

Inspection report for Haughton Children's Centre

Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	410953
Inspection dates	14–15 February 2013
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Haughton Community School 138089
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the local authority, centre staff, advisory board members, health professionals, voluntary and statutory partner organisations, one local headteacher and parents. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Haughton Children's Centre operates from a purpose-built building that opened in May 2011; it also delivers outreach services from Red Hall Community Centre. It is a phase two centre, offering all elements of the core purpose including health services, family support, outreach services, welfare advice and guidance and links to Jobcentre services. The majority of families from the reach area are predominately White British, which reflects the ethnic minority population of 2.1% for Darlington. The linked provision is subject to separate inspection arrangements. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The centre is within a 70% least disadvantaged area, however there are pockets of deprivation within the reach area, one of which is within the Haughton East Ward – Red Hall, which is within the top 5% most deprived in the country. The latest employment figures for Darlington in 2011 show 5.25% of the working population is unemployed, of these 6% are within the Haughton East Ward. The area surrounding the centre has the highest number of households renting property from the local authority. The centre registration for the reach area is currently 76%. On entry to early year's provision in some areas, children's level of skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age.

The service has undergone a period of change with the setting up of integrated teams. Haughton and McNay Children’s Centre are managed by the birth-to-19 Area 2 Service Coordinator who oversees all operational management. The management team also consists of the Whole Family Care Coordinator from County Durham and Foundation Trust, Senior Administrator and the Children’s Centre Development Manager who oversees quality and development across all children’s centres in the Borough.

The centre’s advisory board is made up of four parents from across the area and various professionals from partner organisations. The governance is provided by Darlington Borough Council.

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

Haughton Children’s Centre meets the needs of its community well and delivers good provision. Since the opening of the centre in May 2011, staff have quickly established a responsive programme where outcomes for parents and children are good overall. Increasing numbers use the centre and benefit from its offer.

A wide range of activities are offered at the centre. Particularly impressive is the centre’s flexible approach to meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged section of the community. For example, Red Hall Community Centre offers centre programmes one day a week and attracts families who would not otherwise be engaged. One parent said, ‘I’ve started to feel good about myself for the first time.’ Programmes take place at flexible times, including a Saturday morning Dads’ group. Services for parents and children are well planned and offered in conjunction with partners. An integrated approach, especially with health professionals, is very effective.

The care, guidance and support offered to families are good. An effective and coordinated approach uses the expertise of a range of specialist providers. Support from centre staff during times of crisis is very good, being immediate, appropriate and proportionate. There is good signposting to other providers, helpful information on benefits, housing and childcare, as well as links to Jobcentre Plus. However, opportunities to develop economic skills that

would significantly enhance employment opportunities for those seeking work are less well developed.

The great majority of adults using the centre improve their self-confidence and self-esteem effectively. Parents share their experiences and 'learn to value everyone's experiences as a parent. We learn a lot from each other.' The tracking of individual children's progress through a 'learning journey' is particularly valuable and parents speak of the importance to them of understanding how their child learns and develops.

All premises used by the centre are carefully risk-assessed and provide a safe environment for users. Good safeguarding arrangements are evident and embedded well into all practice. The centre promotes an inclusive approach to children and their parents.

Parents have appropriate opportunities to provide feedback on provision, mainly through direct feedback to staff and through programme reviews. However, the centre has identified that it must continue to search for further ways in which it can gain the views of all users. For example, through the establishment of a parents' group and involving all members of the community, including those from the most disadvantaged groups, in decision making.

The centre understands its community well. Overall self-evaluation is accurate and managers and staff have a clear understanding of what needs to be improved. For example, the centre is benefiting from the improved data and information now available. However, the centre is not yet making full use of the data to evaluate all programmes more rigorously to ensure a continued improvement in services. Centre staff are well qualified and passionate about continuing to develop and improve provision. Both governance and management are good and staff at all levels receive supportive and regular supervision. Considering that outcomes are at least good and improving, together with its other key strengths, the centre has a good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further develop the economic skills of adults to improve employability for those seeking work.
- Using the improved data and information now available, evaluate the programmes more rigorously to ensure maximum impact on outcomes and a continued improvement in services.
- Improve consultation with all members of the community, including those from the most disadvantaged groups, involving them in decision making and the running of the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

A broad and accessible range of child and family health services are offered in the home and at the centre and other community venues. Since the centre opened in May 2011 more families are accessing services, including those from the area of highest disadvantage. Obesity levels of children entering school are falling, partly as a result of activities promoting a healthy lifestyle. These include 'Family Fun' events, recreational walks into the nearby countryside from the Red Hall estate, and healthy cooking during the Saturday morning 'Dads' Group'. The rate for initiating breastfeeding has increased from 60.3% to 61.3% over the past year and breastfeeding at six-to-eight weeks has increased from 32.9% to 37%, consistently above the average for Darlington. Provision of antenatal and postnatal support, through 'Early Days' and other parenting programmes, along with the drop-in breastfeeding clinic, have led to improved confidence in breastfeeding and general baby care. Services to support postnatal depression are responsive and effective.

Children and their families are safe and protected. Every activity is carefully risk-assessed. The centre staff make good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to determine the needs of the family and integrated packages of support are put in place. Children subject to a child protection plan and looked after children are well supported within a multi-agency team. Parenting programmes such as 'Mellow Parenting' ensure that parents improve their awareness of how to keep their children safe. 'We learn about being safe with our kids, like having a hot drink in a cup with a lid.' Children attending the centre behave well.

Children and adults enjoy learning and achieve well. A range of creative opportunities, including 'Every Child a Talker', 'Baby Sing and Play' and 'Dads and Kids' all encourage children and their parents to have fun. Data show that 62% of children achieve at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage, which is an improvement of 7% on the 2011 figures. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest has also narrowed by 7% over the past year. Good opportunities allow parents to develop their self-confidence and improve literacy and numeracy skills through accredited and non-accredited programmes in the centre and other community venues. Although good relationships exist with Jobcentre Plus and the local college, centre staff are aware that more needs to be done to help parents to gain both life and employability skills.

The centre is beginning to play a pivotal role in its community, bringing together the strengths of partners to meet the needs of users in a coherent and effective way. Some families are appropriately involved in the governance of the centre through their membership on the advisory board. Some parents are being encouraged to help design and draw up plans for the new outdoor play area for the centre. However, the centre has recognised that there is need for the further development of a strategy to involve all parents, including those from the most disadvantaged areas, in the governance and decision making within the centre.

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	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

Centre staff have developed a good understanding of the reach area since the centre opened. The centre is busy and participation rates are improving, currently achieving 76% registrations, an increase of 10% on the previous year. An extensive range of parental engagement and outreach activities support those most in need. For example, responding to accurate data analysis, an accessible service is delivered from the Red Hall Community Centre one day a week, starting with 'Tea and Toast' and offering well received sessions, including a 'Baby Clinic', 'Play and Stay' and 'Cooking Together'. As one resident said, 'They have changed a lot of things; they have been listening and now the activities are much more what parents want and need.' However, centre staff recognise that more work now needs to follow on from this by evaluating programmes more carefully, measuring impact, and changing delivery, where appropriate.

The centre promotes purposeful learning well. Parents welcome the opportunity to come together in groups to learn in different and engaging ways. All centre activities are provided with the aim of increasing families' understanding of child development, raising parenting skills and enjoying learning together. Children make good progress and become more self-confident. 'My son was not speaking and now he can string a sentence together. He's much more confident.' Children's learning is individualised through the establishing of 'learning journeys' tracked through sessions and activities. Parents are actively involved in planning activities. 'I feel very comfortable and can talk to the staff; they take my ideas on board.'

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. An integrated approach to health promotion ensures that health visitors, community nurses and parental engagement staff provide a comprehensive range of advice and guidance on topics such as sleeping, nutrition, diet and behaviour management. In a baby clinic session, a discussion about children with

additional needs led to effective and specific signposting of groups which support children and parents with Down's syndrome. The centre coordinates the offer across a range of specialist services to ensure that all needs are met. Talking about the support offered, one dad said, 'This is the best centre in Darlington. They don't judge us here, they help us.'

Information and guidance on a range of health-related issues are made easily available, either through leaflets, home visits or activities for parents. Care and support offered at times of crisis are very effective. The Citizens Advice Bureau has a surgery once a week and provides good information to families around debt 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	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 arrangements are clear and accountable. Darlington Borough Council sets the strategic direction, affirming that children's centres are the 'bedrock' of the authority's early intervention strategy. The advisory board now effectively monitors performance, reviews progress and contributes to future planning having clear terms of reference and good parental representation.

Overall self-evaluation accurately identifies the strengths and areas for development. Data and information are collected monthly and are used effectively to shape the provision, in a direct response to need. However, senior leaders and managers accept that the evaluation of services needs to be more rigorous and targets set need to be more challenging, so that a more accurate analysis of progress can be made and future action identified.

Professional supervision and management arrangements are well defined and are effectively supporting staff. Managers and staff are enthusiastic, motivated and committed to improvement. Users feel that 'Staff are really good and would do anything for us!' Through the development of strong partnerships, integrated provision has successfully been developed: it is meeting identified need and has secured generally good and improving outcomes for children and their parents.

The centre is managed in a way that ensures the best use of resources. Although a small centre, it is very well used with the needs of families being met either by programmes at the centre, its other venues or through outreach in the home. Users report that the centre and

its staff are welcoming; they feel comfortable attending the centre and know that they and their children are safe and well cared-for. Resources to support learning are good. Staff are professionally qualified and benefit from effective professional development opportunities. Value for money is good.

The inclusion of all children and families is central to the centre's vision. An effective equality and diversity policy has been developed and shared with parents. Good strategies have improved engagement and outcomes for some priority groups, such as fathers being signposted to a local Dads' group which meets on a Saturday morning. Participation by the most disadvantaged parts of the community has risen, following the introduction of a range of activities on the Red Hall estate. Staff receive a varied programme of training on inclusive practice and identification of children with special educational needs. They work closely with Beaumont Hill School which has state-of-the-art facilities and support groups for children with Down's syndrome and autism.

A high priority is given to safeguarding and all policies and procedures are consistently implemented. Effective risk-assessment procedures are followed and there are good recruitment and vetting procedures for staff. Families using the centre are able to influence the shaping of provision. Centre staff are strengthening consultation mechanisms by introducing a Parents' Group. Centre staff are aware that they need to further improve consultative mechanisms and the evaluation of courses and activities.

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	3
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	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	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 Haughton Children's Centre on 14–15 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit, we looked at the centre's activities and resources and spoke to staff. We particularly enjoyed the chance to talk to many of you during our inspection of the centre. You told us how welcoming the centre is and how helpful and supportive the staff are. You also told us how accessible the centre is, how you can get answers to questions that are worrying you, and get good information about how your children develop. You welcomed the fact that services were also offered at Red Hall Community Centre, which was easy to get to for those who lived on the estate.

Your children are progressing well in their communication skills and personal and social development. The centre is a safe environment and there are many opportunities for you to make friends and learn new things. You told us that you found some of the parenting programmes particularly useful. Above all you told us how much you and your children enjoy the activities.

You feel very well supported by the centre and told us how often it provides a lifeline, when things are getting on top of you. The centre is good at working with partners, particularly in health, so that you can get a full programme of support that meets your individual needs.

We were impressed with the care, guidance and support offered at the centre and in the home. You told us how much you appreciated the opportunity to get advice about health issues, support for breastfeeding and weaning as well as the chance to join in fun activities such as 'Messy Play' and 'Rhyme Time'.

You told us the centre makes a real difference to your lives.

The staff at the centre are very committed to making the centre even better. We have asked them to make sure that everyone can get really involved in the running of the centre and in decision making in a number of ways, including through the establishment of a Parents' Group. We have asked for a more careful evaluation of all programmes offered, to

enable you to get the most benefit from them. Finally we have asked them to put on more programmes to help you get back into work, if that is your intention.

Thank you very much for your welcome. We enjoyed talking with you and wish you all well for the future.

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