

Inspection report for Highfields Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Leicester
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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, members of staff and professionals from key partner agencies. Discussions were held with parents and representatives from the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

This phase two Sure Start children's centre is located in the Highfields area, close to the centre of Leicester city. The centre delivers a range of integrated services as part of the local authority's central neighbourhood. Mayfields and St Saviour's children's centres are in the same neighbourhood and some provision is shared by the three centres, such as neighbourhood teachers and early years support workers. A neighbourhood advisory board provides advice and assistance to the three centres. Highfields Sure Start Children's Centre is managed by the charitable organisation Action for Children on behalf of the local authority. Barnard Close Pre-school is delivered on-site by the Pre-school Learning Alliance.

The centre serves a diverse community in an area of significant deprivation. Accommodation in the area includes a range of social and privately rented flats and houses, a few owner-occupied houses and two hotels used to place homeless families and those without recourse to public funds. Most of the families are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the highest proportion being of Asian origin. Sixty-nine percent of users of the centre speak English as an additional language.

This is a vibrant community with many community and faith organisations that form the foundations for raising children's achievements. A few children in the area, 17.7%, live in workless households, which is below the Leicester average of 28.5%.

There are 1061 children under five in the area, 620 of whom have engaged with the centre in the last year. There are three primary schools in the reach area and a significant amount of childcare provision. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are below expectations overall.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Highfields Sure Start Children's Centre is a good and improving centre. Families accessing provision benefit from a wide range of cohesive and well-integrated services. The centre has a dedicated staff team whose members, together with support from partner agencies, work well to improve the lives of families within the reach area. They are highly responsive in times of crisis and the emotional needs of users are met well as staff provide effective one-to-one and group support.

Safeguarding is a particular strength of the centre. Safety is of paramount importance for staff in all their dealings with children and families, and safeguarding arrangements are meticulous. Families that use the service know how to ensure their own, and their children's, safety. Many families in the area are relatively new to the country, have English as an additional language or have no English at all. Staff in the centre are able to speak a variety of languages and there is very effective use of translation services, so that the centre is accessible to all. As one parent said, 'This is a second home for me, I am so far from my own country, there are a lot of people here that will listen to me'.

Users speak very positively about the services provided and their experience of the support offered. As one parent said, 'I still come when I need to find someone to listen'. Parents who use the centre are encouraged to let the staff know what services they would like. However, parents are not sufficiently engaged in the formal decision-making and governance of the centre.

Health outcomes are improving for most centre users. An effective partnership with health services ensures new and prospective mothers benefit from a full range of services which promote their health and well-being. Children participate in activities where they learn how to play together, make choices, learn new skills and have fun.

Those adults who access learning opportunities provided by the children's centre have made good progress. However, too few families are currently accessing training that will help them improve their economic stability and independence. Nevertheless, good quality advice and guidance has meant a significant number of families have improved their economic stability by accessing appropriate benefits.

Effective target setting ensures that most families, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, benefit from a range of good quality services. Outcomes for children and families that are signposted to other services are not consistently followed up, so that the centre is unaware of their medium- and long-term achievements. The centre promotes purposeful learning well and families are encouraged to build on their achievements.

Effective leadership and management have led to improved outcomes in the time that the centre has been operating. However, recent developments in the neighbourhood advisory board remit mean it no longer meets the statutory requirements for oversight of the centre, although plans are in place to address this. Leaders have appropriate plans to further enhance provision. Results so far show clear capacity for sustained improvement. Staff understand the challenges faced by families living in the area, are aware of the centre's strengths and identify key areas where outcomes could be improved still further. Families and key partners contribute to the centre's evaluation of its provision.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Together with partners, provide more adults with accessible training opportunities to enable them to achieve their aspirations.
- Further develop systems to track children and families who are signposted to other services to measure their medium- to long-term outcomes.
- Centre leaders should work closely with the local authority to improve governance and accountability by:
 - re-establishing an advisory board which meets the statutory requirements for the governance of the children's centre
 - involving parents and carers in formal decision-making and governance processes.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Staff work hard to ensure positive outcomes for families in the area. Parents feel extremely safe and consider their children to be very safe when using the centre. Excellent highly individualised support for families whose circumstances make them vulnerable, results in them feeling exceptionally secure. Families at risk of domestic violence become significantly more confident as a result of strategies they learn from staff at the 'freedom programme'. Parents are more aware of the potential risks to children following their attendance on effective parenting programmes. Families are

supported to be safer at home through provision of home safety checks. There has been a fall in the number of emergency hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries for children in the area from 13.1 per 1000 in 2009/10 to 8.1 per 1000 in 2011/12. Early identification and prevention of potential risks play a key role in reducing any harm to children. There is sustained improvement in outcomes for those children subject to a child protection plan, and use of the Common Assessment Framework is an integral part of the centre's work with families.

Parents benefit from the centre's good relationships with local health services, many of which are located in the children's centre. The centre promotes breastfeeding successfully in close partnership with health visitors and 'Mama's Community Breastfeeding Support Project'. The number of mothers who sustain breastfeeding at six to eight weeks has risen from 42.8% in 2008/9 to 64.7% in 2010/11. Immunisation rates are high, and there has been a small fall in the percentage of children in the Reception year who are overweight. Families have learnt of the importance of healthy eating, outdoor play and exercise in a range of activities, such as the 'Change for Life' programme, and as a result are adopting healthier lifestyles.

The centre plays a key role in the life of the community and is often the first 'port of call' for families needing to access services. Users and staff treat one another with respect, children who have accessed services engage in positive behaviour, they play well together and readily share toys. Parents' views on services are actively encouraged by centre staff, and this has led to some changes in provision. There is a very small 'parent/carer forum'; however, parents do not contribute to decision-making or the governance of the centre in a formal way.

Support at weekly surgeries by the Welfare Rights Service, Supporting Tenants and Residents Service and the Community Advice and Legal Service have enabled centre users to improve their home and financial circumstances. Families have benefited from increased or appropriate access to benefits, support to deal with debt and improvements in housing conditions. A few parents have successfully completed English and mathematics courses and a group of parents are currently doing an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course.

Over the last three years, there has been an improving trend in children's achievements, with 64.5% reaching 78 points on the Early Years Foundation Stage profile in 2012, up from 40.5% in 2010. There has also been an improving trend in narrowing the gap for the lowest achieving 20% from 39.9% in 2010, to 29.1% in 2012, although the 2012 figure is slightly higher than the previous year. The centre is strongly focused on delivering services and other activities which develop and support family learning. It also promotes users' personal and social development, through activities such as 'Discovering Babies', 'Peek-a-boo' and the 'Bookstart' programme. Parents are well prepared to support their children's transition to nursery.

Outcomes for parents who take part in family learning include improved confidence in their parenting skills and abilities in managing their children's behaviour, keeping

them safe and healthy, and helping them to learn. As one mother said, 'I'm a better parent for being here, it gives me confidence to do new things'. The centre recognises that it does not support enough families to progress to further learning. Where parents are referred to other agencies to further their learning, the centre is not readily able to track outcomes.

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 target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	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?

2

Provision for centre users is good. Families who use the centre are enthusiastic about it. As one parent said, 'Staff at the centre are always available for advice'. Staff use their own expertise and skills and those of their partners to make informed and accurate assessments of the individual needs of users. Supporting family workers ensure that families facing complex difficulties are assessed and supported effectively through good inter-agency working and communication. Services are diverse, of a high quality, and are reviewed with users on a regular basis. Good use of data means that the centre is able to target services precisely to meet users' needs. For example, it is engaging the siblings of children in the lowest 20% of achievers in children's centre activities as early as possible to support their development.

Activities are of a good quality. They are designed around planned outcomes and, in sessions such as 'Weigh and Play', 'All Together Playtime' and 'Peek-a-boo' children are happy, relaxed, engaged and learning, while parents improve their skills in group activities by being actively involved in the sessions. Activities are effectively engaging most target groups, including those families whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. Outreach work is used positively to engage some families on an individual basis, and as a means of contacting families new to the area. Good quality information, guidance and support are used effectively to support families in times of difficulty and crisis. There is a strong emphasis on providing effective emotional support to boost users' confidence and raise their self-esteem. Sensitive, individualised support is provided to help promote outcomes and families feel

extremely well supported. One parent said, 'This service was a saviour for me'.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The leadership and management of the centre are thorough and purposeful. Effective leadership ensures high quality, integrated provision is targeted at those in most need of support. Day-to-day management and professional supervision are robust and ensure staff have relevant and up-to-date expertise. There is an excellent sense of teamwork and ambition to provide the best possible service for families. There are strong links between strategic planning and operational planning. Changes in the remit of the neighbourhood advisory board in recent months, where it has moved to a commissioning model, mean that it no longer provides adequate oversight of the work of the children's centre. Parents from Highfields Sure Start Children's Centre are not represented on the board. This has been recognised and plans are currently being put into place to establish a sub-group of the board that will meet the statutory requirements for governance of the centre.

Detailed self-evaluation and good local data help the centre to set clear priorities for development. The views of families who use the centre influence the self-evaluation and partners play a key role in development planning. The centre staff work effectively with partners to provide a good range of services that users benefit from. Provision is well used, particularly by those whose circumstances make them hard to reach, and outcomes for families are improving strongly. Resource planning is very effective and responsive to changing need. Access to national resources and staff training opportunities, through Action for Children, provides added value. As a consequence, the centre provides good value for money.

The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the work of the centre. Consequently, users reflect the community that the centre serves. The staff profile also mirrors that of the community, and staff have the language skills to communicate with the majority of people in their own language; where this is not possible, translation is found. Disabled children and those who have special educational needs receive focused support to minimise the impact of their needs on their development. Parents who do not speak English, or for whom it is an additional language, are encouraged to share their views on provision using a variety of visual media and help from staff. The 'parent/carer forum' has been recently re-established and currently has only four members. Parents' views are actively sought throughout the year and used to shape services. However, parents make only a limited

contribution to the formal governance and management of the centre.

Staff from partner agencies value the benefits to clients that being based in the centre brings. Families are able to get support for a range of issues in one place and in a timely fashion, as a result outcomes improve. Partners also appreciate the welcome they receive and the quality of communication they get from the centre. Good partnership working underpins the centre's excellent safeguarding arrangements. Children's safety and well-being are significantly enhanced by the rigorous and highly consistent implementation of policies, procedures and practice. This focus on prioritising safeguarding ensures that families receive support as early as possible, often preventing issues from becoming more serious. Staff have a sensitive approach to the variety of needs the centre's users present, which ensures that families feel comfortable with staff and are very well protected. Parents are well informed about the centre's policy on protecting children and sharing information with other relevant agencies. Excellent risk assessments, systems for referring to other agencies and security procedures mean that children are kept extremely safe in the centre.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	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	2
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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Highfields Sure Start Children's Centre on 14–15 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who met with us during the inspection, agreed to let us sit in on your groups, or spoke to us about the centre. We were very grateful for your help with the inspection and interested to hear your views.

We found that the centre is a safe and welcoming environment where you can call in at any time and get help and advice about issues that may be troubling you. The centre is good at making sure it works with families who need the most help and support. Staff make keeping you and your children safe the highest priority in the centre. We found that this way of working has helped to reduce the number of families in your area who need intensive support.

You told us how much you had learned from attending courses at the centre, how you felt better able to support your children's learning and how you were better parents. You showed us that you know what food is healthy for your family to eat and how important physical activity is. We were pleased to find that more mothers are choosing to breastfeed their babies and that fewer children are having accidents that need hospital treatment. You also told us how much fun you have, and how you enjoy coming to the centre.

You told us that the staff will always listen to you, and that you are encouraged to give your views about the activities. We spoke to members of the parent/carer forum and hope that more of you will become involved with it. It is important that partners and people from the community like yourselves are involved in the governance of the centre so we have asked staff and the local authority to make sure that happens.

Some of you who have taken classes at the centre, such as English and mathematics, told us how useful they had been to you. We have asked the centre to work with partners to provide you with more opportunities to learn new things. A large number of you have benefited from having your housing issues resolved and getting advice about benefits and we feel it is important that all these services are in the children's centre.

The senior staff do a good job at the centre and use the information they have about the area to plan the activities they provide. Activities are well attended and many are provided jointly with partner organisations, such as health, which makes them good value for money. For those of you who do not speak English, or for whom English is an additional language, we found that the centre goes out of its way to make sure

you are included in all the activities. Sometimes, the centre is not able to provide you with the services you need and it refers you on to other agencies. We have asked the centre to make sure when it does this, that it finds out how you have got on.

Thank you very much for your welcome and willingness to speak to the inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and sampling the centre's work. We wish you every success in the future.

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