

Inspection report for Hatherton Children's Centre

Local authority	Walsall
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Hatherton Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY380916 Hatherton Pre-school

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 centre staff, users and representatives from the local authority, the local advisory board, and staff from services that use the centre.

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 serves a community which is in one of the 30% most deprived wards in the country. The core purpose of the centre is to provide a range of integrated services that include health, family support, adult training, early years provision, advice and guidance. The centre coordinator manages the services provided by the centre and coordinates those provided by its partners. The local authority is responsible for the performance management of staff in the centre and the Hatherton Primary School governing body is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development. Currently, Walsall local authority is in the process of revising its governance arrangements.

Within the community served by the children's centre, there are six super-output areas; all are within the 30% most deprived, of which two are in the 20% most deprived and three are in the 10% most deprived areas. A large majority of families are of White British heritage. Unemployment is higher than the national average but lower than the West Midlands average.

The centre has Early Years Foundation Stage provision on-site which provides sessional playgroup and crèche facilities which support various courses held on-site. The majority of children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills 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

The outcomes for families are good overall. This is because of strong centre leadership that has ensured that families, particularly those who are vulnerable, benefit from a range of good-quality services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs. Consequently, the centre has successfully improved the health, safety, school readiness and economic well-being of the vulnerable and disadvantaged families and their children who take advantage of its services. As one parent reported, explaining the benefits the centre has brought to his child, 'When she started school, she was ready to learn, she was happy and confident to leave me.' Procedures for safeguarding are comprehensive and robust. The centre is rightly recognised by families as a place of safety.

The families contribute to the decision making and governance of the centre; however, there is not a formal system in place to allow this to happen systematically. The centre encourages adults to take part and values their evaluations of services, making changes in response to their views. The significant changes at Hatherton School have had an impact on the level of challenge and support that the governing body has been able to give to the work of the centre. The local authority is currently reviewing the governance arrangements.

One reason that provision is good is because of the thorough procedures for assessing the needs of families, and in particular, the disadvantaged and vulnerable families. These procedures have been successfully established because of the good partnerships between the early years staff, family support workers, social services and the health visitors and other partner agencies that are responsible for families' health, safety and economic well-being. Parents, particularly those with complicated needs, cannot speak highly enough of the quality of the care, guidance and support that they receive. As one parent said, 'I was in a very dark place, but I am now very positive about the future. I wouldn't be, without the centre's support, guidance and understanding.'

The children's centre demonstrates good capacity for improvement. The leadership of the centre coordinator and her senior leadership team is good. They demonstrate

a passion and relentless determination to improve the life chances of families in the local community. In this, they are ably supported by a very strong team that work extremely effectively together and with their partners.

The improvement plans show that priorities are based on a sound understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for further development. This is because the centre understands the needs of its families very well. However, there is some data that the centre does not receive regularly to enable them to be certain they are meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. Some of the data that is missing is incidents of repeat domestic violence and the numbers of children on child protection plans in the reach area. This data will allow them to further target those that most need their help and improve their outcomes.

The centre and partners have successfully established robust procedures for supervising staff and holding them to account for the quality of their work. However, the centre manager does not currently receive professional supervision. The local authority carries out an annual conversation and, in between, conducts a satisfaction survey to all families. The satisfaction survey showed the vast majority of families found the services offered by the centre to be outstanding and good. These processes show that the centre is effective in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that the governance arrangements are reviewed, and that the advisory board is fully functional, reflects the local community and provides a voice for all partners and families.
- Gain all the necessary data to allow full analysis of all areas of the centre's work, to enable adjustments to be made to services to further meet the needs of families and to ensure that all groups in the community that require support, including those who may be at risk of harm, are reached.
- Ensure that professional supervision is received by all staff.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The emotional well-being of families is greatly improved by their engagement with the centre. The family support worker who works with the older children after school has a focus on their emotional needs which has promoted positive behaviour and helped to develop positive relationships. Parents, such as those who have suffered from mental health problems or postnatal depression, are well cared for. As one parent reported, 'I think I would have cracked up without the centre's support.' Local health services were held at the centre until very recently, such as the baby clinic, which were effective in ensuring that parents gained good advice which improved

their parenting skills. However, the service is no longer provided at the centre and parents reported that they now have to undertake a long walk because the new venue is not on a bus route. This has proved to be a barrier to some parents. Health and the local authority are working together to look at ways to reintroduce health visitor services.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted well through successful initiatives such as courses where parents are taught how to prepare healthy meals for their children. The pre-school has excellent outdoor facilities where children and parents grow their own vegetables and flowers. Children were said to be having the opportunity to taste fresh vegetables for the first time. Some children have managed to persuade their parents to grow vegetables in their own gardens, which has improved their diet and helped to reduce their weekly food bill.

Families are taught well in how to behave in ways which are safe to themselves and others. For example, there is good advice given at the safety week which was put on by the centre following a request from parents who were concerned because their children were running off while walking along the road. Vulnerable families, for example those with children on a child protection plan or who have children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are well supported through procedures such as the Common Assessment Framework and Communication Screening. Partner agencies, such as the teenage pregnancy service, regularly use the centre for groups such as the 'Teens and Toddlers' group, which is a pregnancy preventive programme for school-age children. The pupils at the same time undertake an 'Interpersonal Skills Level 1' qualification. The coordinator reports that 90% of pupils achieve the qualification and an overwhelming majority have not become pregnant.

The social skills of children in the community are improving well. The school reports that children who attend the centre are achieving higher scores at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage than those that do not attend. This shows the centre is having a good impact on narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest. Case studies show how family support workers help parents to make informed choices for their children who require specialist care due to special educational needs, by providing them with the necessary information and taking them to visit the schools. There are good transition arrangements in place by the centre, along with local Early Years Foundation Stage settings in the reach area, who provide home visits to families to aid the transition and pass on assessments to the school. The speaking and listening skills of children are improving well. The centre, in partnership with the speech and language therapist, has worked successfully with parents and their children to strengthen their communication skills so that they are now better prepared for learning when they enter the local nurseries.

The many adults spoken to report how much they enjoy the courses they have successfully completed and are very proud of their achievements. Families benefit from a range of courses carefully designed to improve their self-esteem and knowledge. For example, courses to improve their awareness of their baby's learning and development, and giving them the confidence and knowledge to become their

baby's first teacher. One parent who successfully completed a first-aid course is now enrolled on a nursing course.

A growing number of users are trained to do voluntary work in the centre, such as running the 'crafty session' for families and the dad who helps out at the 'Dads matter' group. The centre regularly acts on the opinions of its families to improve provision. It rightly recognises that users now need to take more responsibility for the centre's work and need to be better included in the important decision-making processes.

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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides a good range of integrated services and activities which are well matched to the needs of families. Parents are seen as individuals and the centre assesses their needs effectively to ensure that those with the greatest level of need are prioritised. Good relationships are established with an extensive range of key partners, including health, social care, oral health, private and voluntary nurseries and the Families Information Service. These ensure that families receive a coordinated approach. Home visits are provided to support those who have difficulty accessing the centre. The staff use their knowledge of the services available to help families to engage with other services. The regular midwife sessions at the centre have ensured that parents access the centre when their children are still very young, and this ensures that new parents are quickly made aware of what the centre has to offer. Activities and services are advertised well through effective links with other providers and community groups, including the library and nurseries. Good signposting ensures that families are able to have access to a range of information. The families report that if the centre is not able to answer their questions immediately then they are proactive in seeking out the appropriate answer and feeding it back to the parents.

The centre assesses the needs of all groups to ensure they are able to provide a good level of support and guidance. Crèche facilities enable parents to attend courses at the centre, such as paediatric first aid. The qualified teacher provides guidance and support to the crèche and nursery, and works with them to ensure consistency and to improve services. She also regularly supports the local private nurseries that are also included in training and any relevant meetings. This has impacted positively on the quality of the provision offered to children in the reach area.

The centre provides good-quality information and guidance documents in its main reception area and throughout the centre. Its website provides good-quality information about the services on offer at the centre. Some links are established with Jobcentre Plus and the centre receives job vacancies on a regular basis which are displayed on the centre's Jobcentre Plus notice board. Families are being supported and given guidance by family support workers who are able to advise them.

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

Parents were unanimous in the praise for the centre; one parent reported, 'It's like having a second mother, they have always got the answer to all our problems', and another said, 'We are like one big happy family, everyone is welcome and we are all treated equally.' The high-quality supervision that benefits staff has been successful in establishing a very strong sense of common purpose. All staff feel valued and respect the contribution each makes to improving life chances of families. Consequently, the concerted and effective work of the centre has created a safe, friendly environment where there are high expectations of its families. The centre manager is currently not receiving professional supervision; however, she has put in place her own system to ensure that she receives support and guidance through a buddy system with a neighbouring children's centre and through her senior management team. The centre offers good value for money because of the great care taken to provide services for families that are specifically tailored around their needs. This enables the large majority of families to be much safer than they were, and has improved their health and economic well-being.

The centre knows its families very well and can demonstrate its success on an individual and activity basis because of regular evaluations by families and centre

staff. There is some uncertainty about the future structure of governance boards for the children's centre. The local authority rightly identified that governance arrangements are not as effective as they could be, but has not yet decided on future arrangements. This lack of clarity also means that the engagement of families in the strategic planning of the centre is less well developed. The local authority does a good job of providing most of the necessary data; however, there are some gaps which hinders the centre's ability to know if it is meeting the needs of all of the people who may be vulnerable.

The centre promotes equality of opportunity well through its work with different groups targeted for specific support, such as the pregnant young mums group. The centre has been successful in breaking down the barriers that vulnerable families experience, ensuring equality of access to services. For example, families reported how isolated they felt before becoming involved in the work of the centre. The centre successfully displays visual aids around the centre and uses Makaton regularly, which ensures that all children, including those with speech and language delay, are fully able to join in activities. One parent said, 'Since the introduction of Makaton, he can now communicate with his child'.

Safeguarding is given high priority by all staff. Good recording ensures children and families who give cause for concern are well monitored. All policies and procedures are in place to safeguard families and are reviewed annually. The centre provides a very safe environment that is appreciated by all families and partner agencies.

Partnerships are of a good quality because a strong belief in collaborative working is at the heart of the centre's ethos. All agencies speak highly of the centre and demonstrate a commitment to working together.

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	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	2

meet its core purpose	
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

None

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Summary for centre families

We inspected the Hatherton Children's Centre on 7–8 December 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

The strong centre leadership of the coordinator and her dedicated team have provided you with a range of good-quality services that are carefully tailored to meet your particular needs. Those of you who use the centre are now much more able to stay safe and healthy, and to provide for your families. Those of you we spoke to were particularly proud of your achievements. These ranged from becoming better parents to gaining voluntary positions or enrolling on accredited courses. You said this was because of the skills that you had learnt at the centre and the help that they had given you. The children that use the centre are also well catered for. This means that they settle quickly into school and are ready to start learning and make better progress than they would if they had not benefited from the centre's services.

You told us that you think that the centre is a safe place for you and your children. Inspectors agreed with this view and think that staff work very well to ensure the health and safety of all who use the centre. The centre is also good at helping children in need to be safe by working well with other agencies such as the health and social services.

You told us over and over again that coming to the centre had increased your confidence and self-esteem. This is because the staff are good at helping you to decide how to improve your lives and then making sure that you access the right services to do this. You also appreciate the warm, friendly atmosphere in the centre and the fact that there is always someone to help when you need advice. Those of you who have felt isolated and alone with your problems have made friends as a result of the centre's work. As one of you said, 'It's like one big happy family.'

The centre staff and their partner agencies have provided families with a good range of varied services that cater for all needs. For example, you thoroughly enjoy the

stay and play sessions where you learn many skills that equip you well to improve your child's learning and development. The services for children are also good, such as the on-site pre-school, where they thrive.

We have asked the centre to make some improvements. We would like the governance arrangements to be reviewed, so that everyone, including you, has an opportunity to ask the centre about their work and question why things are being done or not, whichever the case may be. Some data are not being provided to the centre so it may be difficult for the centre to be certain that they are addressing everyone's needs. We would like to see the centre manager receive the same good-quality supervision that the rest of her team and partners receive.

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