

Inspection report for Heckmondwike Children's Centre

Local authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	406948
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Leeside Community Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Counting House 311432 White Lee Playgroup 311339 Barnardos KKDB Nursery EY371128 Salvation Army Play Group 311338

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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 one Early Years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with the chair of the advisory board, headteachers, representatives from the local authority and parents.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and the centre's equality and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Heckmondwike Children's Centre is situated in Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire. It was established in September 2008 under Phase 2 of the children's centre development programme, and became operational in December 2009. The centre is situated in Leaside Primary school. It has a second base which is situated in Barnardos Kirklees Khandaani Dhek Bhal (KKDB). Childcare provision is provided by The Counting House private day nursery, Barnardos KKDB Nursery, Salvation Army Play Group and White Lee Playgroup. The linked provisions were subject to separate inspection arrangements and were last inspected in November 2008, March 2012 and June 2010. The reports of these inspections are available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. Early Years services are also provided by private and voluntary Early Years organisations in the local area.

There are approximately 1068 children under five years of age living in the reach area. The centre serves the Heckmondwike ward. The communities covered are ranked amongst the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The main social issues affecting these areas are a high percentage of worklessness and the number of families living on benefits. Qualifications achieved are lower than the national average, as are the wages paid for those in

employment. Families face a range of challenges in the local area including children entering school overweight, pockets of domestic abuse and adults feeling isolated.

The centre offers the full core purpose. Family support, parenting programmes and Early Years advice are offered by a multi-disciplinary team based at the centre and also through outreach, group and home-visiting programmes. The majority of families is of White British and South Asian heritage. The reach area is characterised by a mix of private, private rented and social housing. Data show that most children in the reach area enter Early Years provision with a range of experiences and skills expected for their age. The centre takes referrals from a range of professionals and supports families with children in four local schools. Health services are offered by Local Community Partnerships and Mid-Yorkshire Hospitals National Health Service Trust.

Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority. A range of professionals is represented on the advisory board that supports the governance and direction of the centre. These include health, headteachers, voluntary organisations, psychological services, local councillors from the Heckmondwike ward, Jobcentre Plus, Safer Stronger Communities and Moneywise. Parents also sit on the advisory board.

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

The overall effectiveness of the centre is good because of the skilful leadership and governance of the centre. The centre is relatively new in comparison with other centres in the local authority. From the onset, staff set out to engage families from all the communities that live in the area. In addition, the aim was to establish strong partnerships that would help families improve their lifestyles and life chances. It has achieved this. Through concerted efforts made by centre staff and key partners, data show that the numbers of families who are registering and engaging with centre activities, particularly those families with circumstances that make them more vulnerable, are increasing month by month. This demonstrates good capacity for sustained improvement.

Everyone involved is passionate about children and families and determined to make a difference. Leaders have set ambitious targets to improve families' life chances. However, some aims lack clear, measurable outcomes. The highly effective parents' forum, with the support of centre staff, raised funds to ensure that everyone could attend the summer activities and enjoy the outdoor experiences these trips offer. The centre promotes good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles. A real success has been the drive to encourage new mothers to sustain breastfeeding which has already resulted in 46% of women in the community breastfeeding their babies. Building on this success, the centre is now encouraging more mothers to stop smoking during pregnancy and helping parents and their children look closely at what and how much they eat to reduce some high levels of obesity in the area.

Exemplary partnership working is a key factor in the success of the centre. Everyone is determined to provide the best services they can for families and works across professional boundaries to ensure this happens. A multi-agency approach was seen in all aspects of the centre's work. All activities, whether targeted or universal, are purposeful, with increasing clarity about their expected outcomes. This has had a good impact on the range of services offered in the centre, which are regularly reviewed and refreshed. While some adults are gaining the skills they need to enter the workplace, there are limited opportunities for adults to learn basic skills in activities such as literacy and numeracy.

The commitment to reaching the most excluded is supported by high levels of flexibility and by rigorous cross-agency identification of those in the greatest need. As a result, all families known to the centre receive exceptional support and advice, particularly families in crisis situations. The children's centre community fully reflects the make-up of the reach area, where every opportunity is taken to increase understanding of different cultures and backgrounds, and to celebrate diversity. Safeguarding is at the heart of everything the centre does. Systems are good and policies and procedures are understood and implemented by everyone in the centre. The learning and progress of children who use centre activities is good. The centre manager and her staff team strongly feel that children in the reach area deserve the best start in life and the best quality early learning experiences. They ensure that this happens. As a consequence, the majority of children is now entering schools with skills and knowledge equal to those of their peers from similar backgrounds.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Add clarity to the development plan by including specific targets and timescales linked to available data for all vulnerable groups.
- Improve outcomes and the economic well-being of all families by:
 - increasing adults' chances of future employment through access to training and qualifications.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

A good variety of services to improve the health of families is underpinned by excellent partnership working with health visitors and midwives. Beginning at the antenatal stage, there is a busy midwife service where many parents first become aware of the centre and what it has to offer. Families then move on to access a good range of support around improving health and well-being. Breastfeeding is actively supported. 'The support from this centre has helped me to continue breastfeeding,' is a recurring comment from parents. Data in the centre's reach area show that smoking at delivery for expectant mothers is an issue in the area. However, the centre has been proactive, holding smoking cessation appointments in the centre which lead to improved results for those who access the service. Parents make the most of a good range of activities helping them lead healthy lifestyles, such as 'Cook and Eat' where parents learn the benefits of healthy eating and how to cook cheaper and healthier food options. While some children in the area are entering school obese, data show that this number is decreasing year on year. The importance of exercise is highlighted through sessions provided by the centre, and parents are actively involved in working with the centre to develop a new local park which is due to open in the near future.

Parents are safe in the centre. Typical comments are, 'I felt alone and isolated before coming here' and 'we can talk to the staff about anything, they are always here for us.' Parents are learning how to keep their children safe by attending 'First Aid' and through home-safety checks. A clear referral system, alongside well-embedded partnership practices with social services, means support for families with circumstances that make them vulnerable is good. Where families need specific support, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used effectively to identify their needs. Due to this work, there is good evidence of improved outcomes for children subject to a child protection plan.

Structured parenting programmes are raising self-esteem and improving parents' confidence in managing their child's behaviour appropriately. Parents say they are able to discuss any problems in a friendly atmosphere. There are excellent opportunities for parents to be involved in the centre at all levels, including as members of the advisory board. For example, the parents' forum designed the summer activity programme, and helped to raise over £2000 to develop a gardening project in the area. For those who wish to do so, there is

encouragement and support to become volunteers in the centre. While a good range of activities is provided, including non-vocational activities such as sewing and henna painting, insufficient attention is given in the activity programme to help adults improve their literacy and numeracy skills, gain qualifications and get back into work. Many parents appreciate the help they have been given by debt advisors to improve their economic well-being. As one parent put it, 'the extra money we have coming in helps me to do a proper shop and give my children little treats each week.'

Through 'Stay and Play' sessions parents learn useful skills and activities they can try out at home to support their child's learning. In addition, children's natural curiosity was supported when they handled household and kitchen items during 'Let's Play 2'. Through this activity, parents learn that everyday items found in the home can help their children make enjoyable discoveries. For example, children were seen fitting items together, stacking and knocking down a wide range of materials. Parents also saw how, by playing this way, their children were occupied for surprising stretches of time.

Data show that the achievement gap between the lowest-achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest has narrowed overall across the area from 35% in 2009 to 33% in 2011. Data also show that 56% of children in the area achieved the expected rate of progress by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, which is above the national average of 54% for children living in similar circumstances.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
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.	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre ensures that a wide range of information about many aspects of parenting, including advice about how to keep children healthy and safe, is freely available to parents. Outreach is a vital and very successful part of the centre's work, and its involvement in the community. The centre successfully ensures that families benefit from a co-ordinated approach and, for those who cannot attend the centre, joint home visits are made to provide support and encourage engagement with other services. The centre team works

very closely with all their partners to ensure that everyone's needs are met. The centre staff, health partners and local headteachers in particular, fully understand the challenges facing the community.

Children make good progress from their starting points through attending centre activities. This is a significant achievement for the centre and clearly shows the impact on children, who can be seen demonstrating an enthusiasm for learning, building up their social skills and preparing them for the future. Children enjoy sessions; the achievement of both children and adults is well-celebrated. Childminders provide good quality childcare places and are supported by the centre to improve their practice and join in with centre activities. This has led to strong partnerships with private and voluntary Early Years settings in the area.

The personal testimony of families who receive support from the centre demonstrates that when support and care are most needed, the response from the centre is outstanding. In times of diminishing budgets, the centre uses its resources well to respond to families in crisis. Multi-agency work is extremely effective in providing support for users at the time they most need it.

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.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance is effective and offers a clear challenge to the centre manager. The advisory board is well-established and has five parents who are part of the membership, including one parent in the role of chairperson. A lively parents' forum feeds into this. The advisory board itself has a good understanding of its role, not only in supporting and challenging the centre leadership, but also in suggesting possible future initiatives and directions for development. Resources, including staffing, are well-deployed to ensure that delivery of services is as effective as possible. The budget is carefully deployed and focuses support where it is needed most. As a result, the centre is giving good value for money.

The centre's improvement plan has clearly identified priorities and actions. However, not all are specific or clearly focused on how improved outcomes will be achieved. The local authority is instrumental in supervising the centre's operation, providing challenges through regular meetings and a formal annual conversation. Staff feel valued and are able to develop their own professional expertise through a wide range of training opportunities.

Regular partnership meetings ensure that all partners and staff are aware of what is happening in the area to prevent duplication. Professional partnerships are the thread through which everything is done at the centre. Safeguarding policies and practices ensure good systems for, and awareness of, safeguarding throughout the centre. Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out for all who work or volunteer there. Recruitment procedures are led by the local authority and are rigorous. Risk assessments are good and the lone working policy and procedures ensure that staff are safe when visiting families on their own. Families are informed of the importance of safeguarding when they start at the centre and there are colourful notices around the centre to explain what they should do if they have any concerns.

Inclusion is totally at the heart of the centre's work. This is epitomised by the fact that the centre has been successful in registering and engaging an equal number of families from both the White British and South Asian communities. The parents' forum requested that the summer trip was moved to enable South Asian families who were participating in Ramadan to attend. Careful consideration is given to the design of the centre so that all users can gain full access. Centre staff and partners provide an excellent service for families with disabled children and those who have special educational needs.

User engagement is exceptional. The centre consistently seeks the voice of parents and children through regular questionnaires and surveys. The 'Wish Tree' is used very well and provides an interesting and creative way for parents and children to make suggestions to help shape provision. The centre programme is regularly reviewed with the parents' forum to ensure it continues to engage with changing priorities. Because they have been involved in shaping services, parents feel listened to and this, in turn, raises their confidence in the work of the centre.

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	1
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	1
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.	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 Heckmondwike Children's Centre on 3 and 4 October 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us during the inspection. We spoke with a number of you about the centre's work and looked at the comments you made on feedback sheets and evaluations. We really enjoyed talking to you in your activities and around the centre in the community groups. You expressed your opinions very clearly and they were very helpful to us. We were delighted to hear how helpful and friendly you find all the staff.

Like you, we were greeted with a warm welcome when we arrived and found the staff very communicative and helpful. The centre promotes equality and diversity exceptionally well. Everyone is included, treated with the utmost respect and able to access all that the centre provides. We gathered evidence to confirm that the large majority of you is very satisfied with the service you receive.

Those of you that we spoke to clearly appreciate the excellent guidance and support on offer and gave us many examples of how the centre has helped to change your lives for the better. This caring approach by all the adults working in the centre is reflected in the good safeguarding procedures that help local children and families to live and learn safely. We were particularly impressed by the work of the parents' forum that is not only helping you to have a real voice at the centre, but also their outstanding commitment to helping others in the community.

The centre's Early Years team, local Early Years providers, and particularly the local schools in your area offer a wonderful service to you and your children. You told us how much you appreciate the support they all give you to help you understand how your young children learn and develop. A consequence of this very strong partnership is that most children in your area are now entering school ready and keen to learn. This is a tremendous achievement and one which we are sure you are equally proud of. Whilst many of you told us that you are learning new skills yourself, particularly in understanding how your children learn and develop, we found that there are few opportunities for you to learn skills and gain recognised qualifications that will help you find employment and improve your family's economic stability. We have asked the centre to address this.

Many of you told us how well your centre has supported you in times of crisis. Those of you we spoke to thought very highly of the family support workers. More than one of you told us how family support workers had met you at the door when you first started, to make sure you were supported to attend the centre. We agree that the quality of support provided by the centre is excellent. Centre staff and other professionals, with whom they work closely, care a great deal about you and are fully committed to helping you improve your lives.

Leaders are very ambitious and set clear targets that are based on a good understanding of the needs of the reach area. However, we found that sometimes these targets lack clarity as to how they can be measured and achieved. We have asked the centre to address this.

It was a pleasure to meet some of you during the inspection. We hope that you, your children and many more parents who live locally will continue to enjoy and benefit from all of the services available to you in the future. Thank you for your contribution to the inspection. We are very grateful and wish you every success in the future.

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