

Inspection report for Northern Parade Children's Centre

Local authority	Portsmouth
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	

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, 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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, the area manager, a representative of the local authority, a member of the advisory board, a health visitor and parents using the centre.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including safeguarding policies and minutes of meetings.

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

The centre is managed by the local authority. It opened in September 2008 and became fully operational in the summer of 2009. The centre provides family support, outreach and adult learning at Northern Parade and at Anchorage Lodge Community Centre. The centre's reach area covers a wide range of deprivation, and includes families of Fijian heritage and African heritage living on the naval estate within the centre's reach area. Approximately 17% of children live in workless households. Nineteen per cent of families are known to be eligible for working tax credits. Ten per cent of families are from minority ethnic heritages. Children enter the Reception classes in infant schools with attainment that is below expectations for their age.

The centre is in its own building adjacent to Northern Parade Junior School. It has two main rooms, a one-to-one room, a large reception area, a sensory room and a secure outdoor learning area.

Overall effectiveness

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The centre is popular with parents and users, with many of its activities oversubscribed. It works in effective partnership with the local authority to provide commissioned services, such as 'Baby Boogie Mites', which are enjoyed by parents and babies alike. Through its strong links with the pre-school located on the site of Northern Parade Infants School, the centre provides children with good opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world through opportunities to do cooking and use computers. The centre's sensory room is particularly effective in supporting children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Through its effective links with the pre-school, the centre improved successfully the quality of packed lunches provided by some families.

Through its good care, guidance and support for families, the centre makes a real difference, especially to families in crisis. The centre uses funding, for example to provide respite care and taxis to enable users to attend appointments that take place outside of its immediate area. The centre is developing its role in contacting families that are harder to reach and knows that more work remains to be done within its outreach area.

The centre runs a range of adult-learning courses that are popular with users and include literacy, numeracy and information technology. Parents can access information about employment and job vacancies but there is currently no face-to-face service provided. The centre is, however, effective in signposting users to other commissioned services within the city, including minority ethnic support groups. It has useful systems in place to gather users' views about the services and activities that they attend at other centres within the city.

All users of activities provided by the centre have the opportunity to feed back on the quality of courses and activities through questionnaires. The response rates are good and show a high level of satisfaction. Staff respond effectively to users' views, for example by changing 'Messy Play' so that there are separate sessions for babies and toddlers rather than one. The centre runs a successful parent-volunteer programme to try and engage more in the day-to-day life of the centre, with a particular focus on engaging those who do not like attending 'formal' meetings.

The centre's advisory board held its first meeting in January 2011. Although its membership includes representatives of the pre-school, local schools and the naval community, it does not have any parents serving on the board. At present, it has not produced any terms of reference to guide its role and work in supporting the centre. The centre's day-to-day management is good and it benefits from the close partnership working with other children's centres in the North Island area of the city. The centre's leaders have identified a clear set of priorities for the next stage of its development based on the accurate assessment of its outreach area, and from the outcomes of feedback from its users. Currently, the centre's service delivery plan does not include measurable targets for evaluating the longer-term impact of its work to improve outcomes for users, particularly in relation to national indicators.

The attention given to safeguarding is good, with the centre adhering rigorously to the local authority's policies in relation to safe recruitment, vetting of staff and child protection, especially for staff commissioned to provide services within the centre. High expectations for the families it serves, especially the most disadvantaged, and the effectiveness with which leaders have adapted services to meet local needs demonstrate the centre's good capacity for further improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen the procedures for setting targets to measure the longer-term impact of provision on outcomes for all user groups within the centre's reach area.
- Develop the composition and work of the advisory board, especially through establishing terms of reference and engaging parents as members.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for the children and families it serves. There is a year-on-year improvement in the attainment of children at the end of the Reception Year in the neighbouring infant school. Parents and children benefit from the 'Snack Club' through the provision of much healthier lunch boxes and equipping parents with strategies to ensure that they get the 'best deals' when shopping for healthy foods. The club has been particularly successful in reaching families within the naval community. The meeting in the centre of the 'Turkish Group' and the work with Fijian families on the naval estate reflects the centre's promotion of tolerance and respect within its community and the celebration of ethnic diversity.

Through activities, such as 'Little Steps Gym', 'Skilful Soccer' and 'Boogie Mites Mini's Crawlers to Walkers', the centre promotes the good physical development of children and raises parents' understanding of the importance of, and fun to be had, through physical play. Children's creative development is enhanced through 'Messy Play' and 'Come and Sing', which are popular and oversubscribed. The centre provides a small library with books for children and adults, that promotes children's interest in and love of books. Families frequently drop-in to borrow books or just to sit and read.

The 'Nurture Group' is successful in supporting parents who are harder to reach and in developing their parenting skills. Staff are very sensitive to the challenges faced by some users in 'making the step' to attend and will, for example, go to the home and come with the family to the centre. Staff carry out many home visits to support families, especially in times of crisis. The centre works closely with other agencies to support children who have a child protection plan and those subject to Common Assessment Framework processes.

The centre works hard to promote the safeguarding and well-being of children. The centre is safe and staff carry out all required risk assessments, including those for

the outdoor area before they are used, for example when a crèche is provided. The centre provides a 'Paediatric First-Aid Training' course that is popular and fully booked to improve parents' knowledge and understanding of first aid in the home for very young children.

Children enjoy their time at the centre and their behaviour is good. They learn successfully to engage with each other in the range of activities provided, especially those for older children. Currently, users do not make a sufficient contribution to the governance of the centre, particularly as no parents currently serve on the advisory board.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and 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 and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre is successful in providing resources to support parents and families, both in the centre itself and at Anchorage Lodge Community Centre and The Phoenix Centre. In addition, the centre provides resources to support families in times of crisis based on assessed individual needs, for example by funding child-care support at the pre-school in order to provide respite care for families. The centre provides a warm welcome for new users, including those who 'drop in' for the first time. It is well resourced and provides a stimulating environment for children and parents. The centre's sensory room, cooking facilities and information technology resources are used effectively to support the needs of a wide range of users. The varied and interesting activities provided for children aged from birth to five years contribute successfully to their physical and creative development. One parent spoke confidently about the 'Baby Massage' session, saying, 'I use this at home to settle my 14-month-old son during our bedtime routine.'

The centre is effective in assessing the needs of users within its reach area. Staff respond to users' views, for example in amending the 'Messy Play' sessions so that babies and toddlers are not there at the same time. Staff work effectively in partnership with other agencies, including health professionals and other centres

within the city, to ensure users know how to access services not directly provided by the centre itself, such as smoking cessation.

The centre provides good care, guidance and support for parents and children. Families are signposted quickly to services that the centre does not provide. Parents become involved more in their children's play in a relaxed and friendly environment. Users benefit from a variety of adult-learning courses. The current information technology course provides parents with excellent advice on the dangers of the internet and helpful guidance as to how they can keep their children safe when online. The course also develops parents' skills in creating documents through using a publishing program. As one parent said, 'I am now able to do other things on the computer at home – putting photos on and printing out to send to the family – previously, though, it was too complicated.'

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
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?

2

Effective day-to-day management ensures the smooth running of the centre. The centre manager ensures that all staff receive up-to-date training in child protection procedures and there is a rigorous focus on implementing the local authority's safeguarding policy which all centres in the city adhere to. The premises are secure, including the outdoor learning area. Procedures for vetting staff and volunteers are robust, as are risk assessments of the centre's provision at Northern Parade and at its other sites. Protocols for keeping children free from harm are effective and shared with all relevant agencies.

The centre works effectively with the local authority and other centres to meet the needs of users and to implement local authority management policies and procedures. The advisory board has only held one meeting, at which five members were present, and it has not yet established terms of reference to underpin its role in supporting and developing the work of the centre within its reach area. Currently, no parents are on the board, which makes it more difficult for the board to take into account the views of users. However, a representative of the naval community, who has an in-depth understanding of the particular needs and issues that impact on service families, serves on the board.

The centre manager and staff have a strong focus on promoting a wide range of good quality services that meet the needs of different groups of users; the centre

provides good value for money. As a result of their rigorous assessment of needs and careful monitoring of the impact of the centre's work, for example in raising children's attainment, leaders have identified appropriate areas for improvement for the future. For example, there are plans for further developing links with the naval community, especially those families with a partner away at sea and those who move into the area. The centre manager and staff are also forging links to support a pocket of deprivation within the reach area, where there is a high proportion of lone parents and high unemployment. Staff have a clear understanding of what needs to be improved in the services provided within the centre's reach area.

Services are planned to meet the needs of specific groups, for example the 'First Time Parents Group' that meets at Anchorage Lodge. The centre's service delivery plan for 2011–2012 has clear targets in relation to health, family services, working in partnership and safeguarding. While the plan specifies clear outcomes, these are not always sufficiently measurable in relation to the number of families reached or the centre's impact over the longer term, for example in improving its performance against key national indicators.

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	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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	2

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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Northern Parade Children's Centre on 30–31 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We valued your contribution to the inspection, especially those of you who kindly took time to share with us your views on the centre. It is clear that you and your children enjoy the many and varied activities that the centre provides. Through the activities provided, your children make good progress in their creative and physical development, and in the enjoyment of books through the centre's library. Those of you who attend the 'IT Course' benefit in relation to developing your skills and in learning how to keep your children safe when using the internet. Staff value your feedback on the sessions provided and we noticed how, in response, they now organise separate 'Messy Play' sessions for babies and toddlers. We know that there are examples of the staff 'going the extra mile' to support you in times of particular difficulty and that you appreciate such help.

The centre provides a good range of resources for you and your children to use, including the library, sensory room, cooking area and computers. Children attending the crèche benefit from playing in a secure outdoor-learning area. The centre provides good resources at Anchorage Road Community Centre and The Phoenix Centre for those of you who find attending sessions there more accessible. It also gives you useful information about services that other children's centres provide.

At the moment, the centre's advisory board is newly established and has held only one meeting, and it has not set up its terms of reference. To be fully effective, it does need parents to serve on the board, so that the views of users can be taken into account when fulfilling its roles and responsibilities. We know that the centre actively seeks more volunteers and that a number of you take part in the current volunteer training programme. We have asked the centre and the local authority to develop the role of the advisory board and to encourage more of you to serve on it.

The day-to-day management of the centre is good and staff provide you with a warm welcome. Procedures to keep you and your children safe are rigorous. Staff have a good understanding of how they wish to improve provision in the centre and know that there are families it still needs to reach. The centre is effective in working with families from the naval community and in meeting their particular needs. At the

moment, the centre's service delivery plan does not contain targets that will enable staff to measure how successful it has been over time in improving the lives of its users. We have asked the local authority and the centre to fine-tune these targets to give them a clearer idea of how many families and users in its reach area benefit from its services and the impact they have on you and your families.

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