

# Inspection report for Higham Ferrers Library Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Northamptonshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	383960
<b>Inspection dates</b>	21–22 November 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mary Dudley

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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	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

Higham Ferrers Library Children's Centre is located in the library of this rural town in East Northamptonshire. It is a phase two children's centre, which was designated in 2008. It serves a rural community that includes the villages of Chelveston, Caldecott and Newton Bromswold, and a small part of the neighbouring town of Rushden. The children's centre operates from two rooms and shared space in the library, and delivers services from other community venues in the area. The centre's core purpose is provided through a range of integrated services that include health, family support and outreach work.

The county council has commissioned the Northamptonshire Library Service to manage the children's centre on its behalf. The children's centre leader has responsibility for a small staff team and the day-to-day running of the centre; she is line managed by the principal librarian from Kettering and supported by an advisory board.

Higham Ferrers is ranked one of the 70% most deprived areas in the country. A very small minority of children aged under five years in the area live in workless households. Most families in the area are of White British heritage with a few families representing a number of ethnic groups. There are two primary schools within the centre's reach area. When they enter early years provision, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are in line with those expected for their age. There are 696

children under five in the centre's reach area, 352 (51%) of whom are registered with the centre.

## 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

Higham Ferrers Library Children's Centre offers children and adult users a satisfactory and improving level of service. Relationships with families are good and the centre rightly prides itself on the warm welcome it extends to all. Users speak very positively about the services provided by the centre and their experience of the support offered. One user, reflecting the views of many parents inspectors spoke to, said: 'The services here have been invaluable.' Parents who use the centre are encouraged to let the staff know what they would like. They feel that their views are valued and are confident that their wishes will be considered.

The centre has identified that feelings of anxiety and isolation are a significant issue for many of its parents. Mothers who have worked, prior to having a baby, and mothers whose partners work away during the week, have said how important it is for them to be able to come to the centre and know they can get advice and support. Good quality work with health professionals is beginning to be reflected in the improving health and well-being of children and families. Centre activities to support breastfeeding, improve physical fitness and promote healthy eating are popular and well attended.

The centre is inclusive and ensures that families from different backgrounds feel welcome. Families say they feel safe at the centre and effective support from staff means those families whose circumstances have made them vulnerable are increasingly safe and protected. Appropriate safeguarding arrangements ensure the safety and well-being of children and all service users. In times of crisis, parents feel able to turn to the centre for support and staff respond effectively to the needs identified.

Activities provided by the centre are of a good quality and families who use the centre are beginning to show improved outcomes in most areas. However, there is little or no evidence of the impact of the centre's work prior to the current centre

leader taking up post in September 2011. Systems introduced to measure the impact of provision on improving outcomes are not yet embedded.

The centre's engagement with education partners at a local level has enabled the delivery of programmes which are well attended and successful, including the 'Community Breakfast'. Children have good opportunities to participate in a range of purposeful activities such as 'Creative Story Time' and 'Kaleidoscope sensory play'. Universal services, including well-supported 'Stay and Play' sessions, encourage families to develop a relationship with centre staff and to access other services. Outreach work in other venues, including local schools, outlying villages and a presence at community events means that the centre is well known locally.

Supporting families to develop their economic stability and promoting access to training has not been seen as a priority for the work of the centre. As a result, there has been little adult training offered that could lead to employment. Volunteering at the centre is in its very early stages; however, this has been recognised as one route that the centre can promote to support parents returning to work.

Purposeful leadership and management by the current leader, following a period of significant disruption for the centre, have led to improved outcomes and quality of provision in the last year. Staff are highly motivated and feel well supported by the the centre leader. The advisory board is at an early stage of development and is not yet providing sufficiently rigorous challenge and support to the centre to ensure its effectiveness. The local authority acts as the accountable body in all legal and financial matters. However, recent personnel changes have resulted in a reduced capacity for it to effectively carry out this function. There are too few personnel with responsibility for monitoring the centre's progress in reaching its targets and quality assuring the centre's performance. For example, the centre's work is not directly observed for quality assurance purposes and assuring its safeguarding compliance is sufficiently rigorous.

The centre leader and staff are resourceful in managing limited funds and delivering a wide range of services. Recent results show a satisfactory capacity to sustain improvements. Staff understand the challenges faced by families living in the area; they 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**

- Further develop systems to measure the impact of the centre's provision on improving outcomes for children and families in order to accurately demonstrate the centre's effectiveness.
- Develop provision to enhance users' economic well-being by:
  - increasing the opportunities for volunteers to be involved in the work of

- the centre
- improving the uptake of adult learning which can lead to employment.
- Improve the quality assurance and monitoring of the children's centre by:
  - strengthening the local authority's capacity to effectively monitor the centre's work
  - supporting the development of the advisory board so that it provides challenge and support to ensure the centre is effective.

## How good are outcomes for families?

3
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Families that engage with the children's centre are positive about the difference it has made to them. Many parents spoke of how their engagement with the centre has stopped them feeling isolated and how they now feel they have a supportive network of friends and staff around them. One woman said, 'The centre helped keep me sane in the week', and another said, 'It has helped me make new friends, breaking the cycle of isolation.' Many of the activities are a recent development, in the last year, and systems for measuring the impact of provision on improving outcomes for families is not sufficiently embedded to effectively demonstrate progress made. As a result, the majority of outcomes are satisfactory.

Parents benefit from the centre's good relationships with some local health partners. The centre promotes breastfeeding successfully in close partnership with health visitors, breastfeeding support specialists and through varied and popular activities such as 'Baby Talk' and baby massage sessions. The centre has information about all live births within the reach area and makes contact with all new mothers to introduce the work of the centre and offer support. Immunisation rates are good and breastfeeding rates are improving. Anecdotal evidence suggests families' physical health and eating habits are beginning to improve as a result of their engagement in activities such as 'Buggy Bootcamp', 'Get Sporty' and the 'Community Breakfast'.

Families feel safe at the centre and are confident to leave their children in crèche provision run by centre staff. Families whose circumstances make them vulnerable feel secure because of the individualised support they receive from staff. Some families are more aware of the risks to children following parenting advice from staff and partners. Early identification and prevention of potential risks play a key role in reducing any harm to children. Numbers of children on child protection and child in need plans is low. Family support workers are trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework procedures.

Families are frequently encouraged to express their views in a wide variety of formal and informal ways. These opportunities range from feeding back following activities or programmes, responding to questionnaires or talking to front-line staff who are approachable and responsive to ideas. Parents are represented on the advisory board and there is a lively parents' forum. Responses to suggestions are fed back to parents and they can see how their views inform development of services.

The centre is strongly focused on delivering services and other activities which

develop and support family learning, such as 'Rhyme Time' and 'Tiny Twinklers' which support children's speech and language development. Training for centre staff on aspects of child development, by a teacher from a local nursery and infant school, has led to children developing their fine motor skills in activities such as 'Creative Story Time'. Over the last three years, there has been an improving learning trend in children's achievement, with 74% reaching 78 points at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2012. Information is not available to show the centre's contribution to this trend. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is a little lower than in 2010 at 19%. Parents and children are well supported to make the transition to nursery.

The centre works with the library to provide information for parents regarding employment, adult education and training opportunities. There is a Jobcentre Plus noticeboard which is updated regularly by library staff. Training and job opportunity information is provided on the library computers. The centre supports some parents to access appropriate childcare options well. It has a very small number of volunteers who are gaining in confidence and learning new skills. First Aid courses have been well supported by parents. However, the centre recognises that it does not support enough families to progress to further learning and employment.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

**3**

In the last year, the centre has produced an area profile and has undertaken a range of assessments and consultations to ensure it knows the families using its services well. A further consultation is currently underway with families who do not use the centre. This information is used to ensure that services meet individual need. The quality and range of services is good and activities are engaging some of the users in target groups of families. One parent commented, 'My son loves it, the range of activities, especially the creative play.' Participation rates and attendance levels are improving. However, many of the activities have not been running long enough to be

able to measure their impact across outcome areas. 'Stay and play' activities are delivered in Chelveston and other activities are delivered from a range of venues in the area. Parents speak readily of how this outreach work has made them feel less isolated.

Activities such as 'Rhyme Time', 'Creative Story Time' and 'First Steps' ensure children have opportunities to participate in purposeful learning. They are happy, relaxed, engaged and learning positively. Activities are designed around planned outcomes, but are not sufficiently detailed to ensure individual children achieve well. Parents are improving their understanding of how to support their child's learning.

The strong emphasis placed on the care, guidance and support of families using the centre is beginning to demonstrate a positive impact on families' lives. Families receiving individual support can identify improvement in their situations, and feel well supported in times of crisis. One parent commented, 'A real God-send that's all I can say.' The centre's role in the life of the community is developing strongly.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

For much of the first three years of its existence, the centre has been through a period of upheaval and changes that proved challenging for all concerned. The appointment of the current centre leader in September 2011 marked a change in the centre's fortunes. The leadership team is now clearly focused on providing good quality provision that reflects the needs of users. The staff work as an effective team, whose members feel well supported and clearly enjoy their work. Day-to-day management of the centre is good. Self-evaluation is accurate, informed by partners, and underpins the centre's priorities. Development plans clearly reflect the needs of the community, although local authority priorities are not as evident. The advisory board and local authority do not currently take an equitable role with the centre leader in ensuring the centre's effectiveness. The relatively recent development of the parents' forum provides an opportunity for parents to contribute their views on the centre, and be represented on the advisory board. Parental evaluation of each session is an integral part of shaping future provision.

The centre's small staff team delivers a wide range of well-attended activities and individual work. One parent said how she really appreciated 'the great resources, always something to stimulate.' The two small rooms that the centre operates from are supplemented by shared space with the library. This mutually beneficial use of

space enhances the opportunities for inter-generational work which both services support. The centre provides satisfactory value for money as outcomes for families are currently satisfactory.

Partnership work with some parts of health, education and libraries are very strong. Where services are delivered jointly such as the 'Community Breakfast' and 'Baby Talk', children and families are making real progress. The centre manager and staff are proactive in developing new partnership activities to provide additional opportunities for families.

The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the work of the centre. Staff ensure that children and adults, regardless of background, aptitudes or other differences, have equal access to provision. Joint work with a neighbouring children's centre has just begun to identify the needs of Traveller families living on a site in the area. Parents are eager to explain that the centre itself is a real community where positive relationships flourish.

The safety and security of users and staff are a priority and the centre adopts recommended good practice across all areas of its work. Staff receive training on how to keep children safe. Checks are made with the Criminal Records Bureau to make sure that all staff are suitable to work with children, and qualifications are maintained effectively. The centre has clear and appropriate policies for health and safety, child protection, risk assessment and safe recruitment, which are all up to date and reviewed regularly. Risk assessments are undertaken for all activities and visits.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

range of provision	
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## Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Higham Ferrers Library Children's Centre on 21 and 22 November 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory 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 were interested to hear your views.

Since the centre opened, there have been a lot of changes. You told us how much better things are now and how happy you and your families are with what the centre does for you. We have seen how much the centre has improved and are satisfied that it will continue to do so.

You told us how approachable and helpful everyone is and how happy you and your children are at the centre, and we agree with you. The centre works hard to care for you and your families. It has all the necessary procedures and systems in place to keep you safe. Safety, security and your well-being are important for all centre staff and staff from partner organisations.

The centre has a range of ways to help you and your family stay healthy, such as 'Get Sporty' and 'Buggy Bootcamp'. You told us how much you and your children enjoy activities such as 'Baby Talk', 'Rhyme Time' and 'Stay and Play' sessions. These activities are of good quality and are beginning to help your children to learn and develop.

The centre works very hard to support you and your family, especially at times of crisis. We know that you are frequently asked for your views on the activities the centre offers and that many of you have already made suggestions about what you would like. We met members of the parents' forum and were impressed with their ideas of things they want to do in the future.

Those of you who have taken part in activities told us how much you have learnt about bringing up your children and how much you learn from one another. We have

asked the centre to help more of you go on to further training and volunteering in order for you to continue learning and gain employment.

We know that you are happy with the way the centre runs because you told us so. The management team and staff are working hard to support your needs. However, they should be getting more support and be held to account more by the advisory board and the local authority and we have asked that they address this.

Thank you very much for your welcome and willingness to speak to the inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and seeing some of 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).