

# Inspection report for Cannock Chase Children's Centre

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Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	362452
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Centre governance	Local authority
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Cannock Chase Children's Centre Nursery
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Cannock Chase Children's Centre Childcare

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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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

An inspection of the maintained nursery 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's manager and staff, three members of the management advisory board, various professionals who work in partnership with the centre, parents and users of the centre, and a representative from the local authority.

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

## Information about the centre

Cannock Chase Children's Centre is a phase one children's centre which opened in June 2003 to provide the full core offer. The head of centre is answerable to the local authority for the running of the centre. The centre receives the advice and guidance of a management advisory board. The head of the centre is due to retire in December 2010 and the local authority is considering options for the future leadership of the centre.

The head of centre has overall responsibility for the children's centre, the nursery school and the day-care provision which are all located in the same building and operate as a tightly integrated unit offering a full range of services. These include day-care provision for children up to the age of five, nursery provision for three and four-year-olds, various stay-and-play sessions for parents and their children, and a wide and varying range of groups, meetings and one-to-one sessions to meet the

needs of users. Some of the centre's services take place at different locations within and just outside the centre's reach area, the boundaries of which have changed during the last year.

Much of the catchment lies in areas of significant deprivation where there are problems related to health, lone and teenage parents, education, low incomes and poor housing. The level of unemployment and the proportion of families on benefits are above the national average. The great majority of the catchment area is White British with a low, but increasing, proportion of families from minority ethnic backgrounds. Most children's development on entry to early years provision is below expected levels for their age.

## Inspection judgements

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

### Overall effectiveness

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

**1**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**1**

## Main findings

Cannock Chase Children’s Centre provides an outstanding, fully integrated service for the young children, parents, carers and families who live within and just beyond its reach area. Parents greatly appreciate that so many facilities are available to them under one roof, from the outstanding day-care facilities for children up to the age of five and the outstanding nursery provision, to a very wide range of courses and activities for parents and the availability of many other professionals who provide advice and support. Those who live further away from the centre value the efforts made by the centre’s staff to offer stay and play sessions and other courses at various locations. The quality of what the centre offers is reflected in the high uptake of courses and the large numbers of users who seek advice from the services that work in cooperation with the centre, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

At the heart of the centre is a relentless drive by the head of centre and her leadership team to provide the very best possible facilities and opportunities for children and their families. This is reflected in the vibrant, attractive displays of children’s work, artefacts and resources, and in the celebratory photos of children enjoying learning and adults receiving awards. It is also measured by the truly outstanding level of partnership with other organisations and professionals who work so closely with the centre, share information with each other and really enhance each other’s work. The maintenance of the highest standards over many years, the determination to continue improving, and the passion and commitment of the centre’s staff indicate an excellent capacity to sustain these high standards. This capacity is not diminished by the imminent retirement of the head of centre or the lack of clarity in governance. This is because senior managers have clearly delegated roles and responsibilities which they carry out with a high degree of professionalism, and the day-to-day management of the centre is excellent. These factors override some confusion between the role of the management advisory board, which only meets once a term and whose remit is not entirely clear, and that of the local authority, which maintains accountability for, but not day-to-day, oversight of the centre.

The centre has an excellent understanding of the needs of its community. This stems from excellent levels of communication received from midwives, health visitors and other professionals, and information gained from the visits which the centre's outreach workers make to every family at six months and then two years after a child is born. These visits help to identify where families have additional needs and enable the centre's staff to identify courses and activities which will meet the most pressing needs within the reach area. This approach also demonstrates an unerring commitment to true equality of opportunity, with every family in the area benefiting from the centre's services, while those with particular needs are signposted to other professionals or to further options which are available at the centre.

The range of services delivered by or on behalf of the centre is excellent and results in outstanding outcomes as children and their families deepen their understanding of how to live healthy lifestyles and keep themselves safe, and develop essential skills for employment or the next stage of education. Children greatly enjoy their time at the centre learning how to do exciting things and making new discoveries. Users speak very highly of all of the centre's activities and provide useful feedback which helps staff to identify ways in which courses or activities may best be adapted to suit the needs of users. However, apart from the representation of a small number of parents on the management advisory board, there is little opportunity for parents to be systematically and routinely engaged in the governance of the centre or to shape the broader scope of the centre's services and evaluate the effectiveness of what is provided.

The quality of care, guidance and support is excellent and one of the main reasons why users and the centre's partners speak so highly of the centre. There is a very strong commitment to ensuring the safety and protection of children and all who use the centre, including the centre's staff. Policies and procedures for safeguarding apply across all areas of the centre's work so that practices are consistent whether in the nursery, in a crèche for young children or at an activity at a satellite venue. The local authority has every justification in regarding this centre as one of its flagship venues and an exemplar of the very best practice in a children's centre.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the local authority and the management advisory board so that the arrangements for governance and accountability are fully understood by both bodies and the centre's senior management team.
- Provide more opportunities for parents and users of the centre to be involved in decision making, and the design, set-up and evaluation of services, and to be systematically and routinely engaged in the governance of the centre.

## How good are outcomes for users?

1

Data from the Staffordshire Observatory indicate that the general state of health, safety, educational achievement and level of employment within the centre's reach area is below average. Cannock Chase has a higher rate of low-birth-weight babies than the national average, there is a high incidence of teenage pregnancies and a high prevalence of obesity. The area has the highest proportion of children under the age of one who become subject to a child protection plan. Against this background, the centre's staff work tirelessly to improve outcomes for children and their families with remarkable success. Within the nursery and day-care provision, children make excellent progress in all areas of learning from low starting points. Indeed, in their personal, social and emotional development, they exceed national expectations by the time they leave the centre. They grow quickly in confidence, make rapid progress in their speaking and listening skills, and develop an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles and keep themselves safe.

The many opportunities for parents to develop their understanding of health and safety issues are having a positive impact on improving outcomes for both parents and children. Almost every family within the reach area is involved with the centre in some way, if only through the centre's initial visits and universal offer of services, and every effort is made to support those who are hard to engage. Many case studies show with great clarity how parents not only feel safe at the centre but really appreciate the opportunity to share their concerns and problems with staff. The centre's supportive attitude to breastfeeding, and the ready availability of practical advice and guidance, has resulted in an increase in the uptake of breastfeeding. Through the various parenting programmes and activities for young mothers, parents become more aware of their children's emotional needs, develop confidence in bonding with their children and learn new strategies for managing their children's behaviour. Parents speak very highly of the guidance they receive at the centre and feel very well supported at home. Early intervention by the centre's outreach workers ensures that parents develop a good awareness of how to keep their homes and children safe. Highly effective parenting programmes help them to develop their confidence in managing their children's behaviour. Excellent liaison with social care and other agencies ensure that the life chances and safety of the most vulnerable children and those on the child protection register are significantly improved through regular consultation and through the Common Assessment Framework processes. Additional activities, such as the Saturday Club and weekday support group, help to improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their parents.

The centre possesses an overwhelming number of case studies which show how well individual families have made progress in their educational, personal and social development, acquired skills for the future or improved their economic stability and independence. Some of the most poignant case studies show how the centre, through its gentle persistence, has helped those who have been hard to engage to improve their family circumstances and life chances. Parents are very enthusiastic

about their own learning experiences and comment on how they feel better prepared for employment as a result of taking part in the centre's programmes of learning. As a result of the centre's support, some parents have accessed university and others have gained higher-level professional qualifications. Through high-quality opportunities, such as at the 'Stay and Play', 'Cannock Babes' and 'Song and Rhyme', and the activities which are modelled by the centre's staff, parents develop their parenting skills very effectively and deepen their understanding of their children's development and welfare.

Children attending sessions with their parents demonstrate positive behaviour and very good relationships and these traits are also abundantly evident in the nursery and day-care provision. Users value the centre's staff highly, and there is a very warm rapport between them and with the many other partners who work with the centre. The centre is very much at the heart of the community, and users feel their views and concerns are listened to. Parents are playing an increasingly important part in the centre's activities. For example, several parents are taking part in a course for volunteers, while others have trained as peer support workers for breastfeeding. An enthusiastic group of parents has re-established a friends group. Although still in its infancy, they are working to raise the profile of the group and to reach out to users to seek their views and involvement. The centre seeks the views of users at each activity, and responses have been used to assess on-going needs and develop services for the future. For example, the development and success of parenting programmes, the 'Baby Cafe' and breastfeeding services have been influenced by parents' views and involvement. There is, however, little opportunity for parents to be engaged in the governance of the centre or to shape the overall direction of the centre's services.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment.</b>	<b>1</b>



## How good is the provision?

1

The centre staff have an excellent understanding of the families and the needs affecting children within their reach area. This understanding is informed by data provided by the local authority but, much more pertinently, through the excellent communication with fellow professionals and the home visits conducted by the centre's outreach staff. Relevant information is shared freely between midwives, health visitors and the centre, enabling the centre to prioritise services for the most vulnerable and to ensure that the activities it offers are meeting the most pressing needs within the community. A visit to every family, six months after the birth of a child, is the linchpin around which the centre provides support after the initial influx of advice and care from health professionals prior to, and immediately after, the birth of a child. These visits are timed for maximum impact to assure parents of continuing support, to diagnose needs as parenting responsibilities change, and to ensure that every family is aware of what the centre has to offer. The fact that these visits and the centre's services are offered to every family encourages those who most need the centre's advice and help to attend because any fear of stigma is removed. The centre continues to assess users' needs at every activity and every opportunity, and welcomes feedback which helps to tailor services to users' requirements. A further visit to every family after two years strengthens the bonds with the centre and provides parents with helpful guidance on childcare and nursery placements.

The discussions between parents and the centre's outreach workers on the six-monthly and two-yearly visits form the bedrock for the excellent care, guidance and support which is provided by the team of staff at the centre, all of whom have an obvious passion for their job and a willingness to serve the needs of the community. Many case studies show how parents have valued the support and advice they have been given which, at times, has been life changing. Children love attending nursery, day-care sessions and the various activities which are provided for them to attend with their parents. The outstanding collaboration and cooperation with other agencies – community link team, health visitors, parenting support, speech and language specialists, Citizens Advice Bureau workers, midwives, adult and community learning outreach workers and other professionals – ensure that expertise is available for every type of need. These professionals know each other, trust each other and are working well together to provide the best possible solutions to improve outcomes for families and their children. As a result, the quality and range of services offered are excellent, and the provision to help children to learn and develop is outstanding. Many high-quality activities take place at the centre, but at least six satellite venues are used to reach out into all areas of the community. The centre uses its own vans to transport a wide range of high-quality resources to ensure that stay and play sessions at outlying centres are equally as well resourced as those which run at the centre. A toy library offers resources for families at 12 different venues. Well-attended ante-natal and post-natal groups, baby massage and sensory sessions, along with a range of parenting courses, are just part of the rich variety of services which are having such a positive impact on users' lives. Through all of these activities, personal development and achievement are celebrated, as seen in the

recent awards event for parents.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

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

<b>1</b>
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The excellent leadership of the head of centre over the last seven years and a strong, well-established senior leadership team, each member of which has a clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities, have enabled the centre to direct its own course and establish excellent provision for the local community. Despite a lack of clarity in the arrangements for governance with regard to the respective roles of the local authority and the management advisory board, there is good strategic planning, a determined ambition to continue to improve, a buoyant morale and a strong sense of purpose amongst the staff. Line management responsibilities are clear, and the day-to-day management of the centre is efficient and effective. The high quality service provided by the centre is mirrored in the contribution of the centre's many partners, and there is frequent and productive dialogue which seeks to enhance the quality of services for all users. The centre is accurate in its self-evaluation and has ambitious targets and clear ideas of how its services might be improved. However, while users provide useful feedback on individual services, there are no formal mechanisms for them to contribute to formal self-evaluation, decision-making or the shaping of the centre's services. There is high uptake for the centre's services which reach into all areas of the community and provides particularly well for the most vulnerable groups and for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Resources are used effectively and well, and there is particularly careful planning for the transportation and use of resources at the various satellite venues.

Safeguarding arrangements are excellent. One member of the leadership team has the responsibility for ensuring that policies and procedures are fully understood by all who work in, or are associated with, the centre and that they are applied consistently and rigorously across all areas of the centre's work. All staff receive regular training on safeguarding and child protection issues. Recruitment checks are rigorous and all relevant information is recorded in detail. The arrangements for making referrals and sharing information between different agencies working with the centre are exemplary and ensure early intervention where necessary and full support for any children who have child protection plans. The environment is welcoming and invites

the participation and involvement of parents and children. Risk assessments are detailed and meticulous. Parents and children feel very safe within the centre and in their relationships with the centre’s staff. Users reflect the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the local community, all are treated on an equal basis, and every person is treated with respect. The centre goes well beyond the duties which apply to it and provides excellent value for money.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</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>1</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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

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

The inspection team met with the lead inspectors who were carrying out concurrent inspections of the nursery school and the childcare provision based at the children’s centre. The findings of both of these inspections were taken into consideration when making judgements about the children’s centre. Both the nursery school and the childcare provision were judged to be outstanding.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected Cannock Chase Children's Centre on 1–2 December 2010. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We greatly appreciated the opportunity to talk to a number of you who braved the snow and adverse weather conditions to attend the centre's activities during the two days of the inspection. We gained a very clear impression that you really value the work of the children's centre. You find it very convenient to have the nursery and day-care facilities operating alongside many of the other activities which the centre offers. Many of you also appreciate the fact that the centre offers quite a range of activities at other venues. From many of the anonymous case studies which we looked at, we know that many of you are grateful to the staff at the centre for the ways in which they have helped you to improve circumstances at home or have helped you to solve problems.

We can see why you have such a positive view of the centre, because it provides you with an outstanding quality of care, guidance and support. Talking with the staff, it is clear that they have a real passion for working with children and families. The staff are extremely good at dealing with young children, and the day-care, nursery and stay-and-play provision is second to none. But the staff are also very good at dealing with adults, offering friendship and advice, and helping you to discover how much you can learn from many of the centre's activities. We were also struck by the excellent partnership that exists between the centre and the many professionals who work with the centre. This partnership provides a truly valuable service for you, as their cooperation avoids duplication of effort and ensures that you receive the best type of advice and help. The various services are very good at passing on relevant information to the centre, but also very careful to respect your privacy.

Although the head of centre is retiring at the end of the year, we have every confidence that the very high quality of service, which has been evident for many years now, will continue. This is because there has been excellent leadership in the past which has given rise to a strong leadership team at the centre. Those with responsibility in the centre know what their roles are, and they are good at fulfilling them. Even though there is some confusion over the respective roles and responsibilities of the management advisory board and the local authority, which we have asked to be clarified, the centre runs very effectively and efficiently on a day-to-day basis. We know that the centre constantly seeks your opinions on how effective each of its activities are, and your views help to improve what the centre has to offer. However, we were somewhat disappointed to find that there are too few opportunities for users of the centre to be involved on the advisory board or to contribute to decision-making and helping to shape the services which the centre offers. Some of you might like to get involved in this way.

The visits which the centre's outreach workers make to every family, six months and two years after a child is born, are crucial to the success of the centre. These visits enable the centre's staff to get to know you and to understand how the centre might

be of help to you. As a result, the centre provides an excellent range of services and activities which are ideally suited to the needs within the community. The numbers attending the centre's events show how popular they are. And what a range there is – they include stay-and-play sessions in various venues, sensory sessions, 'Baby Bounce and Rhyme', baby massage, family learning, 'Rhyme Time', ante-natal and post-natal courses and a range of parenting programmes. We understand that some of you have formed a friends group and a number of you volunteer as peer support workers to help those who are breastfeeding. This sort of help is a really important extension of the centre's work, which we hope will increase in the future.

From all of the conversations we had, from observing various activities and from looking at the centre's data and assessments, it is very clear that the centre is having a major impact on helping your children to develop really well in all areas of learning. It is also helping you to gain a better understanding of how children develop and thereby be able to support them better as they grow up. Many of the centre's activities help you to develop a better understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles and how to keep you and your families safe. It is clear that children enjoy their involvement with the centre, as do you. The centre has been particularly helpful to many of you in the way it has helped you to become better qualified for employment or ensured that you have access to benefits to which you are entitled. All in all, we feel the centre is doing a grand job to help you and your children.

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