford Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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



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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader and a range of providers, parents and carers, volunteers and representatives from the local authority including the district children's commissioner, the transformation manager and the head of the children, young people and families commissioning unit.

Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at sessions held at the centre and at other sites. They looked at relevant documentation including the centre's plans, self-evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Hednesford Children's Centre is a phase two centre designated in 2009 that serves residential areas in Hednesford and Cannock in the south-west of Staffordshire. The area is socially mixed and there are pockets of poverty, unemployment, poor health and low levels of literacy and numeracy. The vast majority of families are White British, and other families represent a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds with no predominant groups. An average proportion of families are from workless households and claim benefits. Children from the reach area enter the nursery with skills, knowledge and abilities that are below those expected for their age. The local authority has responsibility for the governance of the centre at present, but it has plans to delegate its powers as part of its re-organisation of local services. There is currently no active advisory board. The centre is co-located on the same site as Hednesford Nursery School and the headteacher oversees the site and its safety. Hednesford Children's Centre works in partnership with Cannock Chase Children's Centre whose recently appointed leader has just taken on responsibility for managing the provision in both centres.

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 families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Hednesford Children's Centre provides a warm, welcoming environment for children and families. Children are cared for sensitively, and safeguarding arrangements are good. Parents and carers value the centre's support and the positive impact this has on their lives. A typical view expressed by one parent was, 'The staff are very friendly and always ensure that it is a relaxed atmosphere.' Another spoke of the 'Lovely building, lots of facilities and staff who are really good with the children.' Centre staff are well qualified and approachable. They encourage adults who use the centre's services to gain confidence and self-esteem, particularly families who face difficult challenges. Parents and carers say that they appreciate the sensitivity of the staff who have helped them to improve their lives through well-planned activities and individual support.

The outcomes for users are satisfactory because the centre provides a suitable range of services, activities and opportunities to meet their needs, particularly for those in target groups, such as lone parents and teenagers. Activities are well attended, and the outreach provision in community settings addresses the needs of families through health, social care and childminding services. Staff are effective in supporting children's learning and development and, as a consequence, children achieve satisfactorily and go on to build successfully upon their skills, knowledge and understanding in their early years at school. Positive partnerships with other providers and the co-located nursery school are helping to raise the aspirations of families who participate in the centre's provision. Parents, carers and children are guided and supported appropriately, and partnership working with health visitors ensures effective checks are made on health care and early childhood development.

The local authority provides satisfactory governance and fulfils its statutory requirements. However, the governance arrangements do not allow for enough challenge and support to leaders to help them improve outcomes for families and enhance outcomes for the identified target groups. The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities is satisfactory overall, but there is no advisory board for users and key partners to express their views and contribute to decision-making and strategic planning. This limits their participation in self-

evaluation processes and measuring the impact of services. The centre has satisfactory capacity to improve under the leadership of the new centre manager who has a clear insight of the strengths of the centre and the areas to develop.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve governance to provide appropriate levels of challenge and support, and secure good outcomes for families by:
 - ensuring users and key partners are fully represented on a governing body and actively participate in self-evaluation and strategic planning
 - establishing an advisory board, drawing on the expertise of partners and involving users, to contribute to decision-making processes.
- Work with partners to gather information about outcomes for children and adult users to ensure that the centre is meeting needs of those who live in the area.
- Improve the range of opportunities to ensure that users' views are taken into account when determining future provision.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Children and their families benefit from the centre's integrated services and positive links with health professionals through Health Net and the local medical centre. They learn about the benefits of breastfeeding, healthy eating and physical exercise. As a result, breastfeeding rates have improved and this helps children to have a healthy start in life. Childhood obesity rates are relatively high in the district but about average in the Hednesford area. Families who use the health services have access to outreach teams for family support, community learning and mental health. Home visits are conducted regularly, and antenatal and paediatric clinics are held at the local hospital to help parents before and after the birth of their babies. Parents experiencing depression are supported by health services and other providers, and the health centre staff provide additional support to help mothers gain confidence and access services.

Children and their families feel safe at the centre because child protection and safeguarding arrangements are given high priority. All partnership providers use the Common Assessment Framework to monitor cases and share information, which means that families and children benefit in their care, safety and well-being. Families in crisis and those seeking urgent assistance are protected quickly with multi-agency support where necessary. Fire safety procedures are well known and the fire service is notified of any target families who require advice regarding safety equipment for the home. Good procedures for conducting risk assessments of the site ensure that children and their families are kept safe while they are at the centre. The new colourful fencing is not only attractive but also provides secure boundaries for the nursery and the children's centre.

Children behave well, form positive relationships with others and enjoy the activities

the centre offers such as 'Baby Massage'. They have good access to a wide range of colourful toys, which helps them to achieve the expected outcomes for their age, particularly in their personal and social development. They like using the climbing equipment and wheeled toys in the excellent outdoor area during 'Toddler Playtime'. Parents and carers develop their understanding of how children learn by seeing staff interact with their children and by adopting similar strategies at home. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well and specialists work with centre staff to ensure positive outcomes for them. One parent said, 'It is the best place I have taken (my child) so far.'

The centre signposts adults to educational provision through its partners, but does not yet have enough detailed information to show the impact of its services for adults in target groups, such as those families who are facing unemployment, fathers and lone parents. Nevertheless, users who have received individual support from Jobcentre Plus say that they have improved their prospects and increased their confidence and self-esteem as a result. Sessions such as the 'Little Angels' childminders drop-in sessions and 'Messy Play' activities give families valuable opportunities to mix socially, with target families being encouraged to attend. Other activities, such as Family Focus 'Stay and Play', which is held in the nearby church hall, provide families with additional opportunities to develop their parenting skills and make friends.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target 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 children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre has a satisfactory range of services, activities and opportunities to meet the needs of families, which contribute to the well-being of families who participate, particularly for those in target groups such as families in crisis and those with complex issues. The centre's satisfactory outreach arrangements to follow up referrals from external services are well organised. Home visits to target families have a high priority, and outcomes following these visits are monitored to safeguard

children and adults. The centre tries to reach families who are reluctant to access services, but is not always able to establish contact with them. Nevertheless, links with social care are strong. Families who require multi-agency interventions are followed up sensitively and parents are pleased with this personalised support.

The centre provides a suitable range of enjoyable sessions for children and their families that are of good quality. For example, 'Start to Play' sessions, 'Baby Playtime' and the toy library provide stimulating opportunities for parents, carers and children to enjoy time together. The children are safe to explore in a nurturing environment while parents receive useful advice and support from professionals and volunteers. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified quickly and given close support. For example, early intervention from specialists such as speech therapists helps children to make a sound start at school. The local community has a few families from minority ethnic backgrounds who are signposted to appropriate services such as language courses. Parents and carers needing childcare are signposted to local providers, and there is also a weekly childminders' 'drop-in' session. The families using the centre value the services offered, but a few say that the recent introduction of fees for activities has limited participation rates.

The care, guidance and support for families are satisfactory overall. Activities, such as 'Stay and Play', reflect the centre's positive approach to raising aspirations in the local area, and the close links with the co-located nursery school allow staff to support children as they move on to more formal education. There are good features in the outreach support provided for target groups who are most in need and for those who are vulnerable due to their circumstances. Families report that their lives are better for having had the help they needed, particularly at difficult times. In partnership with other agencies, the centre is trying to reach more children from target families, but some are proving hard to reach.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre is led and managed effectively by the newly appointed centre leader of Cannock Chase Children's Centre. She and the new district children's commissioner are reflective and ambitious. They have high expectations for users, particularly for adults in the target groups, and have already identified clear areas for development. Together with the staff, they are effectively managing the rapid rate of change which stems from the local authority's restructuring programme. Accurate self-evaluation

feeds into the centre's development plan and is underpinned by clear understanding of the reach area and its target groups. Day-to-day routines and the arrangements for professional supervision are firmly established. Well-qualified staff have clear roles and there is a strong sense of teamwork between the centre and the co-located nursery whose headteacher makes a strong contribution by ensuring the safety of the site. The centre has satisfactory partnerships with external agencies, which lead to an integrated approach to providing services for users and help the centre to meet its core purpose. However, it does not have enough information about children and adult users' outcomes so that it can measure the impact of the service provided.

Safeguarding and child protection procedures are good. Staff have undertaken the required training to ensure that children and their families are safe when they attend the centre. All the relevant policies are known and understood, and leaders ensure the safe recruitment of staff by obtaining Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. All staff are supported through appropriate performance management procedures and professional development opportunities. Staff carry out their roles with care and sensitivity, and deploy trained volunteers to enhance provision. Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily through the centre's integrated approach to families and target groups.

Governance is satisfactory because the local authority fulfils its statutory requirements and oversees the centre's provision to assure accountability. However, the governance arrangements are not sufficiently developed to provide enough challenge and support to secure good outcomes for families. This is because users and key partners are not fully represented and they do not actively participate in self-evaluation and strategic planning. There is no active advisory body because this has disbanded and no longer meets regularly. Thus, the range of opportunities to ensure that users' views are taken into account when reviewing services and determining future provision is limited. The centre offers satisfactory value for money.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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 took into account the findings of the inspection at Hednesford Nursery School, which took place at the same time as the children's centre inspection, and judged the nursery school's overall effectiveness as outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Hednesford Children's Centre on 20 and 21 September 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak with us, particularly those of you who came to the meeting on Wednesday afternoon. We can see that the centre provides a satisfactory range of services to help you to improve your lives and we found out that it intends to develop its provision still further, especially for target groups such as teenage parents and fathers. We are convinced that the centre keeps you and your families safe: it was good to hear that you also regard the centre as a safe and welcoming place to be, where you make good friends. You spoke highly of the staff at the centre and told us about the positive way they handle sensitive issues in your lives, particularly where families face complex difficulties. Activities such as, 'Stay and Play', 'Messy Play' and 'Toddler Playtime' are popular and provide good opportunities for you and your children to learn together. Through such activities, your families benefit by forming good relationships and gaining a better understanding of how to play together.

Centre staff work closely with some of the centre's partners such as the health services and through its close links with Cannock Chase Children's Centre. Skilled professionals provide helpful support for your children so that they get a sound start in life and achieve some of the expected skills for their age. However, the centre does not gather enough information from its partners about outcomes for you and your children so that it can measure the impact of its services and gauge how well it meets your needs.

The new centre manager and staff work together as a team to make sure that day-to-day arrangements are clear and that you have enough information about the activities on offer. The local authority keeps a satisfactory check on the centre's work but the governance is not yet fully developed to provide enough challenge and support for the centre. We know that there was an advisory board in the past but this no longer meets and so there are not enough opportunities for you to contribute to decision-making about the services provided and the governance of the centre.

We have asked the centre leader to work with the local authority to strengthen the governance of the centre and provide more opportunities for you to contribute to decision-making and developing the centre's provision. We want them to take account of your views when thinking about what works well and what will be improved. We have also asked the centre to work with its partners more effectively to gather information about outcomes for you and your children. Thank you, once again, for your contributions to the inspection. We really enjoyed our time at your children's centre, and wish you every success for the future.

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