

Inspection report for Horden Children's Centre

Local authority	Durham
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Giant Steps Horden Ltd EY336375

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 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 advisory board, parents 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

Horden Children's Centre is a phase one centre and was designated in August 2006. It is managed by the local authority and based on the same site as Cotsford Junior School and Giant Steps Daycare. It provides services from the main site and through other neighbouring children's centres to a population made up from a broad range of economic and social circumstances. The majority of children live in areas within the 10% most deprived in the country.

The number of families attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is high. Almost half of the children in the area are living in households where no-one is working. The proportion of families in the area who receive benefits is high. The vast majority of families within the area served by the centre are of White British heritage.

The local authority and its health partners are nearing completion of a major restructure of the delivery of services to children and families. The centre is now part of an integrated hub-and-spoke model.

The centre provides a wide range of supporting services, incorporating midwifery and health visiting clinics, crèche, outreach and home visiting, drop-in health support, parenting courses, volunteering opportunities and workshops. The centre has an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and a parent. Most

children in the area enter early years provision with a range of skills and knowledge lower than 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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory. Leaders have a thorough understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement and are making sure the centre and its services are well established in the community. The centre's performance is increasing steadily and outcomes for the majority of families are improving.

The centre has satisfactory capacity to improve because managers and staff know what has to be done and are determined to improve on what has been accomplished so far. The recent reorganisation of services is now almost complete and although there has been some disruption, more families are now receiving better-integrated services. The written plans used to help the centre develop and improve set out the centre's ambition and identify almost all of the improvements needed. The self-evaluation process is effective and the centre has developed sufficient arrangements to gather the views of parents, staff and partners to help plan for improvements.

The number of families, including those from targeted groups, who are using the centre is increasing although the centre recognises it still does not encourage enough people to register and benefit from its services. Services for young parents are given high priority and they receive effective support. Systems for registering families and recording contact are improving but are not yet fully effective. Outreach provision is well established with experienced family workers who know the community well.

Families who use the centre's services develop a good understanding of dangers and how to keep themselves and each other safe. Staff are well trained and work effectively with partners to safeguard children, including those receiving social work intervention. They create a safe environment within the centre where families feel comfortable. Families remain

safe and their needs are identified because staff use the Common Assessment Framework process effectively.

Children who attend the centre make good progress preparing for school, and families enjoy the activities on offer. Parents who engage in courses such as 'Rhyme Time' and 'Family Nurturing' are helped to understand and support speech and language development. However, arrangements for the provision of opportunities and support for parents seeking help to find work, undertake training or gain accredited qualifications are at a very early stage and only a few parents have benefited from these.

Arrangements for leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory and improving. There are clear lines of accountability and staff understand the priorities for the centre. The advisory board provides useful support for the centre but is not fully involved in setting targets or providing challenge, and the number of parents involved is very low. The centre has been slow to implement plans to develop a parents' forum. Creative use is made of technology to publicise the centre's work but marketing lacks impact because some partners and parents are unclear about the range of services available at the centre.

Partnership arrangements are satisfactory overall. The centre has strong and very effective partnerships with the probation service, local schools and childcare providers which lead to improved outcomes for families. However, the centre recognises that current levels of integration with other partner organisations are not well enough established in order for more families from target groups to benefit, such as men and disabled children. Good opportunities are missed for staff and other partners to work more effectively together to support families who attend the centre for routine health appointments. Breastfeeding rates are particularly low and smoking through pregnancy is high. Partnership arrangements with education and training providers for adults do not lead to improved outcomes for a sufficient number of parents.

Arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity and the promotion of diversity are satisfactory. Families with the greatest needs are prioritised and the centre uses its resources adequately to ensure support is provided at an early stage. The gap between the lowest attaining children and others is reducing slowly. Rehabilitation for mothers who are subject to statutory supervision by the probation service is given high priority and is particularly effective. However, arrangements to identify, register and support families with disabled children are not fully effective.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase registration and user participation through better promotion of the centre's provision and by more precise identification and targeting of those most in need, including fathers and families with disabled children.
- Work more effectively with health partners to develop an effective joint strategy to improve breastfeeding rates and decrease the number of mothers smoking during pregnancy.

- Improve the level of service offered to support adults interested in seeking paid work, training and education.
- Increase and widen the participation of parents in the decision-making processes at the centre by developing a parents' forum and encouraging more parents to join the advisory board.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes for the children and parents who use the centre are satisfactory. Health outcomes are improving. Healthy eating and exercise are promoted well and the centre encourages families to use the outdoor area to play games and have fun. One parent told us, 'The centre is not just a place to play. I would not have managed without their support.' Obesity levels for children are below the national rate and are reducing further. There is a low but increasing number of mothers commencing and continuing breastfeeding. Too many mothers continue to smoke during pregnancy.

Parents trust the family workers and know that they will receive effective help. They feel safe at the centre and receive encouragement to explore and understand risks and dangers through play and experience. Families develop a good understanding of dangers and how to keep themselves and each other safe. Support for parents experiencing domestic violence is effective because the centre works well with partners to provide support. Close and effective working with social workers is ensuring children subject to child protection plans are prioritised to receive support.

Families value the support they receive and make good use of the sessions because they recognise the benefits. This improves their children's learning and promotes good parenting. One parent commented, 'Staff go outside of the box to help you just when you need it.'

Children make good progress in preparing for school. Speech and language development are given high priority and those children who use the centre's services have been identified as having high levels of communication and language skills, and their personal and social development is advanced by the time they enter school. However, the number of adults who gain accredited qualifications and participate in training is low.

Parents make a satisfactory contribution to decision-making and governance of the centre. They are listened to by staff during feedback and evaluation discussions and their views are valued. However, the centre does not have a parents' forum and the advisory board does not include enough parents.

Parents, including those from target groups such as young parents and women offenders make good progress because they improve their parenting skills and strengthen bonds with their children. Some parents who recognised they had little confidence and low self-esteem have developed greater self-assurance and improved their personal well-being. A few parents become peer-mentors and help support other families.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	3

How good is the provision?

3

The quality of provision is satisfactory overall. The centre is a bright and attractive place with a wide variety of toys and equipment to stimulate learning and development. Staff are welcoming and have high levels of skills, knowledge and experience. The centre has an adequate understanding of the needs of the community and assessment is generally used appropriately to plan individual support. However, the pace to increase the number of families registered and to target those most in need of support is slow.

Parents have fun at the centre and engage in exciting activities, whilst building their confidence, relationships and parenting skills. An increasing number of families from targeted groups are the focus of prioritised support and their needs are adequately met. One parent told the inspectors 'I got help for my depression straight away; this made a big difference for me and my family.'

Provision is increasing and improving and staff work increasingly effectively to provide early intervention and support for families referred to them, such as those with a new baby. Families who are brought to the attention of the family support workers receive effective support because staff use their knowledge and influence well.

The staff and the centre's partners provide satisfactory care, guidance and support and are becoming steadily more effective at supporting those who use its services. Arrangements for supporting young parents are very good and support and guidance for families facing challenges and those using health-related provision are improving. However, support and guidance arrangements for those seeking to improve their education and find paid work remain underdeveloped.

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 are satisfactory overall. Senior leaders have a very clear vision for the development of the centre and are focused on improving outcomes for families. This is leading to a steady increase in the quality of the provision and the number of families using the centre. The local authority monitors the work of the centre very closely in its efforts to establish a consistent and high level of performance across the county. Its representatives collect and analyse data very thoroughly to inform target setting. Quality improvement processes are well established and the centre has benefited from accurate and critical advice and support. However, despite strong ambition the centre has also been slow to identify all target groups, such as fathers and disabled children, and to increase the number of families registering with the centre. The centre has an active and supportive advisory board.

The centre provides satisfactory value for money because it uses its resources appropriately to meet the needs of families. The centre promotes equality satisfactorily in its activities, some of which involve the celebration of different cultures and beliefs. There is a steady reduction of the gap in achievement between different groups. Discrimination, where it occurs, is dealt with promptly and effectively. The centre is committed to inclusion and removing barriers, including those faced by users with the greatest needs.

The centre leader gives high priority to maintaining effective arrangements to safeguard families. All requirements are met, staff receive appropriate training, have adequate levels of awareness and know what to do if action is required to intervene. Integrated working ensures staff have ready access to expert advice on safeguarding and protecting children. Arrangements for staff vetting comply with requirements.

Satisfactory partnerships are in place with a range of key organisations including health, social care, childminders and voluntary and private sector organisations. However, partnerships with organisations that provide adult education, training and employment advice remain underdeveloped.

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 secures improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision.	3

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

The 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.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Horden Children's Centre on 20 and 21 June 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The centre has good arrangements to keep you and your children safe. It is a bright and attractive place that is welcoming. We found the staff are committed and keen to support your children's learning and development and to help some of you become more confident and effective parents. We have asked the centre leader to tell more people about what the centre offers and to encourage more people to use it.

The staff are effective at providing support for individuals, particularly young parents. Some of you told us that the support of the centre is very important when you are having problems. Staff have lots of experience and skills to make sure your time there is well spent. The children we saw enjoyed what they were doing. We have asked the staff and health professionals to do more to encourage and support mothers to breastfeed.

The centre is a pleasant place for families to meet with staff and those from other organisations and to get more support and guidance. There is an interesting variety of sessions and activities which are well attended and increasingly popular.

The number of women in Horden who smoke during pregnancy is high so we have asked the centre to work harder to reduce this by helping more people to stop smoking. The staff are determined to become even better at supporting families with the greatest needs. We have asked them to do more to encourage dads to join in with activities and to make contact with more families with disabled children.

The centre has worked particularly effectively with parents to support children's development and this has helped children to make quicker progress when they start school. We found that under the guidance of the centre's leader, the staff work well to provide satisfactory levels of care, guidance and support. However, the centre does not provide enough services for adults who want help to find work, undertake training or increase their education.

We have asked the centre to encourage more parents to join the advisory board and to set up a parents' forum so that more of you can have your say about how the centre is run. We would like to thank those parents we met during our visit for making us feel so welcome and for the way you helped us with our work.

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