

Inspection report for Harrogate Town Children's Centre

Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	383505
Inspection dates	15–16 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Daniel Grant

Centre leader	Liz Meade
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Wetherby Road Harrogate North Yorkshire HG2 7SG
Telephone number	01609 535753
Fax number	01423 881385
Email address	Liz.meade@northyorks.gov.uk

Linked school	Willow Tree Primary School 121424
Linked early years and childcare	Woodland Nursery 400105

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.

Template published: September 2011

Report Published: December 2011

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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with members of the steering group, parents, carers and service users and representatives from the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Harrogate Town Children's Centre is a Phase two centre and was first designated as delivering the full core offer of services in January 2008. The centre occupies a refurbished school building and shares a site with Willow Tree Primary School. The centre is managed by the local authority. The centre also has a steering group made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and parents and carers.

The centre provides services from two main sites within the community to a population made up from a broad range of economic and social circumstances. A large majority of families live in areas within the 70% least deprived in the country, with some pockets of greater deprivation.

The number of families attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is high. The proportion of children aged under four years who are living in households where no-one is working and rely on benefits is lower than average.

The vast majority of families within the area served by the centre are White British.

The centre provides a wide range of supporting services, incorporating a crèche, outreach and home visiting, drop-in health support, family learning courses, volunteering opportunities and workshops.

The centre has a designated childcare arrangement with a private contractor who provides a crèche service and emergency respite childcare provision. Most children enter early education with a range of skills higher than 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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory. Those in charge are developing a clear vision and understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement, which has helped the centre become increasingly well established in the community.

Many families who live in the area use the centre and its services. The centre is becoming increasingly successful at promoting the services it offers, which has increased the number of families registering and benefiting from attending the centre. Families in the wider community also benefit from the work the centre undertakes to support other providers. Staff work hard to provide good activities and valuable care and support for families who use the centre. As a result, outcomes for those who attend the centre's activities are improved. However, the number of families from targeted groups who are registered and using the centre is low.

Parents and carers share their concerns with staff because they trust them and know they will receive effective help. Families attending the centre develop a satisfactory understanding of dangers and how to keep themselves and each other safe. Staff are experienced and have well-developed skills and understanding of safeguarding children and use these effectively to provide a safe and secure environment within the centre.

Families attending the centre are encouraged to contribute positively to their community and the life of the centre. Children behave well at the centre and develop positive relationships with each other and adults. Families using the centre are listened to and feel they are included in making decisions about how the centre is run.

Young parents who attend the very popular 'Bumps to Babes' sessions learn essential skills which help to strengthen bonds with their children. Some parents and carers who registered with the centre at a time when they had little confidence and low self-esteem have developed greater self-assurance and improved their personal well-being.

Children make good progress preparing for school and families attending the centre enjoy the activities on offer. However, the centre does not sufficiently promote opportunities for adults seeking help to find work, undertake training or gain accredited qualifications.

Leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory and improving. The centre manager is new to her post and has already established effective strategies to ensure the centre's work remains effective and improves further. This ensures the centre has satisfactory capacity to improve. However, the centre has been slow to develop a more accurate understanding of the needs of the community, identify target groups and increase the number of families registering with the centre. Although the majority of families do benefit from the work of the centre, there is a need to increase this number and improve outcomes for more families within the area. The local authority provides the centre with high quality data and information about the population of the area it serves, which the centre uses increasingly effectively to establish local targets. However, arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of all services and addressing priorities promptly are not fully established.

Partnership working with the local authority's services for children and families is very well integrated with health provision and the work of the centre. There are satisfactory arrangements with a broad range of partner organisations, which are becoming increasingly effective. However, some organisations, such as Jobcentre Plus and adult learning services provide very little support for the increasing number of adults seeking advice about benefits, training, education or help to find paid employment.

Arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity and the promotion of diversity are satisfactory. Barriers to attending services are effectively overcome and there is a positive trend in the reduction of the achievement gap in the Early Years Foundation Stage profiles. However, arrangements to engage some targeted groups, such as children with disabilities are under developed.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase registration and participation, through more effective promotion of the centre's offer and by more effective identification and targeting of those most in need, including disabled children.
- Jobcentre Plus and the adult learning service to work with the centre and its other partners to improve and increase the level of provision offered to adults, including better information and support for those claiming benefits, and a comprehensive range of opportunities for those interested in seeking paid work, training and education.

- Ensure arrangements for improving quality and performance are sufficiently robust to establish priorities and implement them at an early stage.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Harrogate Town Children's Centre is bright, attractive and welcoming, which encourages families to respond well to the wide range of activities relating to improving diet, development, exercise and lifestyle. Outcomes for the children and families who use the centre are satisfactory overall. Health outcomes are improving with very high number of mothers commencing and continuing breastfeeding. Obesity rates are decreasing and support to promote awareness of the benefits of immunisation and smoking cessation are effective. However, the centre is not yet having a significant impact on a proportion of the community with greatest need. This is a priority for improvement.

Arrangements to help keep children and families safe when accessing services at the centre are effective because staff have a good level of expertise and the building is secure. Children and adults enjoy attending the centre. Children respond very well to the established routines and settle quickly in the crèche because they have positive relationships with the adults. Children's behaviour in the centre is good.

Courses on offer are interesting and rewarding. Families value the support they receive and make good use of the sessions because they recognise the benefits, such as increased confidence, improving their children's learning, and promoting good parenting skills. The centre is making a positive contribution towards narrowing the gap between the lowest attaining children and others, although an expected and exceptionally low average score for a number of children in the current cohort has interrupted this progress. Opportunities for adults seeking to improve their educational qualifications, undertake training or find paid work are limited and not promoted well enough.

Families engage with centre activities very well because staff are supportive and build strong, trusting relationships with them. These relationships support the good work that is undertaken through the Common Assessment Framework, those subject to child protection plans and with looked after children. This support is highly valued by users; for example, one parent told us 'I feel a lot calmer with my child now. I don't think I would have got this far without the support of this group.'

The centre and its partners have a very strong focus on developing children's speech and language, with initiatives such as story sacks proving very popular. This has resulted in positive benefits which improve children's speech and increase parents' and carers' understanding of how they can encourage their children's language development. A speech and language therapist provides very valuable support for families and raises staff awareness at regular monthly drop-in sessions.

The centre collects and analyses data well and the local authority provides very useful information to help the centre track its progress. This has been used effectively to

demonstrate how contact with the centre has enabled children to have a better start to school life. However, the use of tracking of individual progress in centre activities is at an early stage. The children's centre childcare sufficiency support officer works very effectively with childminders and the learning and teaching consultant works effectively with other early years providers to improve the quality of their provision and so improve outcomes for children.

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	3
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 quality of provision at Harrogate Town Children's Centre is satisfactory overall. Assessment is generally used well to plan individual support for users and cover the whole range of needs, including the needs of those from some target groups. The staff and the centre's partners are becoming steadily more effective at supporting those who use its services and are increasing the number registered. The centre has accurate information to help them identify the needs of the local community and they are working effectively with partners to meet those needs.

The number of families currently registered with the centre is satisfactory. The parent support advisors provide outreach services in the local community to attract new members and the targeting of families who are thought to have the greatest needs is progressing. Parent support workers use their knowledge and influence to help families engage with other professionals to ensure the well-being of children and their parents and carers.

Satisfactory partnerships and outreach services are in place with a range of key organisations including the linked schools, health, social care, youth support service, Early Years Foundation Stage providers and voluntary and private sector organisations. However,

partnerships with organisations that provide adult education, training and employment advice are under-developed and these services only provide support for a few users.

The centre is developing increasingly effective procedures with all partners to improve targeted services for individual children and families, although for some groups, such as children with disabilities, the progress has been slow.

Evidence shows that families using the centre receive satisfactory care, guidance and support and achieve improved outcomes. However, the quality of information about opportunities for education, training and support to find paid work is poor. Parents and carers have fun at the centre and engage in exciting activities, whilst building their confidence, relationships and parenting skills. One parent told us 'Staff are very helpful, give me information about other groups and are always welcoming and friendly'.

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

Leadership and management of Harrogate Town Children's Centre are satisfactory. The range of interesting and challenging activities is leading to an increase in the number of families registered with the centre. The centre manager receives adequate support through supervision and good training to provide a clear focus for the continued improvement of the centre. Staff are well-motivated, recognise the strengths of the centre and know what has to be done to improve outcomes for families. However, arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of all services and addressing priorities promptly are not fully established.

The centre has an established steering group which is chaired by a parent. The steering group are active and enthusiastic in their work to negotiate protocols for partnership working and establish meaningful targets for performance. Parents and carers participate well in decision making at the centre and evaluation of the centre's work is methodical and inclusive. The centre's leadership team listen to and take account of users' views.

The centre's leadership team has adequate arrangements to involve staff, partners and centre users in the process of self-evaluation. The development plan sets out the centre's ambition and identifies some of the improvements needed. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

The centre promotes equality satisfactorily in its activities, some of which involve the celebration of different cultures and beliefs. Discrimination, where it occurs, is dealt with promptly and effectively. The centre has contributed well to narrowing the gap between the lowest 20% and the rest in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre is committed to inclusion and removing barriers, including those faced by users with the greatest needs. The centre manager uses effective arrangements to ensure safeguarding regulations are met. Staff receive suitable training and know what to do if action needs to be taken. Integrated working ensures staff get ready access to expert advice on safeguarding and protecting children. There are good arrangements for supervision of outreach workers from the early intervention manager, who is trained in social work, to ensure their work is effective. Arrangements for staff vetting are appropriate. Staff have an adequate understanding of arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable adults and almost all staff members have received training to help them identify and support victims of domestic abuse.

Partnership working often has a positive impact on improving outcomes for those families who attend the centre. For example, mothers who choose to breastfeed receive good support and encouragement from staff and health professionals. However, work with partnerships is satisfactory rather than good overall because those involved in helping adults towards employment are not yet effective enough.

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	3
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 findings from the most recent inspection of the linked early years and childcare provider were taken into account in the outcomes section of this report.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaints procedure: raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted* 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 Harrogate Town Children's Centre on 15 and 16 November 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We enjoyed our visit to your centre and meeting so many of you. We would like to thank those of you who helped us with our work. We found the staff to be committed and keen to support children's learning and development and to help adults become more confident and effective parents.

The centre provides an interesting variety of sessions and activities which are well attended and increasingly popular. The centre is a good place for families to meet with staff from other organisations to get more support and guidance. We found that under the guidance of the centre leadership team, the staff work well to provide satisfactory care, guidance and support for all users. However, we think the centre and Jobcentre Plus needs to provide better services for adults who want help to find work, undertake training or increase their education.

Some of you told us that the support of the centre is very important when you are having problems. We found the staff to be effective at providing individual support and that they are determined to become even better at supporting families with the greatest needs. The staff have established partnerships with other professionals and organisations to ensure you have access to a full range of support and guidance. They are providing adequate guidance on how to keep families healthy and safe, and have placed great efforts on increasing children's development through many of the interesting and exciting activities.

We found the centre to be a safe place for you and your children. The reception staff are very welcoming and helpful. Some of you told us how the centre is a bright and attractive place and we agree. The rooms and play equipment are of a very good standard and the staff have lots of experience and skills to make sure your time there is well spent. The children we saw were making good progress and enjoyed what they were doing.

Some of you said that sessions, such as 'Bumps to Babes', are very valuable and we agree. The centre asks for your views on activities and courses and some of you are involved in helping to manage the centre.

The centre manager makes sure that the services the centre is providing meet your needs and interests, and we have asked the centre to make sure these arrangements are of good quality and that they continue to improve.

The centre staff listen to your views and uses this information to make improvements. They are aware that more could be done to involve more families in the life of the centre.

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