

Inspection report for Hedgerows Children's Centre

Local authority	Milton Keynes Council
Inspection number	404492
Inspection dates	23–24 October 2012
Reporting inspector	Derrick Baughan HMI

Centre leader	Tina Price
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Netherfield Children's Centre 141770 Playzone Day Nursery 141848

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.

Report published: November 2012



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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 one additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers, centre staff, parents, members of the advisory board, the local Police Community Support Officer and a number of partners, including local authority and National Health Service staff. They observed the centre's work and looked at activity sessions taking place in the centre and in one outreach location. Inspectors also examined a range of documents and records, including the centre's development plan, policy documents, families' evaluations of sessions, data reports and details of the centre's safeguarding arrangements.

Information about the centre

Hedgerows Children's Centre is a phase two centre, which opened in February 2008 and fulfils the core purpose of Sure Start Children's Services. The local authority directly manages the centre. It is located on the same site as its linked nursery, Playzone, and a linked children's play centre, Netherfield Children's Centre. Hedgerows is also adjacent to a primary school, Langland Community School. The centre provides services from its main building and through one outreach location within the local area.

The centre serves a geographically small urban area, including areas of very high deprivation. A total of 796 children under five years old live in the area. The main social issues affecting the area are unemployment and poor housing which was built as a temporary solution to meet housing shortages and has now gone well beyond its planned life. Levels of domestic violence in the area are high. Many families have complex social needs, which make them vulnerable.

Approximately 45% of the children in the area live in households where nobody is working and 40% live in lone-parent households. A large majority of families within the area served by the centre are of White British heritage. The small minority of

families from Black or minority ethnic heritages are mostly West African. Most children typically enter early years provision with a range of skills, knowledge and abilities below the levels expected for their age

The centre is open 51 weeks of the year, Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm. In addition, the centre provides Saturday morning activities for working parents. Centre staff and those from partner groups provide a range of services at the centre, including family support and childcare. A range of professionals are represented on the advisory board, including centre staff, parents, a local deputy headteacher, health and social care professionals, and representatives from other agencies and the local council. A team of one deputy, one administrator, three full-time family support workers, a teacher for one day a week and a part-time premises manager supports the centre manager. At the time of the inspection, 68% of families with children under five years of age in the reach area were registered with the centre, and 76% of families from the most deprived areas were registered.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

This outstanding centre provides high-quality services, very effectively aimed at the large majority of families who are vulnerable due to their circumstances. Teenage parents, lone parents, families experiencing domestic abuse and parents of children with disabilities, special educational needs or long-term health-related issues receive excellent care, guidance and support. The centre has established very high levels of trust and respect within the community. It provides a friendly and welcoming environment for families to access seamlessly the services that they need. As a result, outcomes for children and families are improving and in many cases are better than those in other areas of the local authority. However, the number of parents who smoke is not reducing quickly enough and although the proportion of children who are obese when they enter primary school had been reducing to below the national average, it has increased slightly this year.

The management, staff and governors of the centre have created a culture of high expectation for the local population, which helps them raise their aspirations. Staff use their high levels of skills, knowledge and experience to provide excellent direct

support and guidance with specialist support. Staff are well respected by their peers, who speak highly of the impact that the centre has on outcomes for families. Staff at the centre know the community and the needs of local families extremely well. They use this knowledge to ensure the families get exactly the right help to improve their lives. The centre is highly effective in all the services it provides, and particularly in the outstanding support for victims of domestic violence and those with families who have mental health issues.

Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. The centre meets all current government requirements. Staff receive thorough and regular training and updating. They use their excellent knowledge well to help families stay safe. Parents are unanimous in their praise for how much the centre helps them keep themselves and their children safe and well protected; for example by helping families with home safety installations. Because of exemplary partnership arrangements, support for the most vulnerable children and families is swift and highly effective. In many cases, the staff take prompt action to prevent crises happening and minimise the impact of those that do.

The centre is a flagship for tolerance and respect. It embraces and celebrates diversity within the local area. Support for speakers of English as an additional language is excellent, with centre staff being very effective at helping adults improve their English language skills. The centre supports and guides well the many adults who have significant barriers to education and employment. As a result, they take up various learning opportunities that improve their employability. Several have gone into volunteering, paid employment or further training.

The centre manages its resources exceptionally well. Centre staff regularly review the use of resources and are very good at making changes to adapt to the changing needs of the local population. For example, the change in arrangements for rooms to allow a greater uptake of the 'Two year old pilot' has resulted in improved outcomes for young children.

The centre focuses well on self-evaluation, review and improvement. As a result, almost all performance indicators are rising steadily. The centre makes changes that are highly responsive to families' needs and parents and children are fully engaged in the improvement process. As a result, the centre has an outstanding capacity to improve. It knows itself extremely well. Senior managers lead and manage the centre extremely well. They set demanding targets. Staff, families, advisory board members and professionals from support agencies work together extremely effectively to ensure the centre goes from strength to strength.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further improve healthy lifestyles of children and families in the area by:
 - working more closely with parents who smoke to help them understand the dangers to them and their children and to help them stop smoking
 - monitoring and evaluating the impact of the centre’s work to reverse the upward trend in the proportion of reception-age children who are obese.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

The very large majority of families registered with the centre are accessing mainstream health services. The centre promotes healthy lifestyles extremely well. The proportions of mothers initiating breastfeeding and continuing to breastfeed at six to eight weeks are continually increasing and are above the national averages. Outstanding sessions about cooking are extremely effective at developing parents’ understanding of a healthy lifestyle and how to cook from fresh ingredients.

The percentage of reception-age schoolchildren who are obese fell to below the national average last year. However, this year it rose. The centre responded quickly by increasing the number of physical activities it provides, such as Saturday mornings’ ‘mini strikers’. This footballing activity complements well the other activities, which include fitness sessions for women only. The proportion of mothers who smoke is reducing but the centre manager acknowledges that it is not reducing quickly enough.

Families use well the wide range of advice and guidance provided to help them deal with issues during pregnancy and with their young children. For example, services to improve speech and language development are very effective in helping children to communicate. The centre regularly tries innovative ideas. The ‘dummy tree’ is an effective way to help children develop. They get a book as a gift for tying their dummy to the tree.

The support for families with disabled children and/or with special educational needs is outstanding. Staff help these families well through the process of identifying needs and dealing with challenges. The support for children with long-term health-related issues is outstanding. The centre is particularly effective in its approach to mental health issues by the provision of additional services, such as a life coach. Many parents stated that they did not know what they would have done without the help from the centre, for example, to keep their children out of care.

The staff at the centre use their excellent knowledge and experience of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) well to help looked after children and those subject to a child protection plan. The centre’s early intervention work helps prevent some

complex situations from developing further and the number of children subject to a child protection plan is reducing. Parents speak highly about the centre’s help in improving outcomes for their children by making them better parents.

The percentage of children gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile with at least six points in each of the scales for personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy is increasing and above the national average. The achievement gap between the lowest 20% and the rest is reducing quickly and is narrower than the national average. Excellent links with local schools and nurseries mean that children’s transition to school is very effective.

The take-up rates for parenting and child behaviour courses are very high. This results in exemplary behaviour within the centre. Activities are fun and allow parents and children to learn together, for example the ‘mucky pups’ session helps children to understand textures well as they play with a range of different substances. The centre has also run this session for adults, which has helped them understand how their children learn.

Adults take full advantage of the excellent guidance and support for their further learning and development. Many complete courses leading to qualifications, for example first aid. Because of the excellent programme for developing volunteers, parents contribute extremely well to the life of the centre. The ‘job club’ sessions are highly effective. In the last year, 14% of the participants found paid employment and 50% went into education or training. Most parents enhance their employability skills. Very flexible childcare options help parents take up these opportunities.

The centre staff are exceptionally effective at helping families deal with domestic violence; they often play a leading role, providing continuity of support for parents. Because of changes in how the authority records accidents to children, the rate of accidents across the whole Milton Keynes area appears to have increased. However, the percentage of accidents involving children from the reach area is very low.

The centre is a powerful force for community cohesion, highly regarded in the community, and promotes social inclusion very well. Parents make an excellent contribution to the decision making and governance of the centre. Children develop positive relationships because of this level of involvement and cooperation. Inspectors observed children playing and learning together extremely well.

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	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from	1

target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	
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	1
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	1

How good is the provision?

1

The centre provides an excellent range of services that meet the needs of families, including those in target groups, exceedingly well. The highly experienced, well-qualified and trained staff understand the needs of local families exceptionally well, including those in the target groups. Staff carry out thorough initial assessments to ensure they have an accurate grasp of the needs of each person very well. The staff use this knowledge to provide highly effective and impartial advice and guidance that are individual to each family. Centre staff and those from partner agencies effectively monitor the progress that children and parents make. Participation rates in the centre's activities are very high. Almost all families participate in at least one group session and many participate in a number of them.

Outreach work is outstanding. Extremely effective home visits help the centre ensure that it meets the needs of families who are most vulnerable and have difficulty in attending the centre. Centre staff and families celebrate well children's and parents' participation and achievement. Attractive and informative wall displays proudly show off their achievements.

Care, guidance and support are particularly strong features of this centre. The quality of support for families in crisis is excellent. Staff are extremely adept at spotting potential crises and intervening to prevent them developing further. Parents unanimously praise the support and guidance that they receive from the centre; they frequently refer to the centre as 'a second home.' Parents speak very highly about the specialist guidance they receive, such as that to build their parenting skills or improve their financial management.

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	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Governance is very strong. Members of the advisory board use their wide range of knowledge and experience to enhance the effectiveness of the centre. The advisory board holds the centre to account very well by working closely with staff to improve the provision. The centre manager has built up a close-knit, highly effective team. Because of rigorous quality assurance arrangements, the centre continues to improve. The centre has established well-thought-out and clear relationships with partners. These bring immense benefit to families, through well-targeted support.

Self-evaluation is rigorous, thorough and detailed. The centre makes excellent use of performance data of all kinds to help focus its actions to bring improvement. The centre's judgements about its provision are very accurate. Partners and families have a firm grasp of their role and a positive involvement in decision making and governance. Extremely good analyses of the changing environment help the centre match provision to needs extremely well. For example, the centre manager judged that one partner's services were not effective and replaced them with a different provider.

Senior leaders have extremely high expectations, which they share well with staff and families to raise their aspirations. The centre staff use available resources extremely well to create a very welcoming and friendly environment. Equality and diversity are actively celebrated. The centre uses English for Speakers of Other Languages courses very well to promote inclusion and help those who are learning to speak English as a new language. The good links with adult education services help parents improve their levels of literacy and numeracy. Complaints are extremely rare but staff deal with those that occur exceptionally well.

The focus on safeguarding, both in the centre and in the home, is exceptionally strong. Good use is made of home safety packs, including smoke detectors and stair gates to help families make their homes safer. Discussions about sexual abuse grooming are a recent addition to raising the awareness of parents about the dangers in society. Staff training is thorough and regularly updated. Rigorous risk assessments ensure a safe and secure environment for all. Parents and other adults are fully aware of safeguarding issues and they and the centre staff are meticulous in ensuring everyone adheres to the very thorough procedures. The comprehensive induction programmes ensures staff and volunteers are extremely well prepared to discharge their responsibilities.

Centre staff use partnerships very well to provide an extremely wide range of services that cover the needs that families have. The centre's highly effective canvassing in the local area results in the large majority of families engaging with the centre, including those most in need of support.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
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	1
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	1

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

The findings from the inspection in August 2011 of the centre's linked nursery, Playzone, and from the inspection in March 2012 of the centre's linked childcare children's centre, Netherfield, have been taken into account.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Hedgerows Children's Centre on 23–24 October 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding.

As part of the inspection, we visited a number of activities, looked at a range of documentation, and talked to a number of children and adults, including parents, staff, local authority representatives and partners. We were very pleased to speak to some of you and to listen to your comments. Thank you for your open and honest views, which we have used to make our judgements.

You all told us how the centre helps you individually and how coming to activities had a big impact on your lives. We were pleased to hear your comments such as the one about helping your children by making you better parents. You were all extremely positive about the amount of support that you get, which the staff match closely to your individual needs. We heard nothing but good stories from everyone and too many of them to write about.

We noted that you are keen to provide a healthy lifestyle for your families and that the excellent sessions on cooking give you the skills to do this. We were concerned that the number of parents and pregnant women who smoke is not reducing as quickly as we would like and that the number of reception-age children who are obese has risen this year. However, we were pleased that the centre is well aware of this and is taking action to help bring improvement.

The centre is very effective in ensuring that you and your families are safe and secure in the centre. It goes further than this with the excellent support that it gives you to keep yourselves and your families safe in the wider community. Its excellent work to support families suffering from domestic violence and those with mental health issues makes a significant difference to improving their lives.

We agree with you that the centre is welcoming and friendly. The displays on the wall proudly show your achievements and that you work well together. We also agree with you that the centre is a very inclusive and tolerant place and has helped bring the community together.

The centre provides a wide range of activities and services to help you and your families. The staff are very good at monitoring how effective these are, and making sure that your outcomes are very positive. They are also very good at developing partnerships that ensure you have support whatever your needs are. We were impressed with the range of support options that the centre can call upon to help it meet all local needs.

We noted that you take part in many of the activities and gain the most benefit from what the centre offers. We really enjoyed watching your children learn about texture in the 'mucky pups' session. We also enjoyed watching the 'mini strikers' extend their physical skills through game play. You told us about the other fitness activities, such as the keep fit session for women, which help you become healthier.

We agree with your view that the team runs the centre exceptionally well and the staff and advisory board work very hard to meet your needs and deliver the services that help you. The staff are very good at identifying how well they are doing and deciding what they need to do to improve and this ensures the centre moves forward.

We thoroughly enjoyed our time at the centre and felt privileged to be there and see you all working so well together to improve the lives of those in your community.

The centre is clearly a focal point in the area. Please accept our thanks for your support in carrying out this inspection and best wishes for the future.

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