

Inspection report for Hindpool Close Children's Centre

Local authority	Hartlepool
Inspection number	21516
Inspection dates	26–27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow HMI

Centre governance	Advisory Board
Centre leader	Sarah Foster-Elsdon
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	St Bega's Roman Catholic Primary School; St Helen's Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Kiddikins; Leap Frogs

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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 two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners; health, education and children's social care professionals and representatives from Job Centre Plus, the Credit Union and the West View Advice and Resource Centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

Hindpool Close children's centre is situated towards the north-east of the town of Hartlepool. It serves a community that is ranked within the top 2% of the most deprived areas in the country. Nearly all local families are of White British heritage. The proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is well above the national average, as is the proportion of children aged under-four who are living in households where no one is working.

The centre opened in 2006 and was developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. It is a purpose-built centre and operates as a 'hub and spoke' model, with Hindpool Close as the hub and St Bega's and St Helen's primary schools providing the two spokes. A multi-agency team which includes health visitors, midwives and speech and language therapists is co-located on the centre's site. The team and centre manager work across the wider, north locality of Hartlepool. This comprises two designated centres and a total of six different sites. The children's centre provides the full 'core

offer' of services. Governance arrangements are currently transferring from a strategic partnership group to an advisory board with a range of members.

Childcare is provided by the private provider Kiddikins, and this setting has recently been subject to its own inspection. Childcare is also available at Leap Frogs. Their inspection reports can be found at www.Ofsted.gov.uk. Early Years Foundation Stage education for children aged three years and over is provided at St Helen's and St Bega's primary schools. Their inspection reports are also available on the Ofsted website. Most children enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than that expected for their age. The proportion of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is above average.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Hindpool Close children's centre provides satisfactory and improving support to children and families and outcomes for them are least satisfactory and sometimes good. Strengths include the impact of actions taken to ensure the safety and well-being of children and their families and the quality of the care, guidance and support offered by all who work with them. The centre's good approach to safeguarding, safe recruitment and child protection is robust and meets statutory requirements. Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare provision is good across the area and children make good progress given their well below average starting points. Although outcomes are still below the national average, there has been significant improvement in the proportion of children achieving expected levels in their combined personal social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy skills. The rate of improvement is much faster than that found nationally.

A range of services successfully work together to support the health, emotional health and well-being of children and families and there is a good focus on reducing health inequalities. For example the centre has exceeded their locality target of helping parents to cease smoking. However, although the under-18 conception rate has slightly reduced across Hartlepool over the past year, it remains high at 65.9%. Support for teenage parents is currently delivered through a town-wide dedicated service. Partnerships between this service and the children's centre are less well developed and thus early opportunities for teenage parents to engage in the good range of activities available in the centre are missed. The centre is aware that more

needs to be done to increase the proportion of mothers breast-feeding their babies. These are both key priorities for Hartlepool's Children's Trust. The recent appointment of a breastfeeding coordinator and the proposed development of peer-support worker networks are aimed at improving matters.

Provision is satisfactory overall. Parents describe the centre as warm and welcoming and say they know that they can trust the staff; who willingly listen and respond to their needs. Effective actions are taken to ensure equality of opportunity and to tackle discrimination. Particularly strong actions are taken to support vulnerable families and children and those who need support in times of acute need or crisis. Families who are referred to the centre are assessed promptly and a good package of multi-agency support secured, when necessary, for both parents and children. The developing outreach services are increasingly supporting more hard to reach families and children. However, managers are aware that more needs to be done to make sure outreach is fully identifying the needs of the whole community, so that the centre can add to the good support already provided to families known to others.

Services are increasingly integrated to good effect, particularly the shared actions taken to support, involve and improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for parents of babies and very young children. These, include training on weaning that also successfully promotes healthy lifestyles, Tweeny tots, Leap Frogs, Baby Yoga and Music, and a range of ante-natal and baby clinics. However, some parents spoken to say that there are fewer opportunities for children between the age of three and school-age, to access interesting activities once they have completed their good childcare sessions in Kiddikins or Leap Frogs.

Since her appointment in September, the children's centre manager, together with the early years and childcare manager, has developed a clear and focused vision to make a real difference to this community, based on their needs and wants. She has successfully embraced the whole team, and partners on this journey to improvement. The whole family is at the heart of what everyone is doing and this is evidenced in the increased range of activities that families, particularly the most vulnerable, can access. Managers are aware that there is still some way to go to ensure all needs are met. For example, through knowing the community well, and having a good understanding of the strengths and gaps in service provision, the centre manager is aware that support for substance-misusing families and those suffering from domestic violence needs to improve. Consequently, following consultation with staff and partners she has developed an action plan that provides a clear agenda for future. The plan has accompanying broad targets for improvement but many of these lack quantitative information to enable the centre and the Children's Trust to fully evaluate the impact of their actions.

Governance arrangements are currently moving from a strategic multi-agency partnership board, Extended Services in North Hartlepool (ESINH), to an advisory board. Members of the board are fully supportive of the work of the centre and meet regularly to monitor what the centre is providing. However, their ability to fully evaluate the impact of the centre's work is limited. This is because the centre does not

yet have systematic and accurate management information that records the full impact of its work; or enables them to set consistently challenging targets for improvement. Actions are in place to remedy this. Nevertheless, the centre evaluates the impact of each activity and individual service provided. This information, combined with a range of evaluations from parents affords the board an effective understanding of the progress the centre is making towards achieving their priorities. In order to increase the involvement and influence of parents in the centre's work, a Parent Forum has been re-established but it has not yet had time to contribute to ongoing developments.

Taking into account the satisfactory outcomes overall, the centre's overall effectiveness is also satisfactory. This together with the leadership's determined focus on improvement, identifying and meeting needs indicates the centre has satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outreach working to make sure all unmet need is identified and where relevant tackled, through multi-agency partnership working.
- Ensure the Children's Trust works with the centre to enable them to better-support the Children and Young People Plan's priorities of increasing breast feeding rates and supporting teen mums.
- Work with partners to widen opportunities available for pre-school children.
- Improve the advisory board's ability to evaluate the impact of the centre's multi-agency work by developing more systematic and accurate management information that records the full impact of their work and helps them to set consistently challenging targets for improvement.
- Ensure the views of parents consistently contribute to the governance of the centre and in determining and shaping services.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Evidence through case studies, discussion with partners and parents indicate the positive impact of partnership working to promote children's and families' emotional well-being and their physical health. This includes the work of health visitors, family support workers and services commissioned by the centre such as Reach Out. For example, effective actions have helped to reduce re-referral rates into Harbour, the commissioned domestic violence unit, and one parent spoke with conviction about how much better a parent she is as a result of her counselling with MIND because of the way it has helped her to deal with her anger. Parents attending a weaning session talked of how these have given them a better understanding of how to be healthy. One parent spoke enthusiastically about how she now buys lots more fruit and vegetables for her children and realises how much cheaper weaning is when you make your own rather than buying jars. Parents and children enjoy trying new tastes such as courgettes, mushrooms, peppers as they make healthy pizzas during Tweeny Tots activity.

Good procedures ensure children are well-safeguarded. Parents say they feel safe in

the centre and have confidence that if there were concerns they would come to the centre as they are trusted. Partnership working with Harbour, health visitors, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA), and local community police officers is helping to successfully raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and in their communities. Good multi-agency support to families referred to the centre in times of acute crisis is helping to minimise the number of children entering care or moving onto the child-protection register.

The extent to which children and young people enjoy and achieve is good. Virtually all settings in the area have been judged good in these aspects following Ofsted inspections. The gap between the lowest 20% of children achieving expected levels in key early learning goals, and that for all children in Hartlepool has narrowed at a much faster rate than that found nationally. Headteachers' spoken to during the inspection testify the positive impact close working with the local parent and toddler and kiddikins as well as the support from the Early Years Foundation Stage coordinator has had in raising aspirations and improving outcomes for young children.

A satisfactory range of activities help parents to support and improve their children's personal, social and emotional development and to build good relationships with them. Parents talk positively about the impact of services on their own parenting skills and their children's progress. A visit to a Baby Yoga and Music session provided compelling evidence of babies and mums bonding well and children developing their play, exploration and communication skills alongside having fun. A group of mums at Tweeny tots all celebrated one child taking his first steps and mums report how much better they feel on days when they have an activity to participate in. They regret that there are few activities for their children aged from three to five.

Behaviour across all settings is good. Children in Kiddikins are well-behaved and relate well to each other. Children's learning journals show the good progress they are making, including in their personal and social development. This is because of the good provision and positive role models of adults. Across the centre's local area, there are examples of some parents being encouraged to develop their own sessions such as the Tweeny Tots group and the recently developed Twins Group. Parents explained just what a great lifeline this had become. While twins play together and enjoy a range of interesting and fun activities, parents talk, laugh and share concerns and tips about coping, and enjoying life with twins. However, the centre manager is aware that opportunities for parents to influence service developments are limited. An action plan in place to improve this.

Through generally good childcare and early year's provision, children are successfully developing skills for the future. However action to help parents into learning, training and employment are no more than satisfactory. Effective partnership working with Jobcentre Plus has resulted in regular individual advice sessions to lone parents within the centre, but this is only one group of parents that could benefit from such good advice. Good partnership with the West View Advice and Resource Centre is enabling parents to successfully access benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled. The local Credit Union also works with families in the centre, although recently their

contribution has been of limited value. However, actions are in place to re-establish a stronger presence in the centre. In order to better-meet the training needs of families, the centre manager is currently in discussions with adult education services to close this already identified gap.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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 users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre meets its core offer satisfactorily. Participation rates in activities provided have been variable but are improving because the centre is making sure that activities are better-meeting the range of needs and interests of the community.

Focused multi-agency children centre panel meetings successfully identify and assess those children and families referred to the centre who need immediate support. Those that do not quite meet children's social care thresholds but who would benefit from additional support are provided with a package of support from appropriate partners. Parents including young dads, testify to the timeliness and quality of individual support, for as long as needed.

Assessment of individual cases is robust and the common assessment framework is successfully ensuring teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families identified as in need. Careful exit strategies are in place to ensure parents can build their confidence, parenting skills, and support them to independence, at a pace that is appropriate to them. Effective partnerships between the health visiting team, police and the local accident and emergency unit ensure any at risk families known to be at risk are quickly identified and then supported.

Good provision from childcare providers and schools is ensuring achievements and aspirations of children are raised. Learning and development in these settings have been judged at least satisfactory and often good. Detailed evaluations from individual parents about the quality of support pay tribute to the difference services' support has made to their own and their children's development, enjoyment and well-being.

Care, guidance and support are good. Sensitive individualised and tailored support is provided to all families and children who access the centre. There is evidence of good multi-agency working which ensures that families can access the right kind of support; be it from MIND, social workers, speech and language therapists, or support and advice on benefits. Outreach work is improving and recent case studies show some positive impact from the work of partners. However, a significant minority of families are still not known to the centre, who consequently do not benefit from all the good work the centre offers. Additionally some town-wide services are yet to fully recognise the good opportunities and support the centre can provide.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Governance arrangements are developing satisfactorily. The centre manager, advisory board and partners have a clear focus on improvement. Priorities within the centre's action plan link effectively to the activities and priorities of the wider locality area. There is a coherent link between the Children's Trust's, Children and Young People's Plan, and the centres action plan. However, accountability arrangements are less clear.

As part of the planning cycle, the centre manager works with staff and partners to identify future priorities. These are based on an accurate evaluation of the strengths and areas for improvement. The centre manager is aware that as yet, the plan does not take enough account of views of parents. She does make sure the views of parents and users are canvassed through detailed evaluations of individual activities and interventions in order to check quality, usefulness and to support improvement. Impact of the work with individual families takes place within panel meetings, case studies and through regular supervision of staff. However, this information is not yet collated into manageable data to measure impact at a more strategic centre level. Whilst the centre's action plan has success criteria, qualitative targets, and reasonable timescales, it has few measurable targets and limited resource information. Consequently this makes evaluation of the impact of the plan difficult. Nevertheless, resources are used effectively to provide a rich, warm and welcoming environment. Robust financial management systems are in place to monitor day-to-day expenditure and delegation of responsibility for resources is at an appropriate level to ensure timely and effective packages of support to families. This ensures satisfactory value for money.

The performance management of staff is robust and although not yet fully integrated

across all services, processes provide for equality of opportunity. For example, there is a strong focus on developing skills of all staff, through high quality training, to deliver inclusive provision and to be sensitive to the needs and views of users. Equality impact assessments are always used when developing new provision and a flexible approach to service delivery means that workers can be sensitive to individual needs. For example the provision of one-to-one support in families' homes, when requested.

Effective partnership working, including that with Headland Futures, is supporting the successful involvement of harder to reach groups such as young fathers, in their children's learning, care and support. It is also helping them to develop fruitful relationships with their children and build their parenting skills, confidence and self-esteem. Partnerships are developing effectively and not least because of the strong commitment of the centre manager to harness the energies of everyone in her quest to reach out and support all families in the area. Whilst partners can often show the qualitative difference their contributions have made to individual interventions with children and families, they are not always able to show their impact quantitatively.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
3The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
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	3

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

There are two private sector childcare settings within the Hindpool Close Children's Centre remit. These are Kiddikins and the Leap Frog playgroup. Two local primary

schools, St Bega's and St Helen's with Early Years Foundation Stage provision for children aged over three years, are also part of the centre's remit. Information from their most recent Ofsted inspections has been taken into account when writing about early years provision and outcomes for children in the report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Hindpool Close Children's Centre on 26 and 27 May 2010. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you and professionals.. Following this work we have judged that the centre provides satisfactory, but improving support to you and your families. Some of the things that the centre is doing well include the activities and actions taken to support yours' and your children's safety and well-being and the good quality of care, guidance and support offered by those staff who work with you. In particular, activities and provision for children in childcare settings and schools are generally good across the area and your children are doing well as a result; especially in regard to making friends and developing speaking, listening and reading skills.

The children's centre offers an increasing number of programmes and activities aimed at improving the health of people in your local community. In particular it has been very successful in helping lots of people to quit smoking. However, the manager knows there is still more work to do to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies as well as increase the number of new mums who choose to breastfeed their babies. The centre is already taking action to improve this in order to benefit you and your family. We found that some partnerships with the children's centre were not working as well as they could and as a result some people living in your community were missing out on opportunities to take part in the good range of activities available. This is also something that the children's centre manager knows and is going to tackle.

Parents who spoke to us all said that your children's centre is a warm and welcoming place, full of staff who they feel they can trust to help and support them. They told us that staff listen to them and then make sure that they get the right advice. We found that the centre was really good at helping people at times in their lives when they most need it. Action is taken quickly and different people and organisations work well as a team, to support both you and your children. However, whilst support is effective when families come to the centre, more needs to be done to ensure all families in the community who do not know about the centre can receive this support, so that they too can benefit from the good support and activities available.

We found services work well together to provide help and support to families where a child has a special educational needs and/or disabilities; and for parents of babies and very young children. In particular activities around weaning, Tweeny tots, Leap Frogs, Baby Yoga and Music and the baby clinics were especially good. Parents we spoke to

said they had enjoyed the weaning courses and were amazed at how much they had learnt about healthy food and how much cheaper it was to make their own baby food, rather than buy jars. A lot of parents, especially those who are bringing up children on their own, told us that they felt really happy on the days when they have an activity to go to. The recently developed Twins Group has quickly become a great success and highly valued. However, some parents we spoke to said that there were few opportunities for their older children who attend nursery, and that they would appreciate some more activities to go to in the afternoons.

People in charge of the children's centre are doing a satisfactory and improving job. The children's centre manager is working hard to make sure that everything the centre provides will make a difference to the area in which you live. She has made sure everyone who works with the centre share this commitment and we heard lots of examples from you about how they are making a real difference to your lives. The whole family is at the heart of the centre's work and this is seen in the increasing range of activities on offer and the greater number of you who attend them. Managers know there is still more to do if they are to really get to know the needs of your community, and we have asked them to make this a priority. They have already developed plans to show how they will do this.

The centre has recently changed the way in which decisions are made about its future work and the different services it provides. However, the ability of this group to properly understand how well the centre is doing in improving the lives of you and your family is limited. This is because the centre does not yet have effective systems in place to monitor this. We have asked the centre to make sure actions are in place to improve this. We know the centre is good at asking you to tell them how you have found all the activities and services which you go to, through questionnaires and evaluations. However, the centre knows it needs to increase both your involvement and your ability to influence what is offered. A Parent Forum has been re-established to tackle this but numbers attending are currently quite low. We hope that this is something you might be interested in becoming a part of.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us, we are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

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