

Inspection report for Haddenham Children's Centre

Local authority	Buckinghamshire
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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	Not applicable

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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers from the centre, frontline staff, parents and carers, partners, members of the advisory board and a representative of the local authority linked to the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

This phase 2 centre was designated in March 2007, becoming fully operational from May 2009, and meets its full core purpose. The centre is based at Haddenham Library with office space for one member of staff during library opening times. On Mondays and Wednesdays, when the library is closed, the library can accommodate the whole team and is used to run services and hold meetings. Other venues, for example the local village and scout hall, are also hired to extend the services the centre offers, and a mobile bus is used where possible to deliver services in the surrounding villages. The centre is managed directly by Buckinghamshire County Council. The advisory board includes local headteachers, partner representatives, parents and carers and members of the local authority.

The centre's reach area is predominantly rural and is almost exclusively made up of White British families (99%). Unemployment is low at 2% and almost half of the area's working population is employed in the higher and lower managerial and professional occupations. Very few children live in workless households. However, due to the rurality of the area, it is considered one of the most deprived areas of the county with regards to geographic distance to primary services (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010). Social isolation is one of the main issues, together with pockets of socio-economic deprivation in Haddenham and the parishes of Long Crendon, Worminghall and Stone with Bishopstone and Hartwell.

Children in the centre's reach area demonstrate skills and knowledge broadly in line with those expected for their age on entry to early years provision.

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

Haddenham Children's Centre provides satisfactory support to families and, as a result, outcomes overall are satisfactory. Children and their parents enjoy using the centre and feel comfortable within its welcoming environment. Services are valued and parents and carers find staff very supportive; the extended provision in surrounding villages is viewed very positively by families. The care, guidance and support provided by the centre are good and close attention to all safeguarding matters is a strong aspect of the centre's work and promotes the safety and well-being of children and their parents well. In an area where unemployment is very low, the centre has begun to identify the further skills enhancement parents in target groups need, particularly those from workless homes, but this is currently an under-developed area of its work.

The large majority of families in the reach area with children from birth to five years is registered with the centre and quarterly data from the local authority show that families' engagement with the centre is increasing. However, the volume and depth of engagement of all families, including those in the centre's own identified targeted groups in the most deprived areas, although clearly improving, is not high enough. The centre is fully aware of this and has begun to undertake sharper identification of families' needs and to shape services accordingly. However, systems for tracking and monitoring the impact of its work are underdeveloped. Currently, strategic data from the local authority and its key partners, for example health, are not available at reach area level, thereby limiting the capacity of the centre to evaluate the impact of its work more precisely.

Over the last 15 months progress has been rapid in moving the centre forward. The centre manager and her relatively new team have established effective administrative systems supported by clear strategic thinking translated into target

driven action planning. Working within the constraints imposed by the limited accommodation, the skilled and committed centre staff have accessed a range of venues in the surrounding villages to draw in more families, especially those suffering social isolation. Needs are being more precisely identified and provision is improving. Work has begun on establishing precise, robust monitoring systems to enable the centre to have a fully accurate appraisal of its effectiveness. The centre has a firm grasp on strengths and weaknesses as a result of sound self-evaluation and its capacity to improve is, consequently, satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Identify the needs of all target groups more accurately, increase the volume and depth of engagement of all families, particularly those in the identified targeted groups and residing in the most disadvantaged localities.
- Work more closely with the local authority and key partners, for example health services, to ensure that the provision of data is specific to the centre's reach area so that the impact of the centre's work can be monitored and evaluated more precisely.
- Develop opportunities for targeted parents, particularly from workless homes, to participate in training to enhance their key skills, and monitor their participation and progression in these activities.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre provides a range of activities to promote healthy eating and physical fitness, for example the Tiny Sports sessions on Sundays and Cooking on a Budget for targeted families. Advice given during activities develops parents' understanding and ability to improve their children's health, including oral health and hygiene. As one parent commented in feedback, 'I now pay more attention to what my children eat and drink.' Obesity rates in the reach area are slightly higher than across Buckinghamshire as a whole but below the national average. Mothers receive support in regard to breastfeeding their babies through the regular Bumps and Babes sessions. Breastfeeding initiation and prevalence rates of these mothers have improved, but data are not yet available at reach level to children's centre staff. In consequence, although case studies demonstrate effective impact from the services provided, the centre is unable to evaluate the full impact of its work.

Data indicate that there are no children currently registered with the centre who are on the child protection register. However, the most vulnerable families, including children assessed with specific needs, are well supported by the centre through home visits and one-to-one help, as well as through partnerships with other agencies such as health and social services. For example, concerns over the behaviour of children with additional needs have been addressed through targeted provision for parents, equipping them with the skills to manage potentially difficult situations. In addition, many parents have been issued safety kits to use at home and given basic

paediatric first-aid training as a result of which their awareness of children's safety in the home has been enhanced. Centre staff use the Common Assessment Framework effectively to establish levels of need and this is supplemented by a new assessment tool developed through the 'payment by results' trial in which the local authority is involved.

Families enjoy the varied opportunities provided by the centre. The well-attended Heartbeeps sessions transform 'everyday environments into wonderland' by using multi-sensory approaches to stimulate attention and sustain enjoyment. Although not providing full daycare, the centre is improving parents' understanding of children's development and learning. As a result, parents' confidence in their parenting skills has improved as parents and carers have a better understanding of which activities to use at home to support their children's learning. However, not enough parents from the few economically deprived areas, such as Haddenham, are currently accessing these services. The proportion of children achieving a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved well in the reach area over the past three years. In 2011 the figure was above both the Buckinghamshire and national average.

Most parents make good use of the frequent opportunities to give their views on the events they attend, through the active parents' forum, or as representatives on the advisory board. The parents' forum has influenced important decisions, for example improving the quality of the questions in the feedback evaluations for centre activities. Families are offered support to improve their economic position when needed and case studies show the centre's work has assisted improved outcomes for some. However, there are insufficient opportunities for the small minority of parents with young children from workless households to access training which develops further their key skills and confidence.

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 centre has provided mainly universal services in the past, but is now clearly focused on targeting services at the most vulnerable families, including those suffering from isolation to ensure a better balance in provision and to meet all needs well. For example, the mobile bus is being used to take services to families in outlying villages and this is removing the barrier faced by many concerning access to services. Although the centre has detailed knowledge about the families that are accessing their services, leaders recognise that more remains to be done to engage an increased number of families from key target groups, such as lone parents and families who have children with disabilities. The quarterly data from the local authority provide useful information, for example about the level of engagement of target groups, but currently insufficient data are available at reach area level to enable the full impact of the centre's services to be monitored and evaluated.

The available accommodation, including the library and village hall, is used flexibly to support a suitable range of activities, including the Tiny Sports sessions attended by several fathers with their children at the weekend. Play in the Parishes is a popular summer and Easter vacation provision across Buckinghamshire where families enjoy the high-quality play resources provided and access vital information about children's centre provision at the same time. Centre staff are reaching out to families in the most deprived area of Haddenham, alongside the targeted work in parishes where there are pockets of deprivation, but the full impact of this work is yet to be seen.

The good care, guidance and support provided by the staff are making a real difference to families who report that they feel much more confident, less isolated and have developed greater self-esteem as a result of the centre's timely interventions. A teenage mother who attended the Bumps and Babes sessions says that she felt very supported by the centre and loved the fact that she was seen as a mother rather than a teenager. There is also good targeted provision for those families where an older or younger sibling is learning how to build stronger relationships with their brother or sister who has additional needs and, in consequence, family bonds are strengthen.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre's leaders have a clear vision for taking the centre forward, which is fully supported by the advisory board and the dedicated staff who work there. There are clear lines of accountability and the staff are well supported, supervised and effectively deployed. Self-evaluation is undertaken systematically throughout the year and the action planning which flows from it includes measurable targets for improvement, for example increasing the registration and engagement of lone parents, children who live in workless households, as well as families who live in the most deprived areas. However, occasionally self-evaluation lacks accuracy because the centre does not take sufficient account of the proportion of families it is reaching and engaging with in the reach area when making judgements about outcomes and quality of provision.

The advisory board has a clear structure, is well attended and meets regularly. Board members understand their strategic role of support and challenge, for example when asking questions about how to deepen and sustain engagement with key target groups. The local authority's participation in the 'payment by results' trial is beginning to positively shape the centre's strategies for engaging some hard-to-reach families. Aspiration among centre staff is high and the clear strategy to blend universal services with well-focused targeted provision that ensures the most vulnerable are well supported by the centre is proving positive, as reflected in the satisfactory and improving outcomes. The centre uses all available resources efficiently and as a result of these features the value for money provided is satisfactory.

Safeguarding is given a very high priority. Staff are very well trained in child protection matters and have undergone additional training in mental health and domestic violence which they put to good effect when supporting individual families. Risk assessments for all activities on different sites are very thorough and reviewed regularly. In addition, there are effective systems and procedures in place for safe recruitment. Effective partnership work with health and social services ensures a secure safety net of support for the most vulnerable families.

The centre is fully inclusive as shown, for example, in centre staff going out to surrounding villages to target the harder to reach families. Diversity is celebrated positively, for example festivals of the world's main religions are celebrated at the centre in an area which is predominantly of White British and Christian heritage. The gap between the 20% lowest achieving children and the rest by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is being narrowed successfully in the reach area. However, partly due to the lack of strategic data, the centre is unable to evaluate fully its impact on all targeted groups. Surveys show that parents and carers are satisfied with the services they receive and appreciate the opportunities they get to shape the work of the centre and play a full role in decision making.

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	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

No other information was used as the centre has no linked provision.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Haddenham Centre on 9 and 10 August 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. We enjoyed talking to some of you during the inspection and would like to thank you for your contribution and time. Your comments and written feedback were very valuable and helped us in our work.

The new staff team at the centre, including the centre manager, has made a good impact in the last 15 months. The team has set up effective systems and structures to ensure that the centre is run efficiently on a day-to-day basis. Centre staff have delivered a satisfactory range of services from the library and village hall and across the wider Haddenham area. The number of parents registering at the centre has increased as a result, which is encouraging. Although the large majority (69%) of families with children aged from birth to five years are now registered, the volume

and depth of engagement with families is still not high enough. Therefore, we have asked the centre to continue the hard work at identifying and engaging more families, especially where the need is the greatest, for example lone parents and those families living in the most deprived localities in the reach area.

The centre gets lots of feedback from you about the activities that you and your children attend. It is clear from the evaluations of those of you using the centre that you feel welcomed, safe and comfortable. You say that the care, guidance and support offered by the centre are making a real difference to you and your children and we agree. Those of you that have attended parenting courses and first-aid training say that family life is now more enjoyable and you have learned how to set safe routines at home. The Tiny Sports and Heartbeeps sessions are helping you to ensure your children are healthy and fit, but the children are also learning good language and communication skills at the same time. These are just some examples of how the centre is helping to improve outcomes for families. The centre is beginning to use sharper systems to identify and engage those families who would really benefit from tailored support, for example those from workless homes.

You are well looked after when you attend centre activities because the staff are very well trained in safeguarding and child protection matters. Staff vetting checks and risk assessments comply with requirements. Cooperation amongst partners ensures that families most at risk are well protected. Families are effectively made aware of how to keep safe, as reflected in the good outcomes.

Although there is very little unemployment in the area, the centre recognises that more needs to be done to identify and make provision for targeted parents to develop key skills. We have asked the centre to continue to focus on this. The centre receives useful quarterly data from the local authority which it uses to inform its self-evaluation and make important decisions about where to target its resources. However, the centre does not receive all the data it needs to evaluate the full impact of its work across the reach area. Therefore, we have asked the authority to continue to work closely with key partners, for example health services, to provide the data that the centre needs.

We have seen that parents using the centre have good opportunities to share their views on how the centre should further develop services. Staff and the well-attended advisory board listen to your views closely and have responded to your suggestions well. For example, many of you feel that general practitioners (GPs) in the area do not know enough about the centre and its services. The centre's leaders have responded by raising GPs' awareness of the core purpose of children's centres and how the GPs can link in to the services provided. The work of the parents' forum has been impressive in this regard.

We wish your centre the very best for the future.

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