

Inspection report for Noah's Ark Children's Centre

Local authority	Gloucestershire
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Linked school if applicable	Queen Margaret Primary School 115560 Tewkesbury Church of England Primary School 115654
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Noah's Ark Children's Centre URN 510048 Noah's Ark Children's Centre URN 510063

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers and leaders, members of the advisory board, health, social care and education professionals, representatives of the local authority, adult learning services, family support workers, early years professionals, parents and carers.

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

Information about the centre

Noah's Ark is one of 39 children's centres in the local authority. It is a phase two centre which was designated in March 2007 and is co-located over two sites. The centre provides the full core offer through a range of integrated services that include health, family support, adult training, and childcare provision. The head of centre reports to the local authority which is responsible for the governance of the centre.

Statistical data for the area indicate that it is not an area of significant social and economical disadvantage. The percentage of workless households and those dependent on benefits is below average overall. Children start nursery with skills and knowledge that are below the expected levels. The population is predominantly White British with a growing population from minority ethnic backgrounds, predominantly from Eastern Europe.

The centre is located on the site of Queen Margaret Primary School. The school was inspected in February 2011. There are two nurseries located within the centre or nearby accommodation. One was inspected on 2 February 2011; the other nursery was last inspected on 4 March 2009.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

This good children’s centre provides a wide range of services which are responsive, enabling and inclusive. As a result, outcomes for children and their families are good as is the provision and the leadership and management of the centre.

Well-qualified and reflective leaders and managers look for ways to improve the provision available to children and families. They provide outcome-focused leadership with shared vision and purpose. The centre has, over the last year, gone through a period of significant change including a new leadership and management structure and personnel. The new leadership team is highly motivated and enthusiastic and is ambitious for the success of the centre, although the self-evaluation form modestly underestimates the effectiveness of the centre in many aspects. Self-evaluation documentation is not inclusive of users views nor does it clearly articulate the role of staff in the centre’s ongoing evaluation.

The skilled staff team carries out its duties with integrity and high levels of competence. The centre manager has established a system of performance management and supervision for all staff. This ensures that staff are well supported in their roles. The centre’s business plan supports its further development in line with the needs of the community. However, there is a lack of clarity of the key priorities, timescales, roles and responsibilities within the plan and this lack of clarity is reflected in discussions with some staff. Nevertheless, good progress is being made to develop and improve practice and services for children and families. For instance, good quality services have been developed to support survivors of domestic abuse, teenage parents, and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding arrangements are secure and thorough. The senior leadership team expertly manages child protection and early intervention strategies with its teams. It takes a positive, non-judgemental approach to safeguarding children and adults who are made vulnerable due to their circumstances. Staff’s effective use of assessment and the effective multi-agency working support the work with children and families and ensure that they receive timely and sensitive support.

The centre has equality, diversity and inclusion at its heart and this is evident in all aspects of its work. There is good evidence of the narrowing of the gap in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The Equality Impact Assessment is well considered and there are no areas for concern within the centre's work. Any potential barriers which may prevent children and families accessing the centre or its services are removed through careful planning and consideration. For instance, the provision of crèche services helps users to access training opportunities. This effective and inclusive approach has led to the greater engagement of teenage parents and a significant increase in membership over the last year. The needs of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are met extremely well.

Users who expressed a view say they are happy with the services provided. They report having trusting relationships with centre staff. They are made to feel welcome and feel well supported. However, some parents are unaware of the existence of the Partnership Advisory Board and there is no parent representative currently on the board. However, there are opportunities for parents and users to be involved in decision making and to an extent in the management of the centre.

Partnerships with other professionals and agencies are strong and effective. This is key to the success of the centre and its journey from a centre that was judged satisfactory by the local authority at its last annual conversation. This, coupled with the sterling work of the centre's outreach and family support workers, supports the delivery of a highly cohesive package of integrated services. The success of the work of the Citizens Advice Bureau has helped users to reduce their debts and increased the take-up of welfare entitlements.

The good range of well-planned and cohesive services ensures that those families made vulnerable by their circumstances have access to good-quality support. Participation rates in all training courses, groups and activities are good or improving. While the centre offers a wide range of activities and services, many aspects of provision are not routinely made known to users and not all services and activities feature in published timetables.

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community is good. This is supported by the good range of written evaluations and comments from parents and carers about the positive impact the work of staff is having on their lives.

The existing strong infrastructure provides a platform to drive forward improvement and the capacity for improvement is good. The effective and focused leadership and good quality inter-agency partnership working arrangements have resulted in significant improvements in the quality of provision and outcomes for users over the previous year.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further enhance the centre's work by:
 - promoting the wide range of service and activities available to meet the needs of users and the wider community
 - ensuring the self-evaluation fully reflects the centre's achievements; and by clearly setting out the priorities, challenging targets for improvement, how and when they will be delivered and the resources required to deliver them
 - improving the extent to which users contribute to decision making and management of the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

There is a strong promotion of healthy lifestyles through ante- and post-natal services, baby and childcare. Healthy eating initiatives, including cooking and nutrition courses, are well attended by parents. Children are developing a greater understanding of healthy lifestyles and nutrition through the creative curriculum and by growing fruit and vegetables in the outdoor areas. Many children and families are taking increasing amounts of physical exercise and most walk to the centre and school. Parents are well supported to give children a good start through breastfeeding. Breastfeeding peer supporters provide invaluable reassurance, and some parents have taken on this role following intensive training. Programmes to help parents understand children's emotional needs are having a significant impact on improving relationships and behaviour. All staff treat each other, children and users with consideration and respect.

Parents and children say they feel safe and secure within the premises. They are confident to approach centre staff for support. The centre buildings and outdoor areas are entirely safe and secure. Where there is concern, individual parents are well supported to improve safety in their homes. For instance, many families have benefited from the provision of home safety equipment and first aid training. Highly-skilled family and parenting support is having a significant effect on improving parenting skills to potentially reduce harm or injury to children. The effective use of the Common Assessment Framework and very effective partnership working with social care and health colleagues ensure that children and families, and especially those children on child protection plans, receive timely and sensitive support.

Early years provision within the centre is good. Children with communication concerns receive highly-effective support. Transition arrangements are good and consistently managed in collaboration with the local schools. Parents are actively involved in their child's next steps as they journey from nursery to school and their feedback indicates high levels of satisfaction with the arrangements. Parents take an active role in their child's learning and make regular contributions to their child's learning journeys. Partnerships with the nursery staff are strong and trusting. 'WOW'

certificates are particularly popular with children and parents and are used to celebrate children’s achievements and learning.

Learning opportunities for adults are of good quality and are having a positive impact on the quality of parenting. Training is effective in moving willing individuals towards taking up new interests that benefit their families and lead to recognised qualifications and employment. Several parents have gained National Vocational Qualifications to level 3 in childcare and education and one volunteer has achieved the Early Years Professional Status with the support of the centre. One parent commented, ‘I have continued training with Noah’s Ark, constantly learning and have gained so much knowledge, pride and confidence in myself.’

Parents are confident to share their views. Those who find communication difficult are well supported by centre staff to make their views known. There are effective strategies in place to support good behaviour. Children and parents are actively encouraged to make choices and decisions. For instance, children and parents and carers were instrumental in helping to develop the outdoor play and learning areas including the Forest School.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

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, 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	2
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

Improved assessments in the Early Years Foundation Stage are being used increasingly skilfully to produce secure evidence of children’s good progress. Regular network partnership meetings involving private, voluntary and independent child care providers and are used to share information and develop best practice. Parents are engaged in their child’s learning and contribute to the ongoing assessment of their progress. The use of the Common Assessment Framework plays a significant role in the centre’s work to protect children from risk of harm. Parents and carers are empowered to make improvements to their circumstances and those of their children through the effective way centre staff engage them in the assessment process.

There are strong and effective links between the centre and learning and development partners. Training providers hold the centre in high regard and praise the centre's work to support parents and carers into the learning environment. The centre demonstrates a positive approach to adult learning. Opportunities are varied and uptake of courses is good. Once parents are enlisted on a course their attendance remains good. Survivors of domestic violence and teenage parents are well represented in adult learning activities.

Learning and development are given a high priority. The effective partnerships between the centre and adult learning providers are strong and effective. They have a shared understanding of the learning and development needs of parents and carers following careful and thoughtful consultation with service users. Working collaboratively, they plan and fund learning opportunities at a range of settings across the area. Particularly successful and eagerly requested training includes paediatric first aid and positive parenting programmes. The delivery of good-quality adult learning and activities are having an important impact on improving parenting skills, the economic well-being of children and families and their life chances.

The staff and leaders know the community well. Successful outreach work has been instrumental to many of the achievements of the centre. Membership and take-up data show that the centre is well used by families who historically have been difficult to engage with. In discussion, parents spoke very favourably about the success of home visits carried out by family support workers. Parents said they thought these visits were a fantastic introduction to the centre and helped to build trusting relationships and effective communication. Experienced and skilled centre staff provide a wide range of on-site and outreach support to children and families. The work they do is easily understood by the majority of parents and families and is helping to reduce isolation and supporting positive outcomes for families and the community. There is a strong focus on supporting parents who suffer from low self-esteem and confidence. Participants in services and activities regularly report significant increases in confidence and self-esteem as a result of attending workshops and sessions and this is having a positive impact on the relationships with their children.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

Leaders at all levels contribute to the success of the centre and the improving outcomes for children and their families. They understand that achieving successful outcomes is an ongoing process and are motivated to develop the centre further. The advisory board is a recent development and includes a substantial membership consisting of professional partners, many of whom have notable safeguarding credentials. However, the centre has not yet established a forum for parents and carers to ensure they are fully involved in decision making and the management of the centre.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are rigorous and child protection strategies are effective. Staff recruitment procedures are comprehensive and are designed to ensure all staff employed at the centre are suitable to care for children. Staff receive regular, professional and vocational safeguarding training appropriate to their roles and responsibilities. Good quality, early intervention support is provided to families in crisis including those who are experiencing domestic violence. Parents and carers are actively involved in the assessment of risks as part of the Common Assessment Form which is completed in partnership between the centre and parent. Effective and cohesive partnerships and communication between agencies, in particular health and social care, contribute to the centre's effective safeguarding arrangements. The work of the centre and its partners to combat domestic violence is at its early stages of development but is already helping women and children to improve their physical and emotional well-being.

There are very good first-aid arrangements in place and this ensures that children receive prompt and appropriate attention if they have an accident.

The e-start system provides an improving database to safely and professionally share information about individual children and families. Confidentiality is given every priority and parents and carers are engaged as partners in the safeguarding and assessment processes.

In assessing the quality of the services provided, the centre routinely explores the views of users. Leaders carefully analyse evaluations and use the information to drive improvements. The centre's self-evaluation diligently includes all inspection aspects. However, neither users nor staff are routinely involved in the development of the centre's self-evaluation document. There is also a lack of clarity in the centre's business plan about the centre's priorities and measures to monitor the progress towards meeting specified targets.

The inclusion of all children and families has helped the centre to engage with those from the wider community, including teenage parents. In addition, children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those identified at risk of developmental delay receive well-planned targeted support in partnership with their

parents. The centre's policies and procedures are systematically reviewed and are used as part of the induction process to promote the understanding of the importance of inclusion for staff, students and volunteers. Diversity is celebrated through a range of activities, including training, and staff challenge discrimination of any kind.

The centre provides good value for money. Efficient and effective use is made of highly-valued resources through effective professional multi-agency partnerships. They have worked collaboratively, and to great effect, to reduce any duplication of work, target resources and reduce costs without compromising the high quality of service provision.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
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	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	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	3

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

Noah's Ark Nursery was inspected on 2 February 2011. It was judged to be a good nursery. All aspects of the provision were judged to be good except safeguarding which was judged to be outstanding.

Queen Margaret Primary School was inspected in February 2011 and it was judged to provide satisfactory education overall. Pupils' economic well-being and attendance

were judged to be good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Noah's Ark Children's Centre on 21 and 22 June 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Your children's centre is at the heart of the community and is relied upon for the well-being of large numbers of people. The strong leadership and highly successful teamwork mean families are provided with a wide range of good services tailored to meet their particular needs.

The centre is making a very positive difference to children's well-being and learning. It is particularly making a significant difference in helping children to experience a safe start to childhood. Children are having good opportunities to develop their play and learning within the centre and this is helping them to prepare for their next steps into nursery. They make good progress in their learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The high-quality outdoor learning and play areas, including the Forest School, are helping children to develop their confidence and physical well-being.

Thank you for contributing to the inspection. Your comments prove invaluable to inspectors. Inspectors think that, with the centre's encouragement, many people now make a positive contribution to the centre services and the life of the community. Parents and families were unanimous in their praise of the work of the centre and in particular the family support workers and the outreach support they provide. Parents were really keen to tell inspectors about how well staff supported families, helped to raise self-esteem and confidence and encouraged them to achieve. The care, guidance and support of families and children are good. This is largely as a result of the extremely successful close partnerships that staff forge with parents and the way they engage parents in the work they do with them. The strong partnerships that exist between staff from across the different agencies ensure that parents access the right services as quickly as possible. Several parents and carers believe that their contact with the centre has been life changing. The learning and development opportunities provided within the centre have helped several parents to secure nationally accredited qualifications and employment. Professionals working in partnership with the centre, including multi-agency teams and voluntary organisations spoke with very high regard about the children's centre and the work of its staff.

The leadership and management of the centre understand the needs of the families well. They have good systems to monitor that staff are doing a good job and that the services on offer are making a positive difference to people's lives. They show that

they are determined to improve the lives of users even more. The centre has good capacity to make further positive improvement.

We have asked the centre to develop further its work by improving the extent to which parents and carers contribute to decision making and governance of the centre. We have also asked that parents are made aware of the wide range of services available; that the centre's self-evaluation reflects its achievements; and, to make sure that the centre's plans for future development include clear priorities.

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