

Inspection report for Upton Children's Centre

Local authority	Halton
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	All Saints Upton Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School 131217
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Upton Pre-School & After School Club 303488

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, representatives from the local authority, members of the advisory board, representatives from a wide range of partner agencies and parents. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Upton Children's Centre is a phase two centre that was designated in 2007. It is located in the Hough Green ward of Widnes and serves a socially and economically mixed area. The centre moved premises in 2011 and is now co-located with All Saints Upton Church of England Primary School and Upton Pre-School and Afterschool Club. Upton is one of four children's centres which serve the families of Widnes. There are currently 891 children aged under five years in the reach area. The reach area is amongst the 70% most deprived nationally. Some areas of Hough Green are within the 10% most deprived in the country and 30% of children under four years of age live in households dependent on workless benefits. The large majority of children are of White British heritage, with an increasing number of minority ethnic groups. Children's skills on entry to early years provision are generally below age-related expectations.

The strategic management of the centre is undertaken by the local authority alongside an advisory board. The centre manager has responsibility for two children's centres. The centre provides an appropriate range of services to meet the core purpose. These include: family support, health services, parent and young-child focused activities. Partner agencies and commissioned services include: health professionals; the speech and language team; the Jobcentre; Citizens Advice Bureau; and the Community parent volunteer programme.

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

Upton Children's Centre is a good centre overall with some outstanding features. The senior leadership team and centre staff are passionate about the centre's work and morale is high. The centre manager has successfully established excellent partnership working arrangements with a wide range of professionals, ensuring that services are extremely well-integrated and cohesive. The centre plans and delivers services well to meet the needs of families who are identified as in most need of support. However, some targets are not sufficiently challenging and systems are not in place to evaluate the success of services over a period of time. Families hold the centre in high regard and greatly value the guidance and support on offer. The advisory board is very well placed to both challenge the centre and drive improvement.

The centre uses resources well to avoid any duplication of services. Times of activities are adapted to meet need and the centre has found effective ways of managing its own limited accommodation by using a range of buildings within the community. Centre staff and partners focus on individual learning for families and frequently deliver services in the home. The views of parents are highly valued and several parents engage well with the work of the centre. The Parent's Voice forum is becoming more established and the thriving Dads' group is a strength of the centre.

The centre is a safe environment and there is good attention to keeping families safe. All staff and partners give the highest priority to safeguarding children and families. In addition, the safety and well-being of families is significantly enhanced by the robust and consistent implementation of effective policies. There are good improvements in health outcomes for families with reductions in obesity levels and smoking. The centre places a high priority on encouraging adults to develop their confidence, skills and engage in learning. Children and adults make good progress in developing their skills and enjoy their time at the centre. Personal development for staff is promoted through high quality training. This enables them

to better support children. Good working relationships are in place between the centre and the linked pre-school and primary school.

The centre accurately evaluates its services. This, along with the improved outcomes and higher engagement levels demonstrates that the centre has good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure evaluation is used to set challenging targets, especially for those families in target groups and those in most need of intervention and support.
- Develop systems to monitor and demonstrate the long term impact of services on parents' progress and achievements, both personally and educationally, and use this information to shape services.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Health outcomes for families, including those in most need of support are good and improving. The number of mothers who remain breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks is increasing and currently exceeds the Halton target. Peer support and an incentive scheme have been successful in encouraging mothers to continue with breastfeeding. The centre was awarded Baby Welcome status in March 2012. The centre promotes healthy eating and fitness programmes include, 'Fit4Life' and the popular 'Musical Mini's'. Since 2009 there has been a steep decline in the percentage of those children in the Reception Year that are recorded as being obese from 18.8% to 8.7%. Smoking cessation campaigns have been successful with over 50% of those referred giving up smoking. The Teens and Toddlers project focuses on teenagers with circumstances that make them most vulnerable and supports them to achieve their personal aims. Since 2010 the conception rate for teenagers has fallen.

Families feel extremely safe at the centre and learn to keep themselves safe as they develop a good understanding of dangers within the home. Free home safety equipment is provided and fitted for families who meet the criteria. Referrals through this scheme continue to rise. Between 2008 and 2011 the number of emergency hospital admissions to children under five years reduced significantly. The centre works closely with Halton's safeguarding unit to ensure children are safe and protected. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework process very effectively. Referrals are assessed speedily through the Integrated Working Support Team and the appropriate service identified. There is an excellent uptake of children's centre services from children in need. Training on mental health issues and autism has enabled staff to better support those families with more complex needs.

Children make good progress from their starting points and are achieving well. The percentage gap between the lowest-achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest has reduced by 12.4%. This demonstrates how the attainment gap is

narrowing for children in this area. The most vulnerable two-year-old children in the area access the free nursery education entitlement through joint partnership working with the on-site pre-school. Children attending this group demonstrate improved social skills. The accredited learning through play programme develops parental awareness of how best to support their child's learning and development.

Parents make a very positive contribution to the centre through their behaviour and respect for one another. Some families are engaged in decision making either through the advisory board or through the 'Parents' Voice' forum. The centre actively seeks ways to consult more widely with users. Parents are involved in volunteering through the 'Community Parents Programme' and breastfeeding support. Parents receive good information about benefits and how to manage a budget through specialist home-based support from the Citizens Advice Bureau. Good adult learning courses in literacy and numeracy are improving the opportunities for parents to achieve personal goals and gain employment.

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	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	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	2
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.	2

How good is the provision?

2

Over the last three years the number of families accessing services has significantly increased. Through highly effective multi-agency work the centre has been able to identify target groups within the area and prioritise resources to assess and review need. For those families who live in the 10% most deprived areas of Upton, 83% of them engaged with the centre in the last year. Targeted families are well represented, with Upton having the highest rate in the borough for Children in Need, nought-to-four years accessing services. Specialist provision is in place to support teenage parents and disabled children and those with special educational needs. The very large majority of these groups access services. The highly successful Dads' group continues to grow in popularity and numbers increased by 44% in the last quarter. An inspiring DVD produced by the dads is being used to further promote the group. Minority ethnic groups are a small percentage of the Upton population but are still well represented. Current figures show that this trend across most groups has

continued. Participation and attendance rates vary across activities, with the sensory room and 'Musical Mini's' being very well attended. Following a consultation with parents, the 'Stay and Play' sessions re-located to the community centre and, as a result, has seen a significant increase in the numbers attending.

The celebration of achievements is high on the centre's agenda. Parents and their children celebrate their achievements together through child 'graduation' ceremonies, certificate presentations and a borough wide yearly celebration event. A well-resourced crèche is available and staff model good quality play activities. Existing staff skills to identify early identification of children's needs are built on through good training and development. Detailed learning journeys linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage are used within the crèche provision. Parents learn how to establish routines, deal with behaviour and have fun playing with their children through a wide range of courses. Parents commented on how the 'Early Learning Group' had helped their children, 'increase their social skills' and 'prepare them for nursery'. The importance of literacy skills for children is promoted well through the use of story bags and introducing parents to 'snack and story' time. Adults have a clear pathway for progression through literacy, numeracy and computer courses.

Staff and partners work skilfully and sensitively to meet the needs of families who frequently face a raft of complex and at times overwhelming issues, such as domestic violence, debt and isolation. They understand the barriers faced by families and offer individual support within the home and transport to activities. The integrated package of support makes a difference to the lives of families with circumstances that make them most vulnerable. Case studies and discussions with families demonstrate the successful outcomes for families through the personalised support given, for example, through the speech and language service and the 'short break' service available to help parents with disabled children and those with special educational needs.

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

Governance and accountability arrangements are well-defined and clearly understood. There is a direct link between strategic planning and service provision. The centre is part of the Team Around the Family model. This model was re-designed in April 2012 and has increased the level of integration between services. This has improved the centre's ability to identify

and prioritise those families most in need of support. Performance management is good and all partners understand their roles.

Senior management have high aspirations for the centre and a shared vision of how these will be achieved. Staff work very well together, support each other and feel valued. Monthly team meetings and quarterly reporting contribute to the success of identifying and responding to local need. Self-evaluation is accurate and the service delivery plan is well matched to the needs of families in the area. However, not all priorities have clearly defined or challenging targets, and systems to demonstrate the long-term impact of the centre's work are not in place. Families are viewed as partners and their contribution is valued.

Senior management use resources effectively and respond swiftly to need providing good value for money. The centre is a bright, welcoming environment where helpful reception staff greet members of the public. Space within the centre is limited. However, good use is made of the nearby community centre and library. When families most in need of support lack confidence to access services in the centre individual support is provided in the home, and outcomes for families are good. Shared costs between the centre, school and pre-school help with sustainability.

The centre plays a significant role in the life of the community and the promotion of equality and diversity is given a high priority. The inclusion of all families is promoted effectively as the centre has a good understanding of the needs of the families it supports and knows who the most vulnerable groups are. Crèche facilities enable families to attend training and the dad's group meet at weekends to best meet their needs. The centre promotes the inclusion of disabled children and those with special educational needs well through very effective partnership working and offers good support to vulnerable two-year-olds.

Safeguarding arrangements are given the utmost priority at the centre. Excellent safer recruitment procedures are followed and training is regularly updated. Comprehensive risk assessments, policies and procedures are in place across the centre and form part of the induction procedures. Staff are highly confident in their knowledge and ability to safeguard children. Referrals to the most appropriate agencies, particularly in relation to the high incidence of domestic violence in the area, are timely and extremely effective in protecting families. Clear signs throughout the building remind parents of their responsibility to keep their children safe.

Excellent partnership working enables information to be shared at an early stage. The high level of integrated working ensures referrals are timely and services fully coordinated to avoid duplication. Particularly strong links exist with Children's Social Care, Health workers, the Jobcentre, Community services, Adult Learning and the Citizens Advice Bureau. The holistic approach used to assess the needs of all members within the family has been a great success when supporting families. The Early Years Consultant Teacher supports the private and voluntary sector very effectively through quality training programmes. These have had a positive impact on outcomes for families. Families are well represented on the advisory board and through the developing Parents' Voice Forum. The vast majority of

parents who responded to the satisfaction survey say that they are satisfied with the service provided by 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	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures 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	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.	2

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

Inspectors considered the previous childcare report for Upton Pre-school and After school Club and Upton Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School which are located on the same site as the children's centre. The report for a local catholic primary school was also considered.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Upton Children's Centre on 22–23 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who helped with our work. You expressed your views clearly and they were very helpful to us.

We visited some activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you. Like you, we found the centre to be welcoming and friendly. Staff are enthusiastic and committed to improving outcomes for you and your families. We think the way in which the centre works in partnership with other agencies to ensure you receive the best services and protect you and your children is outstanding and has had a significant impact on the wellbeing and outcomes for your families.

Staff regularly share information and make sure they work very well together with others to provide your family with all the support they need as quickly as possible. We have asked the centre to ensure any targets they have are sufficiently challenging and to consider how they can access information after you have completed training and activities. This will ensure they know it has been a worthwhile experience for you and continues to make a difference to your lives. You may be able to help with this.

You are accessing a good range of health services and the health of your families is improving as a result. Your centre provides a safe environment and staff are swift to intervene early when there are any safeguarding concerns to ensure that children are safe and families are fully supported. Your homes have been made safer by providing many of you with home safety equipment.

The centre provides you with a wide range of activities which you told us you enjoy. You are developing your confidence and parenting skills and, as a result, are enabling your children to make the best progress they can. We were pleased to hear how the centre encourages you to become involved in volunteering and in the work of the centre.

Your centre has become well-established in the community and has been successful in engaging with the majority of families from your community, particularly those identified as being in most need of support. We know the centre has taken your views into account and acted on this information; for example, by providing activities on a Saturday and making use of the community centre.

Your centre strives to be better and is always looking for ways to improve. It is apparent that the centre and its services are important to all of you who use it.

Thank you once again for your time, we wish you all the very best in the future.

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