

Inspection report for High Trees Children's Centre

Local authority	Hertfordshire
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Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Squirrels 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.



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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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and other staff, parents and carers, representatives from the Hertfordshire Regional College and local authority, health care professionals, advisers of partner services, and representatives from the locality advisory board.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation information, its plan for improvement, health and safety records, case studies and data about the locality.

Information about the centre

This is a Phase 2 children's centre designated in January 2008. Hertford Regional College (HRC) is the lead agency for High Trees Children's Centre, based in Turnford and Wormley, Broxbourne, Hertfordshire. The centre provides the full core offer for children aged 0-5 in partnership with a private nursery on the same site.

Governance is provided by a shared arrangement between an operational group representing the lead agency, an advisory board and partnership group. The centre is situated in a 30% area of deprivation. Much of the local population is White British but there is a growing population of families from other parts of Europe. There are two Traveller sites within the reach area. Over a quarter of children come from households dependent on benefit and levels of crime are high in the local area. On entry to the early years, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

High Trees is an effective and inclusive children's centre. Safeguarding, the centre's work with professional partners and care, guidance and support are all outstanding and result in centre users feeling exceptionally safe. The centre is very welcoming and fully reflects the local community's needs and cultural mix. Parents, carers and children feel very safe and fully included in the work of the centre with high numbers from the centre's target groups participating in the many worthwhile activities on offer. All staff provide the highest levels of care and support to a steadily increasing number of families from the different target groups. Effective leadership and good governance have ensured that the wide range of services available effectively meet the needs of the majority of families in local area. Much has been achieved through excellent partnership working between the children's centre, Hertfordshire Regional College, the local authority and other key partners such as the local police force. Capacity for further improvement is good.

Children are being well prepared for next stages of education. Children attending crèche sessions are purposeful and confident in their play, quickly settling to their choice of activity. Children attending day care in the nursery settle very quickly and respond positively to the care and support of the staff and other adults working with them. Teenage mothers develop in confidence in a range of skills through attendance at courses such as 'New Beginnings' to give them access to further training at the college. Parents and carers are learning a wide range of skills and making new friends through attending the 'Parenting Puzzle' and 'Cake Decorating' courses. A significant number of vulnerable mothers demonstrate increased levels of confidence in dealing with domestic abuse at home as a result of attending the 'Freedom Programme' run in conjunction with a local women's refuge.

Staff have established very high levels of trust with parents and carers who use the centre. Consequently, they are very confident about sharing concerns with staff and

seek support in times of personal or family crisis. Comments such as, 'All the staff take time to talk to you and everyone feels included.' and 'The centre has given me the confidence to be a mum through the advice and support you get from the staff.' fully reflect the views of many parents and carers.

Good quality childcare is offered on site and is used effectively as a spring board for other services. These are then personalised to ensure improvements to family health, safety and learning. Participation rates are high with the large majority of registered families attending at least one of the many activities available to them. The personal achievement of both children and parents and carers is celebrated very well. The centre environment is very secure, welcoming and safe. Very effective use is made of accommodation both within the children's centre and nursery settings to support learning and development. Family support staff are extremely successful at using activities such as home visits and stay and play sessions to carefully assess users' needs and in particular those from the Traveller communities.

Leadership and management of the centre are good. Effective procedures have been implemented to provide the leaders with a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. Clear priorities are carefully identified within a detailed action plan. However, the analysis of data is yet to be used systematically in order to target services, identify areas for improvement and improve outcomes further in all areas such those related to health. Furthermore, the absence of measurable targets limits the ability of senior leaders in measuring the centre's overall effectiveness. Parents' views about the quality of services are regularly gathered. These are used well to identify aspects of further improvement to the range of services available. Senior leaders have recognised that there should be greater opportunity for parents to play an active role in governance of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes related to health and especially those linked to obesity and breastfeeding.
- Use assessment data systematically to:
 - further increase the number of families registered with the centre
 - identify areas for further improvement
 - set targets to facilitate the measurement of the centre's success.
- Increase the levels of parental involvement in the governance of the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes related to health are satisfactory but generally improving as a result of effective input from health visitors and outreach staff. Health visitors provide good levels of guidance, support and information about children's health through weekly developmental sessions at the centre. Breastfeeding rates are below the county average but generally improving locally because of more focussed support by the

children centre staff and health workers. Centre staff promote healthy cooking with an increasing numbers of parents who attend healthy cooking sessions. Parents state that these sessions have a positive impact on family life and healthy eating at home. Children develop positive attitudes towards food by eating healthy snacks and fresh fruit in the childcare settings. However, these efforts are yet to be reflected in a significant reduction in levels of obesity of five-year-olds.

Highly effective safeguarding procedures and the rigorous application of the common assessment framework ensure children and families who are vulnerable or at risk are rapidly identified to ensure their safety. Parents say they feel very safe while at the children centre because the premises are extremely secure and any risk is minimised through comprehensive health and safety procedures. Children in all settings behave safely and sensibly in a way they understand; for example, by taking a 'Buggy Bug' home with them and participating in the 'Talky Walks' sessions around the local area. These activities increase road safety awareness very effectively. Furthermore, high numbers of parents attend safety training resulting in improved levels of safety awareness at home.

Personal and social outcomes are good because high quality learning experiences facilitate good achievement. Children play very well together and display very positive relationships with others in all aspects of provision. They take turns and are encouraged to respect each other. The large majority of children, parents and carers grow in confidence quickly as a result of attending centre based activities. The proportion of children attaining the expected levels when starting school is steadily improving but girls are performing better than boys. Initial results from the work of centre staff to help children overcome language and communication barriers demonstrate good progress in language development.

Staff facilitate consultation effectively by fully engaging parents in feedback and 'Parent Voice' surveys. Parents and carers feel that their suggestions are listened to and valued because they recognise improvements within the centre as a result of this good consultation. However, their involvement in centre governance is underdeveloped. Increasing numbers of parents from all target groups are attending the many courses provided to enable them to develop work skills and improve their economic well being. Regular courses effectively support parents and carers in developing their skills in a range of areas such as parenting and managing the behaviour of their children. Participation and completion rates in the range of relevant courses offered are good

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	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from	2

target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	
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	2
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre is increasingly effective at meeting the needs of the families from its reach area. The centre is meeting the needs of the growing numbers of families of Turkish origin and those from the Traveller community well through its outreach work. Centre activities are of high quality and staff regularly celebrate the achievements of users, boosting their confidence and encouraging greater participation. Parents' views are valued greatly and used to develop services further such the cake decorating course and the purchase of a community computer. The range of services continues to increase in response to local need. For instance, the 'Freedom' programme has been extremely successful in supporting large numbers of vulnerable women from the local area in coping with domestic abuse.

The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision in all settings within the centre is good. This is because assessment data are used effectively to inform planning and provide a comprehensive understanding of each child's needs within the childcare settings. Many parents and carers state that they find the different sessions and courses enjoyable. Many say that they are making a big difference to their own lives and those of their families.

The quality of care, guidance and support provided to families is outstanding. Many parents say that they feel fully supported and always feel that they can share their feelings and concerns in an atmosphere of complete trust and empathy. This is because all staff are extremely caring and work very hard to provide a secure and nurturing environment within the centre and nursery setting. The centre staff build excellent relationships with users who often return to access additional services. Support is very effectively tailored to meet the needs of families and this is especially so in times of crisis. Outreach work is very well coordinated and integrates the work of other professionals effectively. The common assessment framework procedures are thorough and fully engage a wide range of professionals in supporting the needs of the most vulnerable children.

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	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance arrangements are secure and clearly understood by all parties. Very clear lines of accountability and terms of reference are in place and overseen effectively by the management board and operational group. The management of financial resources is efficient and value for money is good. The centre manager sets high expectations and clear direction for the centre's development. Day-to-day management is excellent and teamwork is a significant strength. Roles and responsibilities are very clearly understood and effectively delegated to centre staff. However, parents are yet to play a significant role in the governance of the children's centre. The appointment of 'Parent Champion' is a good step forwards.

Partnerships between the centre and all key partners are excellent. The local authority plays an effective strategic role in supporting the centre as part of an integrated network of local children's centres. Communication among the centre manager, staff and key partners is excellent. Accurate self-evaluation effectively engages a wide range of staff, other agencies and users. This is used well to identify areas for further improvement. The plan for centre improvement provides a structured approach to further development. It includes clear timescales and lines of accountability but targets are not explicitly linked to performance and therefore difficult to measure. Centre leadership has made a good start in gathering a wide range of data to measure the effectiveness of overall provision. However, this data are yet to be used with rigour to analyse how the centre can be even more effective.

Equality and disability legislation is fully implemented and all policies are in place. Access to the centre facilities is very good. Very effective levels of support are provided for individual users with disability such as the purchase of a computer to assist learning within the home and online shopping. The cultural identity of minority groups is fully recognised and celebrated such as those from the Gypsy/Roma community. Good levels of support are provided for those parents with poor literacy skills and those who speak English as an additional language. Despite these strong features the centre is yet to demonstrate significant impact in narrowing gaps in children's achievement locally.

Safeguarding procedures are extremely robust and supported by highly effective monitoring of children in all settings. All statutory requirements are met and staff training is comprehensive and at a high level. The recruitment and selection of staff are managed centrally by the lead agency and all staff and regular volunteers are

carefully vetted. Protocols between staff, settings and other agencies are very clear and fully implemented. Strong interagency arrangements are minimising duplication and enhancing safeguarding. The forging of strong links with a local women's refuge is having a significant impact in reducing incidents of domestic violence locally and further afield.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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	1
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	1
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	2

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the High Trees Children's Centre on 12-13 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Many of you told us that staff at the centre are very caring and supportive. We agree with you. We were particularly impressed with the excellent partnerships that the centre has developed with other organisations and how the staff work as a team under the good leadership of the centre manager. They all work hard to support both your children's development and your own confidence and skills. They provide excellent levels of care, guidance and support to you and your families. They are also making a big difference to the progress of the children that come to the centre and the opportunities for parents and carers to learn new skills in cooking and getting work. The staff are going to work even harder to improve the health of families through improving weight loss among children and increasing the numbers of mothers breastfeeding their babies.

High Trees is an extremely safe and secure place for you to bring your children. The entrance area is very welcoming and the rooms and play areas allow your children to play happily while they learn indoors or in the extensive outdoor areas. All of the children are making good progress in many areas of their development.

The centre provides a good place for you to meet other parents, carers and people who can help you and your family. The staff use their knowledge of the local area well to plan activities for you and your children to get involved with. In future they are going to use more detailed information to identify what can be done further and set targets to improve the health and opportunities for those families in most need in the local area. Staff regularly seek the views of parents using the centre to make the centre better. Inspectors have asked that in the future parents have greater say in how the centre is governed.

It was good meeting with so many of you during the inspection. We hope that you, your children and even more parents and carers who live within your community continue to benefit from the good services available to you. Thank you for the part you played in the inspection.

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