

Inspection report for Waterloo Children's Centre

Local authority	Tameside
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY360959 Happy Hedgehogs 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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers and staff from the centre and the local authority, parents and volunteers, members of the advisory board, the pre-school manager, and partners including health, adult learning and Jobcentre Plus. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Waterloo Children's Centre is a stand-alone, purpose built children's centre situated in a mainly residential area of Ashton under Lyne. It is one of three phase one centres that are based in Ashton under Lyne. An assistant locality manager has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the three centres. Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority with support from the advisory board. Part-time early years provision for children aged from two years is offered by Happy Hedgehogs Pre-school. This is a committee run, independent provider that operates from the same building. Separate arrangements are in place to inspect this provision and the report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk

The centre was designated in 2007 to provide a range of services to the local community. The centre serves an area with high levels of deprivation. The number of workless families is low in relation to other areas of Ashton under Lyne. However, the majority of primary school children live in households dependent on benefits. The community is predominately of White British heritage with a small percentage of Black and minority ethnic groups. Children's knowledge and skills on entry to early years provision are generally 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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Waterloo Children's Centre is a satisfactory centre. The centre has recently undergone a number of restructures. These have resulted in a reduction of staff and the joining together of early years and youth and family teams. The combining of services has been well managed and has enhanced work around the whole family. Staff are positive and motivated and rightfully proud of the work that they do. They are committed to offering good levels of care, guidance and support to the families they work with. Safeguarding and promoting family welfare has remained a high priority.

The centre and partners who provide services commissioned by the centre gather some useful data. However, effective systems are not in place to collate data to provide the centre with a clear overview of which target groups are engaged, or to accurately monitor the long-term impact of its services. This reduces the centre's ability to celebrate their successes and clearly identify further target areas for development. Nevertheless, the centre has recently increased the range of partners it is involved with. These partners bring a wealth of experience and skills and a wide knowledge of the local community. On the whole, they work together to ensure that a range of services and support is offered in response to the needs of families they work with. Locality and authority-wide initiatives based on knowledge of issues for the Tameside or Ashton areas have been introduced within the centre and positively promote outcomes for families within the Waterloo area.

Volunteers from the local community have been recruited and trained to enable sessions such as 'Mini Explorers' and 'Mini Movers' to continue to run. Volunteers enthusiastically describe how this has changed their career path and how they have been supported in gaining employment in play and youth work. Different groups are run within the two other centres in the Ashton locality to widen the choice for families. The loss of key early years staff has reduced the links the centre has with local schools. Therefore, the centre no longer

has a clear overview of where to best target support to ensure training for early years providers in the reach area promotes the skills children need for starting school.

Parents and families are consulted through feedback gathered from evaluations of activities and the volunteer programme. However, parents are not yet represented on the advisory board which prevents them from contributing to decision making at a strategic level. This is an area that the centre is addressing and the recently appointed chair of the advisory board is keen to resolve. He works closely with the centre manager, is highly aware of the areas for improvement and has a clear ambition to drive these forward. The senior management team have an accurate overview of the centre's strengths and weaknesses and are working hard to address these through strengthening partnerships. This demonstrates the centre's satisfactory overall effectiveness and capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that data from all partners are collated to:
 - provide a clear picture of the families within the community who are accessing the services delivered or commissioned by the children's centre
 - track the progress that families are making as a result of the children's centre's services more effectively against the key performance indicators
 - identify clear targets for improvement and ensure that these shape future services.
- Develop links with schools and other early years providers to ensure that training and support for staff is well targeted to promote children's learning and development and support school readiness.
- Ensure that users are more involved in the governance and accountability of the children's centre at a strategic level.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Families receive a warm welcome within the centre. . Staff encourage parents to read with their children, take opportunities to register new babies and promote services within the three locality centres. A wealth of information on safeguarding, safety within the home, healthy eating and other issues is well presented. Parents have access to computers to search for employment and training opportunities and Jobcentre Plus provide a weekly list of local job vacancies. Some parents have accessed numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology courses. Other parents have been supported in gaining funding to enable them to access childcare, return to college and ultimately return to work. As parents develop their confidence and skills they are signposted and supported in registering with volunteer groups in the local community.

Some local authority and locality data have been used to prioritise services which promote health outcomes. However, the impact of these services cannot be accurately measured as robust systems are not in place to track progress. Initiatives include a project between a local high school and nurseries that has targeted teenagers considered at high risk of becoming teenage parents. They spend time working within nurseries and with facilitators to discuss issues around self-esteem, keeping safe, risky behaviour, drugs and alcohol, and raising aspirations. Evaluations show positive feedback from those who have taken part.

Although breastfeeding initiation rates within the Ashton locality have increased, the numbers sustaining this at six- to- eight weeks has recently decreased. The centre is addressing this via Home-Start, who supports families to give children the best possible start in life. The organisation recruits, trains and promotes a volunteering programme for peer support through the centre. There is a high proportion of smokers in the area. Although the number of people smoking in pregnancy has reduced within Tameside from 26% to 23% in the past two years, this is still higher than the national percentage. Initiatives are promoted to decrease this. Obesity levels are slightly above the national rate but are decreasing. The centre gives nutritional advice during baby clinics, through groups and contact with families.. Healthy lifestyles are further promoted through physical play sessions and the sale of toothbrushes and toothpaste.

A high priority is given to safeguarding and keeping children, families and staff safe. Partnerships are effective in ensuring that the most vulnerable children in the reach area are identified and referred to the appropriate agencies. Rigorous assessments and use of the Common Assessment Framework process are used effectively to decide the level and package of support needed for each family and to keep children safe. A range of programmes are delivered to develop parenting skills. As one parent stated, 'This has been fabulous in helping to develop my skills and the staff are lovely and available any time.' A range of professionals are involved to support children with more complex needs. They support the child and family at home and help them to access early years provision or school. This support is continued for as long as necessary.

Children achieve well by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the gap between the lowest-performing 20% and the rest is closing. For example, at one school, the percentage of children gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales, with at least six points in each of the scales for personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy, has increased from 78.3% to 86.7% and in another, from 53.3% to 56.7%. However, there is no robust data to show which children live within the centre's reach area or have accessed services provided or commissioned by the centre. Therefore, it is difficult to measure the centre's impact on children's learning. Childminders receive support and training to develop their knowledge and skills of early years guidance and legislation. Crèches and play sessions are planned around children's interests and stages of development and promote all areas of learning well.. Parents report that attending the sessions has helped them to socialise, find support from each other and 'helped them feel normal.' They say that their children look forward to starting at Happy Hedgehogs Pre-school and that the staff encourage them to continue their children's learning at home.

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 some data of the target groups within the area but does not know how many people within these groups are accessing services. The centre uses knowledge provided by partners to target services, activities and opportunities which respond to the needs of families. These include information around the threat of loan sharks within the area and conversation classes for people who speak English as an additional language. Sessions and groups within the centre are well attended. Fathers are well represented within the centre and report that they feel welcome and included in the groups they attend.

Training for centre staff with different partner agencies has improved the support delivered to families. For example, families receive professional advice on sexual health issues, support for children in their communication and language development, smoking cessation, home safety and positive behaviour management.

Different activities are run between the three centres within the locality to increase the range of provision. Parent feedback informs where activities are organised. A dads' group which is run at another centre is well attended by fathers from Waterloo Children's Centre. Formalising the group through support from staff and other partners has enabled them to raise funds to run swimming classes at a local swimming pool.

Parents who receive targeted support by the centre make sound progress in their learning and development. Staff and parents say that they build close relationships and parents report on the high levels of support they are given by their individual worker. Case studies show that individual support packages have a positive impact on families which is withdrawn as families become more independent. 'It has been a lifeline,' is how one parent described

the centre. A parent shared that she was supported to breastfeed her first child and went on to breastfeed her other four children. She described the centre as, 'a fantastic place' and is now heavily involved in organising local events and fundraising events for 'Friends of Waterloo.'

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

Rigorous recruitment and selection procedures are in place and include systems to confirm the suitability of staff from partner agencies. All staff, including volunteers, receive regular safeguarding training. Parents are informed of staff's responsibilities regarding safeguarding. Partners work closely together to ensure that victims of domestic violence are offered a tailored package of support. This may include one-to-one support within the home where appropriate.

Performance management identifies areas for development within the centre. This has largely been based on qualitative evidence and some analysis of evaluations and case studies. The centre is aware that the vast majority of children from birth to five years within the reach area are registered with the centre, but does not know how many of these families access their services. Systems do not currently ensure that live birth data is received regularly or that new mothers are encouraged to register with the centre. However, partners' sound working knowledge of the local community ensures that the families whose circumstances make them vulnerable are identified. Some data gathered by the centre and partners show the positive short-term impact which the centre has on families. However, there is no accurate measure of outcomes against the national key performance indicators or the long-term impact the centre is having on centre users. The lack of clearly collated data impinges on the centre's ability to set specific targets for improving outcomes for families. Governance and accountability arrangements have undergone changes through local authority restructuring. The newly appointed acting Assistant Executive Director is aware of the challenge for the children's centre in relation to data collection.

The centre has worked diligently to ensure a wide range of services and support are delivered to families despite reduced budgets. The centre has identified the need to strengthen partnerships with schools since the loss of key early years staff. Partners work together to support disabled children within early years provision and schools. The authority

is currently developing a 'parenting pathway' for parents with disabilities and support for families within the neo-natal unit at the local hospital. As a result of support offered within the home families who lack confidence, for example asylum seekers and those who speak English as an additional language, are now able to access activities offered by the centre. Taking all of this into account the centre offers satisfactory value for money.

Staff have been supported by the senior management team throughout the re-structuring process. They have worked closely together to identify training needs, have shared current skills and knowledge and developed supportive supervision sessions. As a result, staff have a positive approach and commitment to provide good packages of care, guidance and support to the families they work with.

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 of the inspection of Happy Hedgehogs Pre-school were considered during this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Waterloo Children's Centre on 10 and 11 October 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to those of you who spoke to us during the inspection. It was a pleasure to meet you and hear about your experiences within the children's centre. You told us that you enjoy attending groups and activities. Some of you have been attending since the centre opened and have become involved in fundraising events in the local community. A number of you are aware that the recent cuts have reduced some of the services on offer but greatly appreciate the role the volunteers have had in keeping a number of groups operating. These include 'Mini Movers' and 'Mini Explorers'. We know that these groups are well attended by parents and that your children have fun as they explore the good range of toys and resources. You benefit from opportunities to support your children in their learning, while enjoying opportunities to talk to each other, staff and volunteers.

We learnt of recent restructures and the difficulty that has arisen in collating data. This has made it hard for the centre to show evidence of the wider impact it is having on the local community and how well it is used by families with young children in the reach area. The lack of data also makes it difficult for the centre to make sure that it is targeting support where it is most needed. Therefore, we have asked the centre to make sure that systems are put in place to collate information in a clear and useful way. Throughout the recent changes the centre has continued to give good levels of care, guidance and support to those families in most need, while providing a range of services.

We found that those of you who have had involvement with the children's centre have had opportunities to learn about a range of health issues. These include healthy eating, weaning, breastfeeding and stopping smoking. You have also been offered support and advice around safety within the home and we were told that crime within the local area has reduced. We learnt of the effective referral system and support that is offered to victims of domestic violence and of exciting projects such as 'Toddler and Teens' and 'Speakeasy.' These tackle issues relating to sexual health and work towards reducing the high level of teenage pregnancies in Ashton under Lyne.

We heard of families who have gained apprenticeships and changed their career path following support and training they have received through the children's centre.

We are aware that some of you find it more comfortable having support within your home rather than attending the centre and that you build close relationships with your centre worker. We heard how staff have supported you in dealing more positively with your children's behaviour and they have worked with schools and nurseries to continue this support. The loss of some centre staff has resulted in fewer links with schools and other early years providers. This means that the centre does not have a clear overview of the areas of learning where children might need more support to ensure that they have the skills to make the most of their time at school. We have asked the centre to develop these links to make sure your children are ready for school.

Your centre welcomes all families within your community and makes sure that they are able to access the services. You benefit from visitors to the centre, for example to warn you of loan sharks within the area. This has helped users to access support on managing money more effectively.

We know that the centre and new chair of the advisory board are very keen to work with you and involve you more in making decisions on how the centre should use their resources to make the most difference to your lives. We have asked the centre's leaders to ensure that you are more involved in decision making within the centre, for example on the advisory board.

Thank you again for taking the time to talk to us and we wish you all the very best for the future.

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