

Inspection report for Heath Children's Centre

Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	383955
Inspection dates	17–18 August 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Mann HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Dawn Bellman
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
Centre address	Readon Close Petersfield Hampshire GU31 4BN
Telephone number	01730 269663
Email address	dawn.bellman@hants.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	None

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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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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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 an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with parents, staff and managers. They also met with representatives of partner organisations, the local authority and the Chair of the Partnership Board. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Heath Children's Centre was designated in 2008. It is a phase two centre, located in a rural area. It is part of a cluster of three centres, managed by the centre manager of Heath Children's Centre. The local authority oversees the running of the children's centre. The centre's partnership board contributes to the governance of all centres in the cluster. Heath operates from purpose-built premises. The majority of its services are run from the centre. Heath also has a mobile unit to support its outreach work.

The reach area of the centre is mixed in terms of social and economic need, and has pockets of affluence and deprivation within it. Transport links are few, which makes it difficult for families to travel around the local area. Most families living in the area are of White British heritage, and there are a few families who are from Eastern European and other minority ethnic backgrounds. The number of families living in workless households is above the national average. Many children living in the reach area enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with a much narrower range of skills and abilities than those typically expected for their age. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, 2010 data indicate about 59% of children gain 78 points or more across the six areas of learning, which is just above the national average.

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 users and the wider community

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

1

Main findings

Heath Children’s Centre provides outstanding overall effectiveness. Excellent partnership working with a wide range of agencies, including health services, results in an exceptional range of services. The quality of individualised care and provision for families is superb, resulting in outstanding outcomes for those using the centre. In particular, those families most in need are supported extremely well through a well-planned approach which is delivered sensitively. This enables and empowers adults to make very good improvements in their circumstances.

The local authority, partnership board and centre manager provide very strong collaborative leadership which has the needs of the area at its heart. The manager and senior management team are extremely proactive in evaluating the needs of users. There is a very high focus on forward planning and development which is based on comprehensive and reflective evaluation. The management team is developing its systems of evaluation even further to provide more evidence of outcomes. For example, children on the transition programme are now tracked over the school year to see the impact of the programme on their overall learning and development. Evaluation promotes staff’s professional development very well, because relevant training is undertaken to broaden the range of provision on offer. The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding. Parents express a very high level of satisfaction about their engagement with the centre. Many describe it as ‘a lifeline’ and ‘like my family’. One parent explained how readily the centre reacts to meet her needs as, ‘You need it, you ask for it, you get it.’

The centre promotes equality and diversity exceptionally well. The exemplary focus on individual need ensures that no person at the centre is disadvantaged by their background or circumstances. Those parents with ethnic minority backgrounds are given extremely good emotional and practical support. This helps them integrate into the community and access education for their children and themselves. Staff have

addressed sensitive discriminatory issues that concerned the perception of strong friendship groups very well. Honest discussion and debate with groups of parents have improved attitudes greatly. A very strong sense of community has developed in the centre and almost all refer to it as 'our' centre.

Arrangements to safeguard children's welfare are exemplary. All staff give the highest priority to ensuring children and adults whose circumstances make them vulnerable are safe. Excellent liaison with external agencies supports referrals and processes regarding the care and safeguarding of children very well. All staff are tenacious in their contacts with families and agencies to ensure missed calls and visits are promptly followed up to assure concerns are monitored effectively.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Enhance systems of evaluation even more to provide greater individualised information on how services can improve outcomes of those living in the reach area.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Outstanding outcomes for families who use the centre have a very positive impact on their overall well-being. Almost all families are engaged in universal and targeted health services. There is superb engagement with families through the community staff nurse, health visitor clinics and midwife appointments delivered at the centre and on the outreach bus. This promotes excellent outcomes for children and parents alike. Collaboration between health services and centre staff, in groups such as 'Bumps and Babies' and 'SOS 4 Parent', supports parents very well emotionally and practically, for example through advice on breastfeeding and weaning. Adults' emotional health is given a very high priority. There are a number of women in the local area who suffer with postnatal depression and access very good individual and group support. Evaluation of this indicates it results in high levels of improvement which lead to better outcomes for the whole family.

Parents trust all staff at the centre and, as a consequence, they feel that they and their children are safe. Those who are facing the most challenging of circumstances and find themselves in extremely difficult situations are helped especially well. Practical support is organised, such as the provision of home safety equipment and help with housing needs. Alongside this, a very high level of emotional support and care is given to match resources to needs and ensures the impact of the provision leads to improvement. Parents learn how to keep their children safe through groups and courses to teach first aid, for example. Those who have received help and support with parenting skills say they feel much more confident in their role as a parent. As a result, they enjoy the role much more, which benefits the whole family. Children who have child protection plans do exceptionally well. The centre works very well with a wide range of agencies, including Homestart, to promote the best

outcomes for the child. The centre also works very effectively to address the needs of the whole family so that improved outcomes can be sustained. staff maintain excellent communication with the family and with all relevant agencies and the best provision is arranged as a result.

Children and adults make exceptional progress in their learning and development through their engagement in the centre. Targeted and universal groups for children focus on the learning requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage to promote ongoing development. The centre uses local Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data to identify pertinent needs of provision well. For example, data show that, generally, children do less well in developing their language skills. So, the 'Chatter Chums' referred group has been developed and makes an excellent impact in improving levels of speech for young children. Adults greatly enjoy their engagement with the centre. They understand the value of play and how their children learn much better as a consequence of the high emphasis placed on supporting child and parent interaction. For example, in the Young Parents' Group, parents play with their children alongside centre staff. Parents have recently begun to complete learning journals which track their child's development. These encourage reflection about how their child is learning through play. Children are enthusiastic and rush into the room eager to play. One parent said her child 'gets really excited when he knows he is coming here'. Staff model exemplary practice delivered through interesting activities. These sessions are relaxed and enjoyable and children are highly engaged and motivated to learn.

Centre users are fully involved in evaluation and development of services. There is parent representation on the partnership board. The Parents' Forum actively seeks the opinions and ideas of parents to ensure the centre meets their needs well. Parent involvement has resulted in changes to provision, such as development of the 'Active Tots' soft play session which is now extremely popular. This participation in decision-making processes enhances parents' personal development and improves their levels of self-confidence. Those who wish to pursue further training do very well. This is because excellent individual help and support allow them to source and access vocational and educational courses to become qualified for employment. An extremely high proportion of adults are improving their personal development. Many also access advice on housing and benefits. This improves their economic stability and improves outcomes for their families.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop	1

positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	1

How good is the provision?

1

Staff put high emphasis on getting to know its users well. The senior management team and staff have an excellent knowledge of the local area. Data are used extremely well to identify the engagement of all groups in the reach area, including those considered most hard to reach. Excellent liaison with health services enhances the knowledge of the area even more. The centre's bus, known as 'Daisy', is a vital tool in reaching some more rural areas. Exemplary outreach work promotes very successful outcomes. This is because staff work very closely with individual families and they understand the needs and priorities for each. As a consequence, services are matched to needs extremely well. Targeted services are outstanding. For example, teenage parents, young parents and those who suffer from postnatal depression are given exceptional support and provision. The overall range of services is superb. Universal services, such as 'Dads' Group', 'Active Tots' and 'Stay and Play', provide excellent activities in a supported and safe environment.

The range of provision to help children and their parents learn and develop is excellent. Sessions are delivered exceptionally well. The Early Years Foundation Stage practitioner is highly skilled to enthuse those who attend to become involved with activities as they play with their children. Individualised learning is particularly good because provision is routinely tailored to personal need and facilitates high levels of engagement and success. The quality of care given by staff at Heath is outstanding. A warm welcome is given to all and this provides an extremely friendly and cheerful environment. In times of crisis, parents say they have no hesitation in asking staff for help. The provision for families in need is exemplary and is delivered promptly to promote constructive support and services.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Governance of the centre is outstanding. The local authority has exceptionally robust systems in place to monitor performance and drive improvement. As a result, it provides a very high level of challenge focused on the needs of the reach area. It works extremely well with the centre's management team: processes of self-evaluation and development planning are very well embedded. The Partnership Board is extremely effective in its role. The chair is highly experienced in centre leadership, and the board members represent a very wide range of partners and parents. Furthermore, the board itself is seeking to develop itself further through evaluation and development of its own protocols and practices.

The manager and senior management team are exceptionally focused on local need and improving outcomes for centre users. The manager is a highly visible presence in the centre and is frequently involved in frontline service delivery, so parents get to know her well. The staff team works extremely well together, and morale is very high as a result. The manager has very high aspirations for the development of the centre and a determination to see projects through. Evaluation of how to improve and planning of development are central to management practice and drive ongoing improvement extremely well. Financial planning is rigorous to achieve the best and most appropriate services. The centre maximises the budget's potential. Staff train to deliver services rather than pay outside agencies to provide these, and some staff work flexibly in more than one role. The centre negotiates preferential rates for hiring additional premises when required. As a result, the centre provides outstanding value for money.

The centre's promotion of equality and diversity is exemplary. In outreach work, staff engage with adults in circumstances that make them vulnerable to negate barriers and enable access and full engagement. Those adults who have physical and mental health issues are supported to access the centre by provision of transport and one-to-one support so they are not disadvantaged. The centre works very closely with the area inclusion coordinator to meet the needs of children with special education needs and/or disabilities and put effective strategies in place. Partnership working is excellent with all agencies working with the centre. Excellent communication, shared evaluation and development planning promote superb collaborative working. A partner from the health team stated that the centre 'is like an extension of our services'.

Processes to check that adults are suitable to be in contact with children are extremely rigorous. Staff readily challenge any situation that may pose a risk. The manager has proactively established agreed protocols to support effective working with social care when arranging contact visits and multi-agency meetings. Those adults who have been subject to domestic abuse are extremely well cared for. Staff work diligently to provide emotional support through outreach and engagement in the Freedom Programme, as well as providing childcare and housing. Premises are extremely safe and secure because risk assessments are rigorous.

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	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	1

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Heath Children's Centre on 17 and 18 August 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding.

We would like to thank those of you who took the time to speak with us during our inspection. It was enjoyable to meet you. It was especially helpful for us to hear how much you value the services offered by the centre.

We were very impressed with Heath Children's Centre and the work that everyone there does. We have awarded it with the highest possible grade because we think it is doing an excellent job.

There are far too many strengths of the centre's work to list here, but there are some elements that we thought were particularly excellent.

The way you are all able to give your opinions about what the centre does is very good. You do this through filling in evaluation feedback forms, talking on the Parents' Forum and chatting with staff about ways to improve the groups. This means that you have a say in what services there are and how they are delivered.

The centre manager and staff team are extremely effective. They are very focused on making sure everyone is well looked after. They work very well together to make sure outreach work and groups are exactly what you and your families need. Those of you who live further away from the centre enjoy using 'Daisy' the bus. Groups such as the 'Young Parents Group' and 'Active Kids' are very popular. Together, all the services help to improve the outcomes and well-being of all the families who use the centre.

The quality of activities for children is excellent. We saw how much your children love coming to the centre to play. We enjoyed seeing how much they are learning because the centre staff plan activities very well. You, as parents, value the hard work of the staff. The centre helps many of you to have a better or more enjoyable time. Many of you describe Heath as your 'lifeline'.

There are some very good partnerships with services including health and Homestart. Many of you use the health clinics at the centre, and most of you find it more convenient as it is closer to home. The centre is very good at making sure you and your children are as safe as you can be. Many of you have taken up training to help you stay safe, such as first aid and health and safety courses.

The centre is so good at planning more development and improvements that we have not made many suggestions for ways it could improve. The staff are already looking to make evaluation processes even more detailed so they can see what is working best. We agree this is a very good next step for them to do.

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