

# Inspection report for Northway and Ashchurch Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Gloucestershire
<b>Inspection number</b>	383531
<b>Inspection dates</b>	11–12 October 2011
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Northway Infant School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Noah's Ark Children's Centre Northway Pre-School playgroup

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, partnership board members, local authority representatives, local school's representatives, outreach workers, health, early years, domestic abuse, employment and training professionals and front-line staff. They met parents and carers, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The centre opened in 2008 as a phase 2 centre and is one of three children's centres located in the Tewkesbury area of the county. It shares a site with Northway Infant school and Northway Pre-school playgroup. Data show that the percentage of workless households and families dependant on benefits in the reach area is below that seen nationally. The proportion of lone families in the area is very low as is the proportion of young teenage parents. The large majority of families living within the reach area are of White British heritage. A very small but increasing number of families from eastern European ethnic groups are moving into the area, some of whom are learning to speak English as an additional language. The centre serves a relatively small reach area of nine square miles that is predominantly rural and includes an army base. There is recognised economic and living environment deprivation in the immediate neighbourhood in which the centre is located. A partnership arrangement is in place for service delivery with Noah's Ark Children's Centre which was inspected in June 2011. Children's skills and knowledge when they enter early education is typically below the level expected for their age.

A Partnership Board comprising representatives of all service providers currently oversees links with the community, identifies priorities and monitors outcomes. The centre's governance has recently become the responsibility of the local authority.

The centre is open from 8.30am until 4.30pm Monday to Friday. A range of services is provided based around a 'core offer' of integrated early learning, information and advice to parents and carers, outreach, family support, health services and signposting to training and employment advice.

## 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**

<b>2</b>
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### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>2</b>
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## Main findings

Good provision is made for the young children and families who use the centre and this leads to generally good outcomes. Following a period of significant change, including staff re-structuring and new governance arrangements, the number of families using the centre has increased significantly over the last year. This is largely due to the strong and determined leadership of the centre manager who has a firm grasp on community needs and is working strenuously to widen access to the centre's services. The number of new families accessing services so far is three times higher than seen previously. The centre is particularly successful in its work with families and young children. Families identify the warm and caring atmosphere, friendly staff and good outreach support as being central to improving their daily lives.

Highly positive relationships at all levels make a tangible contribution to the well-being of centre users. Productive partnerships between the centre, local pre-school groups, schools, the clustered children's centre and partner agencies enable prompt intervention that helps a large majority of families to make healthy choices and keep safe. The quality of care, support and guidance offered to users is good. Safeguarding arrangements are secure and thorough. Good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) helps to prioritise services and ensure efficient use of resources.

Early learning experiences make a positive contribution to young children's achievements and school readiness and outcomes are good. The educational achievement of those at most risk of the lowest outcomes is moving much closer to others of the same age. A satisfactory and increasing number of adults participate in

community education courses and some families who use the centre are improving their economic stability and independence. Parenting courses show good participation rates and raise the confidence of those involved. However, relatively few adults from the immediate neighbourhood access further learning programmes through the centre. Parents and carers really value the opportunities provided by the centre. Their evaluations feed into the centre's forward planning but there is no formal opportunity for them to have a more specific 'voice' in decision-making. The establishment of a Parents' Forum which will link into the Partnership Board has been discussed but this has not been pursued sufficiently.

Inclusion is at the heart of the centre's vision and staff have a strong commitment to promoting equality and diversity. Although the centre is effective in reaching target groups, it is aware that there are some groups, particularly adults who are on low incomes or facing unemployment, who are less engaged than others with the centre's services. The centre is particularly successful in its outreach work to support vulnerable children and families, including those with disabilities, mental and ongoing health problems. The centre's growing contact with young families on the nearby army base makes a positive difference to their involvement with the local community.

The centre's capacity to improve is good. Self-evaluation of strengths and weaknesses is accurate and largely based on secure knowledge of its community, case studies, feedback from family workers, service providers and families. The strong and united leadership team is acutely aware of the importance of matching provision to local needs and is conscious of seeking value for money in all of its activities. It uses a variety of business planning and efficiency measures to do this successfully. The gathering of reliable data has been a slow process but is now moving forward quickly. Systems are being developed to track improvement over time for target groups in the reach area. The representation of all service providers on the Partnership Board, robust accountability and improving governance are positive features that enhance the centre's good overall effectiveness.

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

#### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Extend the systems for capturing accurate data on target and vulnerable groups within the community and measuring the impact of services on improving the outcomes of those most at risk.
- Press ahead with the plans to establish a Parents' Forum and extend the opportunities for the involvement of parents and carers in assessing, developing and evaluating local services.
- Widen the support for adults in the community to improve their basic skills and confidence to enable them to access further learning programmes and increase employability.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2
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The centre's close work with health services and other agencies encourages families to make healthy choices and this has a positive impact on their lifestyles. Physical activity is effectively promoted through regular exercise, such as 'Buggy Walks' to the centre and assists the well-being of families. A strong emphasis is placed on the value of good nutrition, with milk and fresh fruit provided free of charge and enjoyed by those who attend family support sessions. Outcomes are improving with child obesity rates in the area below those in other parts of the county at five years. The high take-up of immunisation results in the vast majority of young children in the community completing the full programme by the age of two. Anti-smoking work is effective. The centre has appointed a 'Champion' to further support those who are keen to stop smoking. The centre is proactive in supporting new mothers who want to breastfeed their babies and the success rate is good. However, at 35% the level of sustained breastfeeding for more than eight weeks is currently below the local authority target.

The centre is very sensitive to the needs of families and works effectively to keep them safe and protected. The well-being of young children in particular shows good impact from the centre's well-targeted outreach interventions. Parents and carers value the quality of home support they receive. 'The family worker has been supportive and encouraging. It's good to have someone to listen to your worries and then advise and see you through your problems,' is a typical comment. The small number of children subject to a childcare plan benefit from the centre's well-conceived support. Visits from the police, fire service and road safety officers have helped raise parents' and carers' awareness about the potential dangers in the home and the locality. The rate of non-accidental emergency admissions to hospitals is falling. Successful parenting courses help new parents and carers to build confidence and develop positive coping strategies. 'Stay and Play' sessions encourage children to be active, inquisitive and independent learners. Those who are most vulnerable are helped to build positive family relationships through experiences such as 'Best Start'. Parents and carers strongly identify that they feel confident, safe and free from any form of discrimination.

Data show that the gap in children's achievement between the lowest 20% and the rest is reducing quickly. Current figures show a 16.5% variation which compares very favourably with the 31% local authority figure. The achievement of five-year-old boys is now much closer to that of girls of the same age. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those in receipt of free school meals and those from minority ethnic heritages achieve well from their different starting points. Nearly two thirds of children attain 78+ scale points including communication, language, literacy and personal, social and emotional development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Well-targeted outreach work secures the participation of an increasing number of families who otherwise may not have accessed services. The take-up of community education experiences, such as gardening, jewellery making, cookery and computing,

is good with sixty-one local residents participating in courses. A first-aid course requested by parents and carers is being planned with 12 already on the waiting list. Partnerships with employment and training organisations are strengthening following a period of some difficulty due to staff changes. For example, a new entrepreneurs course is being accessed by a very small number of adults from the neighbourhood who want to widen their business and enterprise skills. Nevertheless, information available locally is patchy and there are relatively few courses being accessed by adults through the centre that lead to accreditation and extend employability.

All observations of activities during the inspection showed behaviour and relationships to be positive with experiences valued. Parents and carers have the opportunity to make their views known mainly through informal conversations, questionnaires and suggestion box ideas. Parents and carers told inspectors that they would like more involvement in planning services and greater awareness about the work of the Partnership Board. The idea of setting up a Parents' Forum has been well received by centre users.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</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>2</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?**

<b>2</b>
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The quality and range of services are integrated and cohesive and meet the personal, social, health and safety needs of most local families well. The children's centre staff work closely with health, social care, speech and language professionals to assess and support the needs of families and refer for one-to-one support in the home.. This enables the development and effective delivery of dovetailed services to target groups. In discussion, parents and carers identified the good quality of outreach services and said how valuable the home visits carried out by family support workers are in helping them through times of crisis.

Case studies provide compelling evidence about the positive difference centre

services make to the outcomes of those in most need, including children and adults with disabilities, teenage parents, those from Eastern European backgrounds and families with children under four-years-old who are experiencing problems. Strong and developing links have been forged with the military families on the Ashchurch army base to address problems of isolation, particularly as many male partners are deployed abroad. Community family workers undertake visits on a regular basis, with the vast majority of young army families on the base now benefiting from regular contact with the centre.

Participating rates are increasing with courses being adapted to better meet needs and secure health and economic well-being. Take-up of the parenting courses on offer to promote positive behaviours, raise confidence and self-esteem are good and improving. However, there are no in-centre courses currently running to extend the further learning of adults living in the neighbourhood and the signposting to activities available further afield lacks cohesion. The centre is aware that available statistical data mask increasing local need for better financial stability. It has not analysed the full extent of the economic issues arising. For example, the latest unemployment rates are around 2.5% in the reach area which is relatively low. However, the picture is different in the immediate neighbourhood and health professionals are reporting rising hardship.

Effective partnerships between local settings assist the youngest children in being confident learners and ready for full-time education. The proportion of children in the reach area who attain 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage scales is above the national average. The focus on early education and support for more vulnerable families, for example through the pilot two-year-old programme, contributes to children's improving achievements alongside other good quality pre-school experiences.

Good quality care, guidance and support help families from different backgrounds that use the centre to feel free from harm and bullying. Outreach work has been pivotal to the good effectiveness of the centre's work. The focus on tailoring services to community needs being driven by the centre manager is having a positive impact as shown by the rising number of families registered with the centre. Staff know the community well and are very reflective about the impact their work is having on improving the daily lives of those in need. Relationships at all levels are respectful and trusting. One parent identified, 'The staff and centre are brilliant!' The good focus on supporting parents and carers in building confidence and self-esteem reduces feelings of isolation and improves family relationships. Quarterly meetings between service partners usefully enable the sharing of information. There is a good range of helpful information available for centre users but its organisation and access could be better. Surveys show that families are very appreciative of the centre's support and are confident that they will be given high quality advice and guidance.

These are the grades for the quality of provision



<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>

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

**2**

Good leadership and management have moved the centre forward during a period of significant change. The centre manager and leadership team are well-focused on the challenges for children and families in the area. Realistic targets have been set to improve the health, safety and economic well-being of the local community based on accurate self-evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, the centre is reaching all groups to varying extents and engaging with the majority of families and achieving good outcomes despite budget reductions. The provision of services across the cluster of centres has been sustained alongside outreach and partnership working. However, there has been a recent loss of service provided within the centre, such as the second weekly 'Stay and Play' group which parents and carers say they miss. The plans to establish a Parents' Forum have not reached fruition and, as such, parents and carers are not fully involved in decisions about local services.

Regular and effective supervision supports the personal and professional development of staff who told inspectors they feel valued and supported in their role. Teamwork among staff is very good and this ensures that resources are used efficiently. The operation of health visitors' and speech therapists' screening checks in the centre enables effective partnership working to the benefit of families with whom they work jointly. Outreach work has been tailored to meet users' needs and has enabled staff to reach more families. The pairing of family workers with health visitors on initial home visits is a positive feature.

Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and ensure that all who use the centre are well protected. Health and safety matters are closely supervised and supported by robust risk assessments. Awareness about child protection matters is good and all staff are up to date with training requirements including paediatric first aid. The systems for staff vetting and recruitment fully meet requirements.

Equality and inclusion are central strands of the centre's work. Its ethos is warm and inviting. The integration of multi-agency services enhances opportunities for children and their families. The centre's approach makes a positive contribution to community cohesion and the breaking down of barriers between families of different backgrounds. The centre's accommodation is accessible for wheelchairs and meets all the requirements for disabled access.

The Partnership Board has clear oversight of service provision. It works collaboratively to make sure that available resources are used efficiently to achieve best impact and good value. Good systems are in place for holding the centre to account with the local authority annual conversation providing critical challenge and regular assessments of the business plan to ensure that the centre keeps on track with its targets. The gathering of data to show improvement over time has been a slow process but is now moving forward quickly, with needs being much more closely analysed. For example, live-birth data has only recently become available and the centre has to extrapolate vulnerable groups' data from 'E-start' each quarter. The centre and local authority have pinpointed the importance of having efficient systems in place to both gather data and demonstrate the impact of services. More effective systems are being implemented to achieve these but are not embedded.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</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>2</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>2</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>
<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>

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

Inspection report for Noah's Ark Children Centre (No 368384 ) inspected in June 2011.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Northway and Ashchurch Children's Centre on 11 and 12 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

We found that the centre makes good provision for the increasing number of young children and families who use it and this helps everyone to lead healthier lives, keep safe, and increase personal achievements. Outreach work is especially beneficial and, as a consequence, many of you receive tailor-made support to help you overcome personal crises. You told us that the centre has a warm and caring atmosphere in which staff are friendly and supportive and make everyone feel valued and respected. We agree that these features are key strengths that help the centre meet the diverse needs of local children and families, including those with disabilities, mental health problems and ongoing health issues. The centre's growing contact with young families on the nearby army base makes a positive difference to their involvement with the local community.

We very much enjoyed observing 'Stay and Play', 'Drop Ins and 'Best Start' – the new mums and babies group. It was super to see your young children behave so well and take full advantage of the exciting learning experiences on offer. The massage session was a new experience for all involved and was clearly helping mums to build close bonds with their babies.

The centre and pre-school settings are doing really well in helping young learners enjoy achieving to the full and be well prepared for starting school. Parenting courses are a successful part of the centre's work and help those who do them to build new skills and move towards better financial well-being. However, some of you are not being encouraged to sign up with the centre and let it know what further learning courses you would find valuable to your future success. We have asked staff to work more closely with you to explore this aspect.

The centre makes sure that you are well looked after when you visit. The good safeguarding arrangements help you feel safe and free from risks. You told us that you put forward your views through chats with staff or by responding to questionnaires but that you like the idea of a forum being established that links more closely to the centre's next step developments. We have asked the centre to press ahead with extending the opportunities for you to be involved with assessing, developing and evaluating local services.

The leadership team does a good job and makes sure that things move forward after the changes experienced, including new staffing, different governance arrangements and the clustering with Noah's Ark Children's Centre. It draws on a lot of information to help it plan carefully and see how well things are going. However, the data have not always been reliable or to hand when it should. We have asked the centre to set out exactly what information will be most useful to helping it keep track of how well services lead to improvements. The Partnership Board and local authority work cooperatively with the centre to keep a check on what is going on in the area and the quality of services being delivered. Please add to the information they gather by making sure your views are taken on board.

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