

Inspection report for Highbridge Children's Centre

Local authority	Somerset
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Churchfields Primary
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY274638 Highbridge Children's Centre 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 her staff, representatives of the advisory board, the headteacher from the adjoining primary school and members of the local community. They also talked with partner agencies and held discussions with health visitors and a speech and language specialist.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including key policies, self-evaluation documents, the business plan, evaluations and data about people who use the centre.

Information about the centre

Highbridge Children's Centre shares the same site as Churchfields Primary School. The children's centre opened seven years ago as a Phase 1 type centre. Following local authority reorganisation, in April 2011 Highbridge became part of a cluster of three children's centres in the North Sedgemoor district of Somerset which share a manager. Highbridge Children's Centre is governed by its own advisory board. The centre is open from 8.00am to 6.00pm, each weekday for 51 weeks of the year. All main services are delivered from the centre, with additional family support provided on an outreach basis in Pawlett village and support for homeless families at a refuge house nearby. The centre houses a 71-place local authority nursery which has a baby room and two inter-linked rooms for children aged two to five years.

There are 728 children under five in the centre's reach area which is socially and economically diverse. The majority of children and families using the centre come from both established housing estates and a number of new developments which are within walking distance of the centre. Many families suffer from drug dependency, unemployment and domestic abuse. There is an increase in obesity and teenage pregnancy. This area is within the top 30% of deprived wards with one of the wards falling within the top 7.4% of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England. A second ward falls within the top 20% of deprivation. There are a high proportion of

single parent families. By contrast, villages to the east of the children’s centre are characterised by greater affluence and a high proportion of professional classes. The majority of families in the reach area are White British. The nursery provides childcare for children with poor levels of personal and social development and a higher than average number of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Good provision is made for the young children and families who use the centre and this leads to good outcomes. Following a period of significant change, including staff restructuring, the number of families using the centre has increased. This is largely due to the strong and determined leadership of the centre manager who has a secure grasp on the needs of the local community and is firmly committed to widening access to the centre’s services. Staff are enthusiastic and passionate about their work and justifiably proud of the successes with centre users.

The centre’s capacity to improve is good. Leaders have a secure understanding of the centre’s strengths and areas for improvement. Together with their partners they work to deliver a cohesive set of services, both at the centre and in community venues. Of particular note is the strong working relationship that the centre shares with health visitors. The centre has started to use data which is made available to them from the local authority to identify need. Nevertheless, while the leaders are aware of the importance of matching provision to local needs, they are at an early stage of using this information to plan services and analyse the impact the centre has on improving the outcomes of the most vulnerable groups within the community. Leaders are also aware that they need to extend the opportunities for the involvement of more parents and carers in evaluating and developing centre services.

Highly positive relationships at all levels make a tangible contribution to the well-being of centre users. The quality of care, support and guidance offered to users is

good. Staff have a strong commitment to promoting equality and diversity, and inclusion is central to the services provided. One parent described how the centre staff 'bend over backwards to help both children and their parents'. Safeguarding arrangements are secure and thorough. Good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) helps to prioritise services and ensure efficient use of resources. Families appreciate the warm and caring atmosphere, friendly staff and good outreach support. They consider that the children's centre services are central to improving their daily lives and, as one parent explained, 'it's a lifeline'.

Early learning experiences make a positive contribution to young children's achievements and school readiness. Outcomes for the majority of children attending the centre's childcare provision are outstanding. Consequently, the educational achievement of those at most risk is moving much closer to others of the same age. A satisfactory and increasing number of adults participate in community education courses and some families at the centre are improving their economic stability and independence. Parenting courses show good participation rates and raise the confidence of those involved.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop an improved understanding of how available data can be used to target all vulnerable groups within the community.
- Extend opportunities for the involvement of parents and carers in evaluating and developing the services provided by the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

By attending courses such as 'Little Chef' where parents and carers learn how to make fruit salad and nourishing vegetable soups, most develop a good understanding of providing healthy meals for their families. Children are consistently encouraged to eat healthy meals and snacks and those who participate in the hot meals provided at midday benefit from a nourishing meal. The 'Movers and Shakers' session ensures that parents and carers have a fun time exercising with their children and experiences in the 'Forest school' help families to understand the importance of learning activities outdoors. There is a good take-up rate for breastfeeding in this area because the support group at the centre guides and encourages new mothers.

The promotion of emotional well-being is an important aspect of the centre's work. Close communication with health partners and volunteer groups enable most families to benefit positively from support which is tailored closely to meet the needs of individual circumstances. The 'Stepping Up' adult sessions has had an impressive impact on improving the confidence of a group of parents. By participating in practical, outdoor activities they have gained confidence in using skills which can

help them in everyday life situations. Young parents and those who have had multiple births explain that they could not have coped without the centre and liken it to being a 'best friend in a crisis'.

Keeping families safe lies at the heart of the centre's work. Parents and carers keep themselves and their families safe because they act on the advice they are given by staff who model and advise on best practice. The centre has effective assessment systems in place to ensure the safety of vulnerable children and adults, and those families subject to Common Assessment Framework processes and Child Protection Plans are monitored closely. Children in the nursery consistently behave well in ways that are safe for themselves and others, for example when they are playing with water outside, using shaving foam to experiment with texture and touch and cutting up fruit with safety knives. The 'Busy Bees' outreach group and the '4 Parents' session not only facilitate social opportunities for families, but also enable them to share experiences of keeping their homes safe and healthy as their children develop and grow.

Relationships are positive and trusting and this enables parenting programmes, such as 'Playing Up' which provides helpful ways for parents and carers to deal with challenging behaviour, to have such successful outcomes. PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership) sessions successfully provide information and guidance to help parents and carers make the most of learning opportunities in everyday life at home by talking, playing, singing and sharing books.

The centre works with adult learning partners to deliver a range of training opportunities for families. Available evidence demonstrates that some of the families are improving their economic stability and independence. This is because families access support about housing advice, volunteer work at the centre and childcare. Parents and carers appreciate that they can return to work knowing that their child is well looked after and cared for. A few parents and carers have accessed courses leading to further qualifications but the centre has plans to improve the opportunities for families to access accredited courses and gain skills in preparation for future employment.

Parents and carers report of the benefits of their children accessing two-year-old funding and recognised how this helps their learning, particularly in their personal, social and emotional development. This is particularly appreciated by parents who have had multiple births and benefit from the personal time this provision gives them. Children are much better prepared for school because provision in the nursery is outstanding. This enables them to make excellent progress in their learning and in the development of their personal and social skills and their ability to communicate and listen carefully.

Parents and carers feel confident sharing their views and opinions with the centre and this is achieved through informal discussions, a suggestions box and comments made to the advisory board. Nevertheless, the centre is fully aware that it needs to establish a more structured approach for parents and carers to evaluate sessions and

contribute to centre planning.

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	2
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	2
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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre has a good understanding of the needs of those who attend the centre, especially those parents, carers and children who have personal, emotional and health issues and adults who experience difficulties with parenting skills. The quality and range of services are integrated and cohesive and meet the personal, social, health and safety needs of most local families well. The children's centre staff work closely with health, social care, speech and language professionals to assess and support the needs of families and refer for one-to-one support in the home. This enables the development and effective delivery of services to target groups. In discussion, parents and carers identified the good quality of outreach services and said how valuable the home visits carried out by family support workers are in helping them through times of crisis. Case studies provide good evidence about the positive difference centre services make to the outcomes of those in need and who are experiencing problems. Strong links have been developed with a local house that provides shelter for homeless families. Family workers undertake visits to individual homes to address problems of isolation. The trusting relationships which develop are used as a stepping stone by the families to access additional services which are available to them elsewhere.

Participating rates are increasing with courses continually being adapted to better meet the needs and secure health and economic well-being. Take-up of the parenting courses on offer to promote positive behaviours, raise confidence and self-esteem are good and improving. Despite, community 'walkabouts', visits to the local supermarket and leaflets distributed to individual homes in a new housing estate, the centre manager is fully aware that some hard to reach families within the community do not use the centre's facilities as frequently as others. There are potential users

who are yet to be identified. This is because although detailed statistical information is provided to the centre twice a year, staff agree that they do not, as yet, have the skills to interpret this data to best effect. Crucial information, such as the birth of new babies, is not readily accessible to them and compounded by the severe shortage of midwives to communicate with locally.

There is a very homely and relaxed atmosphere within the centre. Parents and carers praise the dedication shown to them by staff and fully appreciate the 'open door' approach. Centre users greatly value the way in which staff offer discrete spaces to discuss personal issues. The provision of inclusive and well-run crèche facilities is valued by parents and carers. There a good range of weekly activities, including a health visiting team 'drop-in' clinic, and regular opportunities for expectant mums to meet at 'belly buddies' and dads to be involved during weekend sessions.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood at all levels and links between strategic planning and service provision are effective. Good partnerships with other services and key partners are firmly established, ensuring services are integrated and making a difference for users. The centre is making good strides in addressing targets set by the local authority. The advisory board provides good levels of support but it is in the early stages of developing its ability to challenge the centre leaders.

The use of resources, including the deployment of staff and volunteers, and the good outcomes for families demonstrate that the centre is providing good value for money. Staff are very well led by their leaders and morale is high. Health visitors and speech therapists use the centre to work with children and their parents and carers and this good use of effective partnership benefits the families with whom they work. Outreach work has been tailored to meet users' needs and has enabled staff to reach more families.

Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and ensure that all who use the centre are well protected. Health and safety matters are closely supervised and supported by robust risk assessments. Awareness about child protection matters are closely supervised and supported by robust risk assessments. All staff are up to date

with training requirements including paediatric first aid. The systems for staff vetting and recruitment fully meet requirements.

Equality and inclusion are central strands of the centre's work. Its ethos is exceptionally warm and inviting. The integration of multi-agency services enhances opportunities for children and their families. The centre's approach makes a positive contribution to community cohesion. This was exemplified clearly through the extensive work which was planned around the favourite 'winter carnivals' which are very much a Somerset tradition.

The centre has a good understanding of its strengths and knows what the key areas for development are. There is a good range of monitoring and evaluation systems in place, which ensure high quality services and staff development needs. The success of groups, courses and activities are evaluated by staff who then use this to inform the planning for future sessions. This includes consulting the children about the choices they make in their learning. Case studies are routinely collected to demonstrate the good impact services have for individual families. Nevertheless, the centre knows that they need to develop a more formalised approach to gaining a wider range of user views. They also understand that they need to include the full range of evidence from partners to demonstrate the impact their service has on outcomes.

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	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	2
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

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

The Highbridge Children's Centre's registered early years provision was previously inspected in March 2011. The inspection of the children's centre was informed by the findings and judgements made at the time.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Highbridge Children's Centre on 9 and 10 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Your children's centre provides you with an attractive, safe and inclusive environment where you and your children feel safe, valued and respected. Those of you we spoke to told us that you really enjoy the range of activities on offer, from the health clinic drop-in groups to sessions such as '4Parents' and 'Movers and Shakers'. You appreciate that some groups, such as Busy Bees and Stay and Play are held at other sites in order to reach even more families.

From our observations, discussions and case studies, we were able to see that the centre has a positive impact on your lives. The PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership) sessions which give you ideas about supporting your child's learning at home help them to make secure progress in their social and communication skills. You told us how your children are benefiting from attending the childcare, particularly as part of the two-year-old funding, and the outstanding nursery provision which helps them prepare for school. The children are making significant strides in their learning and development.

We found staff are enthusiastic and work well with partners, such as your health visitors, to successfully help you to make positive changes to your lives. Outcomes for users are good overall and improving. We know that staff talk to you about the opportunities you would like to have on offer and you feel comfortable making suggestions. However, we have asked them to develop a system which reflects your views of the success of the sessions and provides an indication of the impact the services are having on your lives.

We can see that you have good opportunities to take part in group activities and attend courses that help you to adopt healthy lifestyles and understand the importance of keeping you and your families safe. Children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. They skilfully move around the outdoor play area and show sensible levels of responsibility when they are asked to tidy up. Although a

good number of you volunteer at the centre and this experience has led to paid employment, the centre is fully aware that there are fewer opportunities for you to access academic courses that lead to qualifications and they have plans to rectify this.

Partnerships with key agencies are strong so this enables the correct support and guidance to be offered. Staff and partners are effective in assessing the individual needs of families in order to ensure you receive the correct support. Family support workers liaise effectively together to plan support for families who are facing challenges and need the most help and support. For example, courses such as 'Playing Up' help you to learn about child development and behaviour management. Some of you also told us about the low cost healthy meals that you have learnt to cook. Using sign language with babies and singing rhymes and songs have supported your child's development.

We found that the centre carefully plans the use of space and resources and provides good value for money. The centre makes sure you are well looked after when you visit. The good safeguarding arrangements help you to feel safe and free from risks. For example, leaders follow rigorous and robust practices to ensure all adults working in the centre are suitable to do so and staff are highly trained in how to safeguard children.

The centre manager and her team do a good job. They draw on a lot of information to help plan activities carefully and see how well things are going. However, the data they require are not always available or are not provided in a way that is manageable for this busy team to deal with. We have asked the centre to work with the local authority and the health service to ensure that the most up-to-date and relevant information enables them to provide the most relevant services which are accessible to all families in the area.

It was great to see how exciting life is for those children who spend time in the childcare and nursery class. The children settle extremely well and make excellent strides in their development as they are effectively supported in all they do.

We were pleased to talk to some of you during the inspection and were grateful for your views and comments. Thank you for contributing to the inspection at Highbridge Children's Centre.

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