

# Inspection report for Highley Area Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Shropshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	404519
<b>Inspection dates</b>	20–21 March 2013
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Joy Law HMI

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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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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.

Inspection of the registered early years childcare provision located on the same site as the centre was carried out prior to the inspection of the centre under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, representatives of the advisory board, partner agencies and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

## Information about the centre

Highley Area Children's Centre is located in the village of Highley in south-east Shropshire and covers a large rural area. The centre operates from a principal site in the local community centre and 14 service delivery points located across the wider area.

The centre was designated in October 2007 and serves a community in which there are pockets of deprivation and disadvantage among relatively more advantaged areas. The area is served by a number of local amenities including seven primary schools and two secondary schools. Isolation is a major factor affecting families living in this community due to distance and limited public transport services available. The nearest market town which has a community hospital and midwifery unit is seven miles away from the principal site.

The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a range of services for families, working with other partner organisations and by referring parents and children to other specialist providers. The centre does not provide full-time early years provision

but offers advice and guidance to parents on the daycare and childminding facilities available within the local community. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision, are variable; some children are well below and others are in line with those expected for their age.

The Highley Area Children's Centre serves 632 children aged under five years. The proportions of workless households with children aged under five years and those dependent on benefits are below average. There are approximately 317 lone parents with dependent children in the area. The children's centre serves a community, the large majority of which is White British, with the remaining population being largely of mixed heritage and some eastern European families.

The centre is governed directly by the local authority with a strategic locality advisory board. The advisory board is made up of a cross section of professionals, including representatives from health, education, library, adult education, family learning service, Job Centre, local authority and parents. It has recently appointed a new chairperson, who is a voluntary sector partner. The advisory board is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development.

## 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

Highley Area Children's Centre is a good centre as a result of the shared vision and commitment of many people who aspire to serve its community well. The centre is a good example of what can be achieved within a diverse community and rural location.

Outcomes for children and families are good. The good-quality provision, together with effective family support, ensure that families, whose circumstances may have made them vulnerable or who are disadvantaged by economic and social circumstances, benefit from a good range of services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs.

Leadership and management are good. The local authority provides good support

and challenge. The manager provides effective day-to-day management and professional supervision arrangements for staff. The centre receives data from the local authority, however, these are not always specific to the centre's reach area, up-to-date or provided on a regular basis. Nevertheless, the manager and staff's knowledge of the reach area is good. The manager has a good understanding of the centre's main strengths and areas for development. She sets ambitious targets to improve the health, safety and economic well-being of the local community.

The manager proudly and rightly acknowledges the centre's achievements so far. For example, re-locating the centre into the community centre, and the significant impact the centre is making, in partnership with very committed partners, to breaking down barriers in this rurally isolated community. The centre has increased the number of families accessing good-quality services. It is reaching the large majority of families within the reach area as well as supporting many families from outside the area who choose to attend the centre's services. The manager has a clear understanding of how the centre's work can be improved further. The centre demonstrates good capacity to improve.

Partnership working with the majority of partners is a particular strength of the centre and a credit to all those involved. For example, the community centre manager, health visitors, welfare and benefits support, adult community learning, family information service, social worker and Jobcentre Plus, are extremely passionate and dedicated in working with the centre to improve the health, safety and economic well-being of families. However, partnership working with midwives, speech and language, and some early years providers is less well established. Safeguarding is the centre's highest priority and at the heart of what it does. Children who are subject to child protection plans are well supported across the multi-agency partnerships and through the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework processes.

The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the centre's vision. Much of the centre's work takes place out in the community delivering sessions such as 'Family Drop-in', 'Bumps and Babes', parenting programmes and breastfeeding support. Partners, such as health visitors, attend these sessions to give parents additional support and advice. The availability of a crèche enables more parents to access sessions. Staff provide good one-to-one support to families within their homes resulting in good improvements in children's and their families' lives. Parents speak positively about the centre's services and how these have improved their health and well-being, and helped them to overcome feelings of isolation and low self-esteem.

The centre has an effective advisory board. Members are confident and well equipped with the necessary skills to support the centre. They contribute to developing effective integrated provision through sharing what they know about families and the services available. However, they acknowledge they could provide more challenge and hold the centre manager to account more effectively if they had access to more robust data. Parents are well trained in their role and make a good contribution to decision making. The newly appointed chair of the advisory board is

beginning to develop a secure understanding of his role but more work remains.

Parents participate enthusiastically in activities and courses which build their confidence and develop their parenting and life skills. The centre works very effectively with adult community learning to deliver training for adults that is tailored to their needs. For example, accredited courses in 'Employability and Presentation Skills' enable parents to gain confidence and improve skills that help them move onto further learning and employment. Courses such as 'Skills for Life' enable parents who speak English as an additional language to develop their reading and speaking skills. Parents report how their confidence has improved and how they are more able to support their children's learning.

A good range of activities, which are planned and delivered using the Early Years Foundation Stage principles, enable parents and children to play, learn and have fun together. For example, 'Ready, Steady, Play', 'Rhyme Time' and 'Wiggle and Giggle' sessions. Children who attend these sessions and the crèche, benefit particularly from focused support and a good range of play opportunities that help to develop their communication and social skills. Staff model good practice and talk to parents about the activities provided. Parents are enhancing their understanding of how to support their children's learning through play, but their understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage is not sufficiently developed.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve parents' knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage in order that they can support their children well in their learning and development.
- Work with the local authority to obtain regular, accurate and up-to-date data about the reach area.
- Make the advisory board more effective in supporting development of the centre's services by:
  - supporting the newly appointed chair of the advisory board in establishing his role
  - ensuring members use all of the information available, including accurate and up-to-date data, to challenge the manager and hold her to account more effectively.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2
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The health and well-being of families are improving well. The large majority of families in the area are engaging with appropriate health services. The centre offers a good range of opportunities for parents and children to increase their understanding of how to keep healthy. For example, through healthy snacks and targeted support groups such as 'HENRY', 'Let's Cook Together' and participation in

exercise sessions such as ante- and post-natal yoga and 'Wiggles and Giggles'. Parents report that they feel better able to support and enhance a healthy lifestyle for their families as a result of attending the sessions, and that most children are learning to make healthy choices.

The centre's effective collaborative working between health visitors, health development officer and project officer results in positive outcomes for young children and their families to reduce health inequalities. Regular meetings between these partners enable them to share crucial information and implement appropriate action for those most in need, such as teenage mothers and mothers considered to be most vulnerable. Breastfeeding support and sessions such as baby massage successfully contribute towards early attachment and positive relationships between mothers and their babies. Parents say they value the support available. The 'Journey into Motherhood Programme' is particularly successful in supporting pregnant or new mothers. Partners comment positively on how the work of the centre has helped reduce the feeling of rural isolation among families. Parents' comments such as, 'I feel less isolated' and 'You have helped me feel a lot more confident', are typical.

Parents say that they feel safe at the centre and that they trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties. The centre is helping to raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities. For example, outreach support provides parents with information about how to create and maintain a safe environment for young children. Families are provided with home-safety equipment. Parents who have attended family first aid sessions report feeling more confident in their ability to know what to do with regard to children's accidents and emergency situations. Families with children subject to a child protection plan are known to the centre and receive effective, integrated support that keeps children safe.

Children have an increased enjoyment of books and improved communication and language skills as a result of the library service and sessions such as 'Rhyme Time' and 'Chatter Matters'. Parents speak highly of how the children really enjoy these sessions and the positive impact these have on their children's learning. The joint working with the Quality Improvement Learning Coordinator and Development Officers in supporting early years settings and local schools is having a positive impact on raising the quality of provision and children's transition arrangements. As a result, children settle well and make good progress in their learning and development.

Children are well behaved. Children's, parents' and partners' views are routinely obtained through such activities as annual surveys, evaluation of sessions, comment cards, the 'peoples panel' and face-to face conversations. The centre responds to requests and takes action to meet requests where appropriate. For example, new adult and community courses such as 'Chatter Matters' have been developed as a result of parents identifying a need. Parents are well represented on the advisory board and contribute well to shaping the centre's services.

Effective partnerships with agencies such as Family Information Service and Benefits Support, mean that families are provided with a very good range of information to help them improve their economic stability or independence. The strong partnership working with Adult Community Learning successfully supports parents to overcome barriers and progress into learning, training and employment, resulting in improved outcomes for families. Parents report on how the staff support them through difficult times and that, without help from the children's centre, their lives would be very different.

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>2</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>2</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>2</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>2</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>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

The centre team knows and understands its community well. It has forged strong links with the community centre manager which is proving to be very successful in reaching families in the community. The centre works well with its partners to improve the life chances and personal development of parents and children. Assessment and sharing of knowledge is used well to ensure the centre targets resources where they are most needed. The mosaic mapping is used effectively to identify and target those families not yet engaged in the centre's services. Staff deploy resources well. Services are delivered out in the community enabling the most vulnerable and isolated families to access services where previously there was no opportunity. As a result, take-up of most sessions is high, and outcomes for those in most need of intervention and support are good and improving.

Good-quality services and good care, guidance and support for families in difficulty are promoted through strong partnership working. A wide range of good-quality information covering issues such as benefits, childcare, safety and health is provided either directly by the centre or through signposting to other services. Detailed assessments lead to an individual plan for the child and their family, avoid duplication of services and minimise the risk of the most vulnerable families falling through the net. Parents know they can turn to the centre when they are most in need and



receive constructive advice and guidance. Comments such as, 'The centre has had a massive impact on my life, my child's life and helped me when I was down', and the staff have been 'Life savers', are typical.

Provision to help children learn and develop is good. Activities are well located and well attended. A good range of adult learning opportunities results in parents gaining qualifications and support into employment. Parents and children gain from attending sessions such as 'Family drop-In' which are planned around the Early Years Foundation Stage to encourage exploration and enjoyment of learning. However, opportunities for parents' to increase their understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage are less well developed. The centre celebrates all achievements, no matter how big or small, consequently raising aspirations, confidence and self-esteem for all.

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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

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

**2**

The manager provides good leadership and management for the centre. She has a deep commitment to creating links with the community, consistently looking for opportunities to engage. The manager is supported by a very committed, dedicated team that delivers a good service to the families in the reach. Teamwork and morale among staff are good. Strategic planning is based on good self-evaluation involving all staff, partners, parents and the local authority.

Governance and accountability arrangements are good at all levels. The newly elected chair does not have a sufficiently clear understanding of his full range of responsibilities. Nevertheless, the advisory board has a good understanding of local needs and the centre's priorities. It acknowledges that it could provide more challenge and hold the centre manager to account more effectively if it had access to more robust data. Parents are well trained in their role and make a good contribution to decision making. Good professional development opportunities are available to staff, including joint training and development opportunities with colleagues and partners.

Good-quality training and regular updates ensure that all staff are fully aware of safeguarding and child protection procedures. Vetting and recruitment processes for staff and volunteers are carried out well. Effective inter-agency working with skilled professionals means that they identify the needs of potentially vulnerable families at

an early stage and intervene quickly. This prompt action and good use of the Common Assessment Framework ensure the efficient use of resources and reduces the number of children subject to child protection plans.

Staff have a commitment to promoting equality and diversity. Despite the difficulties created by its rural location, the centre is meeting the elements of its core purpose well. Home visits and outreach work are invaluable in reaching families with the greatest need. The centre is particularly successful in its targeted work to support children and families who are in most need of support, including children and families who are disabled or have special educational needs. Subsidised childcare and crèche provision supports individual children's learning and development whilst removing barriers to parents accessing courses. Celebration of festivals and good multi-cultural resources promote children's and parents' understanding of the wider world.

Children, including the most vulnerable, make good progress in their learning and development, with an increasing percentage gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales. Consequently, the gap between the lowest-achieving and the rest is being reduced.

The centre provides good value for money by targeting resources where they are most needed. It works well in partnership with agencies and commissioned services to deliver services at local venues, successfully tapping into additional funding wherever possible and training staff to deliver a range of services. Staff support parent-run groups to promote sustainability. They are constantly looking at ways in which to reach those families who are not accessing services and ensure activities are signposted and promoted well.

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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</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>2</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>2</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>2</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>2</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 range of provision</b>	<b>2</b>
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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 Highley Area Children's Centre on 20–21 March 2013. We judged the centre as good overall. This is the result of the shared vision and commitment of many people who aspire to serve your community well. As a result, outcomes for you and your families are good.

Leadership and management are good. The manager and staff have good knowledge about the reach area. They have a good understanding of the centre's main strengths and areas for development and have set ambitious targets to improve the health, safety and economic well-being of you and your families.

The local authority supports the centre well. However, the data the centre receives to help it evaluate its services and plan what to do next for you, are not as good as they could be. Therefore we have asked the local authority to provide the centre with more regular, accurate and up-to-date information about the reach area.

The manager and her team are rightly proud of what they have achieved for you so far. For example, by re-locating the centre into the community centre and the difference it is making, with the help of very committed partners, to breaking down barriers you experience due to living in a rurally isolated community. As a result, the number of families accessing the centre's service has increased.

Partnership working with the majority of partners is a particular strength of the centre and a credit to all those involved. For example, the community centre manager, health visitors, welfare and benefits support, adult community learning, family information service, social worker and Jobcentre Plus, are extremely passionate and dedicated in working with the centre to improve the health, safety and economic well-being of families. However, partnership working with midwives, speech and language, and some early years providers is less well established.

The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the centre's vision. Much of the centre's work takes place out in the community delivering sessions such as

'Family Drop-in', 'Bumps and Babies', parenting programmes and breastfeeding support. Partners, such as health visitors, attend these sessions to give you additional support and advice. Crèche provision increases your participation and accessibility to sessions. Staff also provide good one-to-one support to you and your families within your homes resulting in good improvements in your lives and your children's lives. You speak positively about the centre's services and how these have improved your health and well-being, and helped you to overcome feelings of isolation and low self-esteem.

The centre has an effective advisory board. Members effectively contribute to developing integrated provision through sharing what they know about families and the services available. However, they acknowledge they could provide more challenge and hold the centre manager to account more effectively if they had access to more robust data. Those of you who are involved in the advisory board are well trained in your role and make a good contribution to decision making. The newly appointed Chair of the advisory board is at an early stage of his understanding of the role. Therefore we have asked the centre to support further development of this and to make sure members of the board use all of the information available, including accurate and up-to-date data, to challenge the manager and hold her to account for the centre's performance more effectively.

The centre offers a good range of opportunities for you and your children to increase your understanding of how to keep healthy, through healthy snacks and targeted support groups such as 'HENRY', 'Let's Cook Together' and participation in exercise sessions such as ante- and post-natal yoga and 'Wiggles and Giggles'. You report that you feel better able to support and enhance a healthy lifestyle for your families as a result of attending the sessions, and that your children are learning to make healthy choices.

You told us that you and your children feel safe at the centre and that you trust the staff to help you in times of crisis or personal difficulties. You are helped to learn how to keep your children safe in the home and your community. For example, outreach support provides you with information about how to create and maintain a safe environment for young children. You are provided with home-safety equipment. Those of you who attended family first aid sessions report feeling more confident in your ability to know what to do with regard to children's accidents and emergency situations. Families subject to child protection plans are known to the centre and receive effective, integrated support to keep children safe.

You participate enthusiastically in activities and courses which build your confidence and develop your parenting and life skills. The centre works very effectively with adult community learning to deliver training for you that is tailored to your needs. For example, accredited courses in 'Employability and Presentation Skills' enable you to gain confidence and improve skills that help you move onto further learning and employment. Courses such as 'Skills for Life' enable those of you who speak English as an additional language, to develop your reading and speaking skills. You report

how your confidence has improved and how you are more able to support your children's learning.

A good range of activities, which are planned and delivered using the Early Years Foundation Stage principles, enable you and your children to play, learn and have fun together. These include, 'Ready, Steady, Play', 'Rhyme Time' and 'Wiggle and Giggle' sessions. Children who attend these sessions and the crèche, benefit particularly from focused support and a good range of play opportunities that help develop their communication and social skills. Staff model good practice and talk to you about the activities provided. You are developing some understanding of how to support your children's learning through play, but your understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage is less well developed. Therefore, we have asked the centre to provide opportunities for you to increase your knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage in order that you can support your children well in their learning and development.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk to you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre, and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).