

Inspection report for Halton Lodge Children's Centre

Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	383588
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	111229 Halton Lodge Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY279805 Ladybirds Neighbourhood Nursery

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Introduction

The inspection covers 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.

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one Early Years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior managers from the centre and the co-located day care. Inspectors also met with parents and carers, members of the advisory board and representatives from Halton local authority as well as a number of partners including those from health, education and social care. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Halton Lodge Children's Centre is a Phase 1 children's centre, designated in 2005, providing the full core offer of services. It serves three wards of Runcorn: Grange, Heath and Mersey. The centre is located in a refurbished infant school, between St Chad's High school and Halton Lodge Primary school, on a housing estate in Runcorn. Halton Lodge Primary school was inspected in the same week as the children's centre. Day care in 'Ladybirds' Nursery' is provided on site by the Pre-School Learning Alliance. A crèche is provided in the centre for a range of children-centred activities including adult learning and parenting courses. A community café is provided on site. Some outreach services and activities are provided in community venues including in the partner site of All Saints' Primary school in the Mersey ward.

The head of the children's centre is also head of another children's centre in Runcorn. The local authority manages the centre and an advisory board oversees the work of the four children's centres in Runcorn.

The centre serves a community which experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of children who live in workless households or with low incomes is high, as is the number of families in receipt of benefits. Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills that are below expectations for their age.

The vast majority of families are of White British heritage. A growing number of families from other minority ethnic groups, particularly of Eastern European heritage, are moving into the centre’s reach area.

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

Halton Lodge Children’s Centre provides a good quality of service for all its children and families. The centre is led well by an enthusiastic manager, with good teamwork leading to good provision for families. Responsibilities are distributed across staff teams, which ensure that each member of staff plays an important part in the children’s centre and its delivery of a range of good services.

Parents and carers praise the commitment made by the children’s centre staff and their partners. During the inspection, users made very positive comments. Examples include, ‘Staff here are fantastic. They have given me the confidence to do something with my life and I am hoping to go back to work.’ ‘My child was really shy and did not know how to mix. Now, he has lots of friends and has learnt to share.’ ‘We all feel safe at the centre. The staff in the crèche are great. If there is a problem with my child when I am doing my course, they just come and get me. I found it hard to let him go, but he loves it in there.’

The inclusion of all families and children is central to the vision for the centre and fully promoted in all aspects of the centre’s work to ensure that families’ diverse needs are well-supported. The centre has a good understanding of its key target groups and as a result, outcomes for those in most need of intervention or support are good. Outcomes for children are particularly good and above the average for Halton, as evidenced in the Early Years

Foundation Stage Profile, which demonstrates clearly the effectiveness of targeted support by the Early Years team. The inclusive range of services for children and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and as a result, their progress is good.

The attractive, well-maintained centre provides a safe and welcoming learning environment. Users receive a warm, personal and professional welcome from reception staff when they arrive and visitors are rigorously checked. The reception area provides a valued space for the sale of fresh fruit and vegetables at affordable prices.

The enjoyment of children in the day care provision and in the crèche is evident from their happiness and laughter. Good partnerships between the day care provision, the children's centre, the local authority Early Years team and the speech therapy service results in good progress for children. There is clear and demonstrable impact from the highly-effective, targeted provision for two-year-olds. Adults and children thoroughly enjoy the good quality learning and development opportunities and as a result, their personal development is good.

In this area of high unemployment, good attention is placed on training and the personal development of adults. A good number of users access the range of courses including first aid, parenting programmes, literacy and numeracy and some improve their economic well-being by gaining qualifications or progressing to further training, education or employment. Good, on-site, crèche facilities ensure equality of access to learning and encourage parents and carers to learn while their children are safe. The centre successfully engages with the majority of its key target groups and attendance at sessions is good. However, few men access learning opportunities.

Safeguarding the health, safety and well-being of children and families in the reach area is a high priority at the centre. There are clear policies and procedures which all staff apply consistently well and the route for referral is clear. The local authority has recently reorganised its services providing care around the family. The new, integrated working support team (IWST) manages and analyses non-statutory early help requests centrally. Local agencies report that this new partnership working to support the most vulnerable families is more effective because of increased clarity in the referral process and central monitoring of impact. Regular information-sharing meetings take place between partner agencies, resulting in programmes of help closely tailored to meet families' needs. Centre staff and their partners from other agencies know the families within the reach area well and target their work appropriately.

Users are developing healthy lifestyles because of good advice, and support which promotes healthy living. Participation in provision such as 'Fun with Food' and 'Family Fit' builds parents' and children's knowledge. They enjoy these sessions, and are confident that the advice they are given has enabled them to have a better understanding of healthy eating. Partnerships with health professionals help ensure that families improve their health and well-being. However, health services do not always share information in a timely manner, or collate it specifically for the reach area, in order for themselves and the centre to monitor the full impact of its services. Available data indicate that the numbers of mothers that breastfeed their babies for at least six to eight weeks is low across the authority.

The centre demonstrates a good capacity for sustained improvement. Good outcomes are achieved because leaders, staff and users constantly monitor the impact of services and identify how they can be improved. Self-assessment is based on the analysis of outcomes and leads to improving provision and outcomes. Careful analysis of the results on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile has resulted in highly-effective, targeted support improving outcomes in identified areas of children's learning. The centre actively seeks and welcomes the views of users and the wider community and uses them to improve services. Children are involved in evaluation and the centre meaningfully involves parents and carers in shaping the services of the future through the advisory board and parents' forum. The positive contribution of users and their engagement in developing the centre is good. The centre provides good value for money.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of users, particularly men, gaining qualifications and/or progressing to further education, training or employment in order to improve the economic well-being of more families in the reach area.
- The local health authority should ensure that the centre has access to timely, local data on the impact of services on health outcomes in order for leaders and the advisory board to monitor all provision effectively.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The children's centre is a safe and secure environment where children's safety and well-being are given a high priority. An effective multi-agency 'team around the family' approach ensures that those subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework process are well-supported and as a result their progress is good. Children, parents and carers develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and reduce risk. Parents and carers talk positively about how the on-going support, information and equipment from the centre have helped them to think about child safety in and around the home. Family support workers provide good support to those families who may be vulnerable due to their circumstances. The centre provides successful courses including 'First Aid', 'Nurturing' and the 'Triple P' parenting course, which are all well-attended and as a result, parents improve their parenting skills. One user said, 'I did the first aid course. It covers important information, such as what to do if your child chokes. The teaching was really good and it was put across in such a way I remembered it all.'

Through a good range of play and development opportunities, parents and carers are learning how to support their children's learning. Outcomes for children from the identified key target groups are good. Attendance at day care and crèche provision leads to good outcomes for children. Children make good progress from their very low starting points in developing the skills that will help them in the future and their behaviour is good. Parents

and children treat each other with respect. Adult learning courses are improving outcomes for some families that take the good opportunities provided and is leading to some positive progressions in further education or employment. 'I have gained so much confidence; I would be lost without the centre' said one parent. However, the centre recognises that unemployment in the area remains high and that some families, particularly men, are not accessing the opportunities it provides to help improve their economic well-being.

Centre users are encouraged to participate in the decision-making of the centre. They make a good contribution through governance to the direction of the centre. The centre routinely listens and uses their feedback to shape and develop its services.

The centre promotes health and well-being through its range of services and effective partnerships with health services. As a result, health outcomes for families are improving. Obesity rates for children in Reception Year are reducing and the emotional health of mothers is improved through a targeted yoga group. The centre is effectively promoting oral hygiene as it recognises that dental health is a key issue in the area. Attendance at ante-natal and baby clinics is good. However, the centre and the health authority are working together to improve the low attendance at one-year-old and two-year-old health checks. Although, the centre provides good breastfeeding support, the number of babies in the area that are breastfed beyond six to eight weeks is low across Halton.

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	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre's good knowledge and understanding of the community it serves leads to the delivery of good quality provision. Staff demonstrate a good commitment to improving the life chances of children, parents and carers. Training, courses and progression routes are carefully planned based on the assessment of individual needs. The building is well-equipped to provide adult learning courses, activities for users, some health services, a crèche and day care for children. The centre is proactive in its approach to working with community organisations in order to enhance the provision. Good relationships with partners

mean that services are coordinated effectively in order to reach more users and to avoid duplication. This ensures that there is a good balance of universal and targeted services to meet the needs of the community. One parent told inspectors, 'My child loves it in the crèche. After I finish my maths and Level 1 childcare course, I am going to take the Level 2 childcare qualification so I can get a job.'

Staff use information about children's starting points to plan their learning and measure their progress effectively. This is having a good impact on improving educational outcomes and narrowing the gap between those who achieve and those who do not. Parents and carers are encouraged to support their children through such activities as 'Playdays' 'Sticky Fingers' and 'Movers and Shakers'. The 'Positive Play' group is enjoyed by children and provides well-targeted learning and development opportunities. The loan of camping equipment to families, in order that they can take a holiday, extends the opportunity for parents to play with their children.

The effectiveness of the centre's approach to care, guidance and support is clearly demonstrated in the improving outcomes for families. Strong partnership working by centre staff and IWST results in effective support for families. Parents and carers comment that the centre has made a big difference to their lives. Typical comments were, 'The support from the centre has been a Godsend. They treat you as a person and you feel valued. You are not judged but listened to, even if you are having a bad day.' Family support workers are successful in engaging and working with families through home visits which includes the one-to-one delivery of parenting programmes for some families. Staff appropriately assess need, provide on-going support and refer to other services. Good relationships enable families to approach the centre with confidence, particularly during times of crisis.

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

The centre leader and staff team demonstrate a clear vision of inclusion and a good understanding of and commitment to the success of this children's centre. This leads to good outcomes for users. Governance, leadership and management are good. Accountability arrangements are clear and understood. The head of centre communicates high expectations and ambitions to staff, who drive forward and improve services for families. The local authority provides a range of data and information on the centre's priorities and how well it is meeting them. The centre uses data to plan and evaluate the delivery and impact of its services and to set measurable targets for improvement. However, data from the health authority are not collected specifically for the centre's reach area and are not always provided in a timely manner. The centre seeks and welcomes the views of all families

and uses them to develop the provision. The advisory board, which oversees the work of this and three other centres, is improving its ability to monitor the specific work of this centre.

The inclusion of all families and children is good and promoted in all aspects of the centre’s provision to ensure that their diverse needs are supported and barriers to access are removed. The centre is effective in engaging with its key target groups and makes a good contribution to community cohesion. The inclusion of children and adults with learning difficulties or disabilities is successful. One parent said: ‘I really appreciate the help I have had to give me the skills to make changes to my life and home circumstances. You can discuss any problems with the staff here.’

Professionals from a range of agencies consider that the children’s centre makes a good commitment to partnership working and to improving the life chances of children and families within the area. Safeguarding arrangements are good. The centre is effective in ensuring that children and families are safe through good attention to child protection, vetting and recruitment procedures. As a result, the progress and outcomes of looked-after children, children in need or those on child protection plans are good. Early identification and intervention through IWST and the centre are having a positive impact on children’s safety and well-being. Resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community. Families using the centre state that provision and support are good and make a strong contribution to their improved outcomes. As a result, services of the centre are used well and engage the majority of families in target groups. The centre, therefore, provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	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.	2

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Halton Lodge Children's Centre on 17 and 18 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you very much for talking to us and letting us come into your sessions. The information you gave and the stories you shared with us helped us to make our judgements. Many of you talked about your involvement with the centre and how it has helped you and your children. You told us how the children's centre has supported you to improve your lives and how you now have more confidence. It was clear that you are proud of your achievements. You told us how it has become easier to ask for help and support because of the friendly welcome and good-quality relationships that you develop. You also told us about the friends you have met and the things you have learnt as a result of your involvement in the centre's activities.

It is clear that you feel welcome at the children's centre. We found out that many of you have learnt new things and developed new skills, and some of you gain qualifications, go on to further training, volunteering or find work. Many of you said how the involvement with the centre is improving your lives and the lives of your children, and how much you appreciate the support and encouragement staff give you. The centre is successful at engaging with the majority of local families that really need some support but they still need to find ways of engaging with the men from local families so they can help improve their families' economic well-being.

We found that staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures and that they are well-trained. You said that you feel your children are safe at the centre and that advice from the centre helps you stay safe at home.

You enjoy the sessions with your children such as 'Sticky Fingers' and 'Playdays' and you have lots of fun and get fit in 'Movers and Shakers'. Those parents with children in day care or those who use the crèche when they are on courses, value the good care their children receive. We found that children benefit from accessing services at the centre and make good progress from their starting points. The centre works well with the adult education

service to give you access to courses to help improve your own education and future employment opportunities. Some of you gain qualifications, but too few men access the courses, gain qualifications or employment.

Your children behave well and you learn more about how to stay healthy. However, the health authority does not provide timely information to the centre on the local impact of its work. We have asked the health authority to improve this. The centre listens to you and asks you what you think of the services and activities they offer. They change how and when they do some things because of what you say. Some of you are involved in making decisions about your centre through being on the parents' forum or the advisory board and are involved in strategic decisions.

We found that the manager and staff are keen to promote equality and diversity. Many of the families with the greatest needs are enjoying sessions to help them and their children. The centre works well for everyone in the community, irrespective of their background or disability, and in doing so it contributes well to community cohesion. Families treat each other with respect.

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