

Hillfields Children's Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103633
Local Authority	Coventry
Inspection number	302139
Inspection dates	4–5 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Joyce Cox

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Children's centre
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	167
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cheryl Lawlor
Headteacher	Helen Watson
Date of previous school inspection	13 May 1996
School address	Clifton Street Coventry CV1 5GR
Telephone number	024 76228174
Fax number	024 76230092

Age group	3–5
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This former early years centre was designated as an early excellence centre in December 1997. It became a children's centre in April 2006 and provides an extensive range of integrated services and day care facilities for families and children as well as full-time nursery provision for children aged three and four. Many of the children who attend the centre come from families that face considerably challenging social and economic circumstances. Children's attainment when they start in the Nursery is well below the expected levels and particularly low in their communication, personal and social skills. An above average number of children have learning difficulties and disabilities. Eighty per cent of the children are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a large number of children are at an early stage of learning English. Thirty different languages are spoken. Hillfields also has the highest concentration of families in Coventry who have asylum seeking status. Many families move in and out of the centre in as little as eight weeks because of their changing refugee status, housing issues and sometimes because of vulnerable lifestyles. Six children are looked after by the local authority and some children also receive respite care provision.

Between 2000 and 2005 the leadership of the centre was fragile as the centre experienced considerable difficulties in recruiting and retaining a permanent senior leadership team. During this time there were also a number of staff changes. Just prior to this inspection, budget cuts necessitated the loss of five members of staff resulting in a relatively new staff team in the nursery section of the centre.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good centre where children of all abilities and backgrounds succeed and thrive. It is an oasis of calm for its children and families, many of whom have undergone significant periods of turbulence in their lives. Since the last inspection, improvements to the provision have been hampered to some extent because of disruption at senior leadership level and budgetary and staffing issues. The future is now much brighter. The good leadership of the head of centre, who is supported effectively by the senior leadership team and the local authority, has accomplished much in a relatively short period of time. Careful analysis has identified accurately strengths and areas for improvement. New appointments and much improved assessment of children's achievement are starting to improve the satisfactory quality of teaching. Achievement is good, resulting in many children working at the levels that are set for their age by the time they leave.

Children's attitudes are positive and their personal development and well-being are good. They love coming to the centre and this is demonstrated by their improved attendance. One parent, summing up the views of many, wrote, 'I am very happy with the staff and the way my child has developed and progressed.' Relationships are good and staff are skilled in giving care and encouragement and this ensures that children make good progress in their personal development and are well equipped for their future education.

Parents and carers appreciate the outstanding pastoral care which the staff provide for children and families. One parent comments, 'It's just amazing here, you feel better the minute you walk through the door and the staff help you take control of your life.' Adults are highly successful in ensuring that children and parents feel safe, happy and valued. Religious and cultural differences are celebrated and respected. Staff sensitively encourage children to become confident and happy learners, so that children are prepared to try out new experiences and activities. A wide range of visits and visitors make a good contribution to children's learning and enhance the satisfactory curriculum. Though the curriculum has improved it is not yet sufficiently adapted to develop children's different interests and preferences. Children's learning needs are identified because the quality of assessment has improved. The next step is to build on its new systems for tracking children's progress to make sure all children, and in particular more able children, make consistently good progress and reach even higher levels.

The head of centre and senior leaders provide good leadership and management, sharing a passionate determination to provide a high quality service for all children and their families. This is reflected in the skilful ways in which the centre has successfully improved its work recently, which demonstrates a good capacity for further improvement. The centre is currently in the early stages of developing more effective ways to support children's learning when they select their own activities, but some nursery staff, because they are so new to their roles, require more help with this. The centre works exceptionally well with other agencies and providers which enhances children's learning. It has also established excellent relationships with parents, who express complete confidence in the staff and are very appreciative of all that the centre provides, both for their children and themselves.

What the school should do to improve further

- Help staff to find the best ways to support children's learning when they pursue their own activities.

- Effectively support the new teaching team to improve the quality of teaching so that children continue to achieve well.
- Use the improved assessment information to plan suitably challenging work for all children and in particular the more able children.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Many children's attainment meets the expected levels for their age by the time they leave the centre. Their achievement is good and they are well prepared for their Reception classes. Children with learning difficulties and disabilities do not attain the expected levels but make good progress from a low starting point because of sensitive, caring support and practical activities and resources that capture their interest. However, the more able children are not sufficiently challenged to reach higher levels. Children from minority ethnic backgrounds and the children who learn English as an additional language achieve well particularly in their communication skills. The centre works hard to support children and their families in the wide range of languages spoken. The talented staff, many of whom are bilingual, slip easily between English and children's home languages to enable children to understand their learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children love coming to the centre. This is why attendance is satisfactory and steadily rising. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They respond to the staff's warm welcome with growing openness and launch straight into the day's activities with enthusiasm. They develop well socially, showing this by relating warmly to their friends, and by responding with increasing confidence to adults. They contribute to group work with ideas, and feel they are helping staff when they are planting carrot and broccoli plants or fitting the memory stick into the laptop. Children's attitudes to their learning are positive and they are beginning to ask deeper questions. They know right from wrong, and about safety. They alert the staff if they see a younger child doing something dangerous. They know about healthy eating and hygiene: 'You have to wash your hands when you've been messing in soil,' they say. They behave well and are sensible on the many occasions when parents are sharing lunch or play areas with them. They are happy learners. Parents like to stay and watch them playing in harmony, saying how much they appreciate the work staff do to bring this about. The skills children learn and the independence they develop prepare them well for later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers, teaching assistants and nursery nurses work well as a team and have a sound understanding of how young children learn. They carefully plan interesting activities for the children such as looking closely at mini-beasts or pretending to be pirates. Staff join in enthusiastically with children's play. Consequently, children enjoy their learning as shown in their happy smiling faces. Staff manage children well and most take every opportunity to encourage children to communicate in each area of learning. Children are encouraged to make choices and work together and this supports their personal development effectively. The improved assessment procedures provide staff with good information. However, this information

is not used to plan suitably challenging work especially for the more able. Some staff, because they are very new to their roles, are not yet involved in supporting and recording achievement when children are engaged in their own selected activities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The staff are passionate about children's rights and the expansion of their experience. This focus on inclusion leads to key strengths in the planning for individual children who have learning difficulties or disabilities, or those who have English as an additional language or who are looked after away from their parents. All of these children have good personal programmes of learning with targets that are fitted to their needs. Although there are strengths within the curriculum it is satisfactory overall because staff are unclear about the best ways to support children when they are engaged in their own selected activities. This is especially true for higher attaining children who receive the same curriculum as everyone else. The range of learning experiences is a strength of the curriculum. This is because of the large number of visitors with fascinating expertise coming into the centre. Staff take children on many visits to places that stimulate their thinking and give them a real insight into the topics they are studying. Parents, too, play a valuable part in this. They bring in their home cultures, which are well celebrated and displayed. The curriculum is, therefore, an exciting vehicle for discovering new things. It contributes well to all aspects of children's personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is a long tradition of good quality care and welfare at Hillfields. The staff are strongly dedicated to the welfare of their children and families. The network of connections with a vast range of agencies and services, and the effectiveness of their work for the centre, has grown to such an extent that pastoral care for children and community can only be described as outstanding. As a result, children are happy and secure, and this is a key contributory factor to their good progress. The centre is a haven of tranquillity, and parents are delighted to come in and share in this experience. 'My children have grown in confidence, and I have too,' is a typical comment. The quantity and quality of the advice and guidance available from staff and specialists make a significant difference to the learning and the lives of the children. Children learn to talk through tasks and problems, and adults do too. There is a new system for assessing and recording children's progress. This is becoming effective as a record of achievement, but is not yet used to check that children are keeping on track. It does not show how different groups are getting on, to give management a clear picture of trends and the value added over time.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The head of the centre has quickly gained a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development and has set a clear direction for improvement. She is supported effectively by her senior leadership team. Together they have gained the respect and total support of the staff, parents and governors. They have successfully engendered a good team spirit and high morale amongst a relatively new staff team after a very difficult period. There is a clear commitment to raising achievement and this has driven the rigorous procedures for checking

and improving the centre's performance by the leadership team. The centre has a clear plan of action to improve its effectiveness. Staff are used effectively to keep teaching groups small so that children get more individual attention. Effective development planning has led to rapid and significant improvements in assessment and tracking children's achievement. Senior leaders recognise that there is still more to do, particularly in the improvement of teaching and the curriculum. Governors are very supportive and increasingly involved in evaluating the centre's work.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

6 July 2007

Dear Children,

Inspection of Hillfields Children's Centre, Coventry CV1 5GR

We enjoyed our visit to your centre very much. We really liked watching some of the exciting things you do and having a delicious lunch with you and some of your parents and carers. We think that you go to a good children's centre.

There are lots of great things about your centre:

- You are good at working hard, helping each other and listening to your teachers, and do well in all your activities.
- The staff care about you very much, they are satisfactory teachers and make learning interesting and fun.
- The staff leaders are very clever at running the centre and make sure you all have a good time and do well.
- Anybody who needs extra help with learning English, getting dressed or with work is always given it.
- You love learning new things and are good at sharing, taking turns, talking and being kind to each other.

Helen and all the other staff have lots of good ideas to make the centre even better. We agree with them that it would be good if teachers could share the best ways to help you when you choose your own activities. It would also be good if all teachers made sure you all learn as much as you possibly can in all lessons.

It was good to see that you are all so happy at the centre and doing well and that your parents and carers think it is such a great place.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Joyce Cox Lead inspector