

# Inspection report for Canberra Children's Centre

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| <b>Local authority</b>     | Wiltshire       |
| <b>Inspection number</b>   | 384060          |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>    | 7—8 March 2012  |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b> | Nigel Evans HMI |

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| <b>Centre leader</b>               | Trixie Lewis                               |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b> | Not applicable                             |
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| <b>Linked school if applicable</b>                     | Not applicable   |
| <b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b> | Queensway Chapel Pre-School<br>King's Park Children's Centre |

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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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents and carers, prospective parents and carers and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents and carers, prospective parents and carers 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 centre staff, parents, representatives from professional staff and advisory boards and the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Canberra Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre designated in 2006. It offers a full range of services which include health services, parenting sessions, family play, financial advice and outreach services. The centre is situated in Melksham, where an increasing number of families are dependent on workless benefits or on low incomes. A hostel providing temporary accommodation is part of the area served by the centre. The population is mostly White British with few families from minority groups or with English as an additional language. Since April 2011 the centre has been managed on behalf of Wiltshire Council by '4Children', a national charity for children and families. An advisory group meets bi-monthly and includes a parent representative.

The centre has two multi-purpose rooms in which to run activities, a sensory room and secure outdoor areas attached to the activity rooms. Most sessions take place at the children's centre with one weekly session taking place at the Kingsbury Square temporary accommodation hostel. The building is fully accessible to children and disabled people.

The centre is linked to one other children's centre and a nursery. The current centre coordinator took over the running of the centre in November 2011. In addition to the centre coordinator, staff include one full-time outreach worker and two part-time support workers; session workers lead groups as required. There are currently 630 children under five years old in the reach area. The range of children's levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is very wide. However, many children from

the areas of greatest deprivation have communication, language, literacy, numeracy and social skills which are well below expected levels. Early years and childcare provision is provided by Queensway Chapel Pre-school; this setting was inspected in January 2012.

## 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

Canberra Children's Centre has experienced three different contract holders and moved premises since it first opened in 2006; the current manager has been in post since November 2011. Despite the significant changes and disruptions, the centre is delivering satisfactory provision for families and children. Over three quarters of the children in the reach area are now registered with the centre and engagement with families in the most deprived areas continues to improve. Additionally, of the 12 disabled children and/or those who have special needs known to the local authority five are registered with the centre.

The partnership work with other agencies and organisations is a strength of this service and this is beginning to have a positive influence on the lives of families. The promotion of learning and development is increasingly becoming more effective and the strong focus on employment is encouraging parents to think about their long-term prospects.

Since April 2011, when 4Children started to manage the centre, staff have worked hard to develop positive relations with the local community. The increased involvement in wider town activities, for example the local food fair, has raised the profile of the centre and contributed to greater use of the resources and the services offered. Children and families feel safe when they use the centre because the high priority given to safety is reinforced during sessions, through posters and displays and through the outreach work. Services for vulnerable families are improving as is the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to access services and support, for example funding some two-year-olds for high quality childcare. Support from the early years advisory teacher and the use of the Every Child a Talker programme is beginning to narrow the achievement gap in the areas of social communication, language and literacy. All of this shows that the centre has

satisfactory capacity to sustain improvement.

The centre's leaders and staff know their provision and local communities well and have a good understanding of the difference it makes to the lives of children and families in the target groups. However, the formal evaluations of the overall work of the centre and activities with small groups or individuals are too general and descriptive and do not clearly lead to improvements in the provision. There is too little focus on what individuals have achieved and significant milestones in children's development are not recorded well.

Parents and other adults are becoming increasingly engaged with the centre. Their views on the quality of the service and where improvements are needed are actively sought. The initiative to increase the number of volunteers supporting the centre is generating interest and staff are working well to encourage further involvement with the running of the centre.

Staff have a good range of experiences and qualifications, and promotion of and support for further professional development is strong. Good use is made of the expertise and skills of key partners, particularly health professionals, to provide specialist support, advice and guidance.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve assessments of the needs of children and their families in order to plan clear, achievable, outcome based targets.
- Use observations and assessments to track children's progress towards early learning goals and demonstrate the effectiveness of the children's centre in improving outcomes for children.
- Make more effective use of available data, information and self-evaluation to set a standard for current performance, improve the targeting of provision for those in greatest need and establish a baseline for families so progress can be measured.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

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|----------|
| <b>3</b> |
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Parents develop a satisfactory understanding of how to develop a healthier lifestyle for their families. The new Snappy Snacks sessions promote healthy eating options in a fun and engaging way. The good range of indoor and outdoor toys and apparatus provides good opportunities for centre staff to encourage parents to play creatively with their children and broaden the range of activities offered at home. The weekly child health clinics are very well attended with health and centre staff working well together to support families. In particular the identification of and support for mothers experiencing or at risk of post-natal depression is effective. The proportion of mothers who breastfeed in the reach area is low, particularly in the areas of greatest deprivation.

Children and families attending the centre respond well to the good reinforcement of working safely which is promoted throughout. Children behave well and inappropriate or unsafe behaviour is challenged appropriately. Families and children using the centre say they feel safe and know what to do if they have concerns about their own or their family's safety. Simple practical guidance reduces risks at home. One parent described how simple advice on managing bath time has reduced stress in the family and made the activity fun and far more manageable. The use of and involvement with the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and pre-CAF process is satisfactory and bringing together relevant agencies to support children and families. Risk assessments are thorough and where a potential risk is identified action is taken, for example, work is planned to reduce the speed of cars entering the shared car park. Outreach work is increasing parents' awareness of dangers in the home, although the resulting practical steps taken by families are not always recorded. The links with the local police are very strong and parents value this close contact. The partnership with the Kingsbury Square temporary accommodation is good and focuses on safety and providing positive experiences for children and families.

Valuable work, particularly from those involved in the Every Child a Talker programme, is beginning to improve language development and reduce the number of children starting school with poor listening, understanding, talking and social communication skills. Where this is most successful, parents have incorporated the principals into their routine activities with their children, although this is not always clearly recorded. The centre provides many activities that promote satisfactory learning and development but the link between the activities and the Early Years Foundation Stage is not evident, consequently parents do not always recognise the progress their children make and their contribution to that progress. The learning journals and case studies record the activities undertaken but do not always record the significant developments made by the child or show clearly how learning is further developed and sustained at home. Centre staff have been successful in obtaining funding to enable two-year-old children, who meet the criteria, to access free childcare at quality settings, improving many aspects of the child's development.

Parents are becoming increasingly confident in contributing to the running and development of the centre. They are aware of how to make their opinions and suggestions for improvements known and feel their views are valued, taken seriously and, where possible, acted upon. The strategy to increase the number of volunteers involved in running the centre is beginning to motivate other parents to become involved and enable staff to spend more time with children. The centre is considering the best way to develop an effective and inclusive parents' forum. Children are confident and at ease around the centre, they have very positive relationships with staff and respond well to interactions with adults and other children.

Good and productive links are developing with external learning providers. Although this development is at an early stage, an increasing number of parents are expressing an interest in taking up learning opportunities. One parent has started a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in customer service. The member of staff

who leads the employment developments across the 16 children's centres run by 4Children in Wiltshire is actively promoting and reinforcing the value of training and employment. Centre staff provide good encouragement to motivate parents to investigate all possible options that will improve their employment prospects. A new partnership with one training provider enables the centre to have access to support from the Family Action Plan; although this is a new development early indications are positive.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families.

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| <b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>   | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>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</b>          | <b>3</b> |
| <b>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</b> | <b>3</b> |

## How good is the provision?

**3**

Centre staff have a good understanding of how best to improve the lives of families in the reach area. The assessment process is increasingly effective in clearly identifying the needs of parents and which targeted service will improve outcomes for the family. However, this is less clearly recorded for children. The outreach worker is using a good self-assessment tool with parents which enables them to identify where they most need support. Managers are beginning to analyse local authority information more effectively and set performance goals to engage with the targeted groups and make best use of available resources.

The centre works well with other health, social care and education professionals to assess and support the needs of children. Throughout the centre the wide range of appropriate and relevant information displayed alerts parents to sources of information and guidance on a good range of topics, including health, finance, domestic abuse, smoking, and drug and alcohol abuse. Family support and outreach workers provide good individual support informally and at times of crisis, they know when to make use of other specialist organisations for advice and support and access to these services is generally good. Following some difficulties in the provision when the children's centre moved premises, trust and confidence between the centre and the local community are being rebuilt, increasing the use of the centre and improving access to additional specialist services.

Involvement with and attendance at the centre are improving and are satisfactory. However, the take-up of courses offered varies and attendance on some courses fluctuates. The centre has suitable plans to introduce a new customer care system which will provide the centre with better information about the type of provision families in the reach area want and the lasting impact on families of the service as children progress.

These are the grades for the quality of provision.

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| <b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>      | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b> | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>   | <b>3</b> |

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

During the short period that 4Children have managed the children's centre they have strengthened the staff team, raised staff morale and improved relations with the local community. There is a clear vision for raising standards and improving outcomes for families and children. The leadership team is dedicated and enthusiastic and has high aspirations to deliver a good quality service. The good range of appropriate skills of the advisory board support the work of the centre well, although the reports they receive do not always enable board members to fully challenge and scrutinise the work of the centre.

Although leaders and managers know most of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement, these are not always clearly reflected in the self-evaluation. The self-evaluation is inclusive and takes account of families and centre partners but it does not always sufficiently assess current performance or make links with the centre development plan.

The use and management of resources to meet the needs of children and families is satisfactory. The environment is bright and welcoming for families. Equipment and learning resources are of a high quality, well maintained and used well to stimulate children. Outdoor areas are safe and provide good opportunities for children to play in the open air, although these were not used at the time of inspection. Staffing appears adequate although the only support worker with an early years qualification was also used as an administrator while the administrator ran sessions for parents and children, although these staff do not work in the centre at the same time.

Centre staff have a strong commitment to promoting equality and diversity and work hard to ensure the service is inclusive and welcoming. The achievement gap for children starting school is beginning to narrow as communication, literacy and



language improve. The centre will provide a crèche when some training activities are offered to enable parents to attend. The support for families with disabled children is good. The centre's support for fathers has increased the participation by men and raised the profile of fathers and other male carers within the centre.

The safeguarding of children, families and staff is good. Staff recruitment practices are thorough, robust and reflect current recommended practice. All necessary checks are undertaken and the single central register includes the start date of employment and the level and date of the most recent safeguarding training. The profile of safeguarding is high throughout the centre. Potential causes for concern are recorded and the information shared with relevant staff. Cooperation with other agencies is good, information is shared appropriately and quickly to ensure interventions are not delayed and children are not put at risk.

Partnerships with key organisations are improving the opportunities for families. The county wide member of staff responsible for employment works particularly effectively with Jobcentre Plus and learning providers to ensure job vacancies and training opportunities are promoted well. All partners speak highly of the work of the centre and are keen for the partnership work to become more extensive.

The centre welcomes and encourages views from families. The formal collection and effective use of these views are at an early stage and do not sufficiently encourage parents to reflect on the impact of the centre's work on outcomes for themselves and their children. Evaluations of sessions and other activities are in place and are beginning to be used more effectively to improve quality although too many evaluations are descriptive and do not clearly identify improvements necessary.

These are the grades for leadership and management.

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| <b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>                     | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>  | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>               | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b> | <b>3</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>            | <b>2</b> |
| <b>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</b> | <b>2</b> |

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| <b>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</b> | <b>3</b> |
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## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection**

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance, *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Canberra Children's Centre on 7 and 8 March 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall with some key strengths.

Thank you to those of you who came to speak to inspectors. We enjoyed talking to you and found your comments very helpful. Your children's centre is a welcoming place and provides you and your children with good facilities. Over the past year staff have worked hard to build a positive relationship with you and others in the local community. The groups run by the centre encourage children to be healthy, to have fun playing and learning and to cooperate with each other. They give you advice on the best way to prepare healthy meals for your children, to stimulate them at home and how to keep them safe. Children's learning and development are improved by attending the centre. However, their progress towards the early learning goals is not always tracked well so we have asked the centre to improve this.

You told us that you enjoy coming to the centre and in particular letting your children take part in messy activities and discovering new ways to help them learn. Your children behave well at the centre and benefit from playing with other children and from using the good quality toys and other resources. Staff understand your needs well and are very good at providing individual support and advice if you need them. You told us how much you value their support and guidance and how this has made a difference to your lives. The outreach and family support workers help families who are dealing with difficult circumstances.

The centre is working well with other professionals. The joint working with health visitors is encouraging more people to use the centre and the partnership with local learning organisations, nextstep advisors and with Jobcentre Plus is giving you confidence to gain qualifications and, for those of you who are ready, helping you to find suitable employment.

Centre staff are keen to find out your views on how the centre can be improved and what other activities should be offered; they are eager for to be more involved in the running of the centre. Volunteers are encouraged to help at the centre and this is helping some of you develop new skills and become more confident. The centre could make better use of the information it has about the local community and those who use the centre to improve the planning of activities and how to make best use of available staff. We have asked the centre to action this.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).