

Inspection report for North City Children's Centre

Local authority	Norfolk
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Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Angel Road Infant School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Pavilion Playschool

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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 co-located/partner primary school 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.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre manager and staff, the Early Years Foundation Stage teacher at Angel Road Infant School, representatives of the governing body and of the advisory board, representatives from local authority services, parents and carers, a community health visitor, a parent support adviser, and representatives from Childminding Matters. Telephone conversations were held with the manager of Pavilion Playschool and a representative from Embrace, a support service for teenage parents.

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

Information about the centre

North City Children's Centre is based on the site of Angel Road Infant School, in an independent building integrated with the school. Angel Road Infant and Junior School are federated, and together with the Children's Centre are overseen by the headteacher and governing body. The linked day care provider shares the same site. This provision is located in the heart of a large housing estate, which together with most of the reach area, is in the top 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. It is a phase two children's centre, designated in March 2008, and provides services to meet all elements of the core purpose of children's centres. Some services are delivered from three outreach centres at Heathgate Community Centre, City Gates Centre, and Shipfield Community Room. Some services are signposted to the two neighbouring phase one centres to avoid duplication. Services delivered by the staff team and partners include health services, family support, employment and training signposting, targeted support for teenage parents, English language training, training for childminders and family learning.

There are 1792 children in the reach area, with 1039 registered at the centre. 78% of children are from White British backgrounds. However, there is an increasing proportion of children from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, and the area has recently been used to house refugee and asylum seekers. Many of these are transient and move in or out of the area with very little notice. A small minority of families speak English as an additional language. The centre does not provide early years childcare, but offers advice and guidance to parents and carers on the day-care and childminding facilities available within the local community. It is currently helping to extend childminding provision due to a shortage of pre-school provision. There is a high number of workless families dependent on state benefits. The rate of unemployment and the proportion of teenage mothers are above average. Children enter early years provision across the area with skills, knowledge and abilities that are below those expected 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 families

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

'I love it here', 'I don't know what I would have done without it' and 'The support has been a major lifeline' are just three of the comments made by parents about the centre. These views were echoed time and again in conversations and written comments. Everyone, children, parents and staff thoroughly enjoy coming to the centre. The open, inclusive, welcoming atmosphere is extended into the outreach centres, and according to parents, into the home. Provision is of high quality. Children take part in well-planned, imaginative activities. Their learning needs are assessed on an on-going basis and outstanding opportunities are created to move their learning forward session-by-session. Safeguarding is a priority and is also outstanding. All matters relating to safety and welfare are attended to rigorously. The centre is a safe haven, which families turn to in times of crisis. It is however a mutually supportive community. Parents know that advice and guidance are always on-hand, but they are also aware that they are responsible for their child's behaviour and take up this responsibility readily. An exemplary feature of the centre is the strong parent voice. Consultation and evaluation thread through all activities, and at all levels. Parents know that their views are not only sought, but acted upon. One member of the 'Parent Voice' is Vice-Chair of the Advisory Board, and is always

accompanied at meetings by at least one other parent.

As a result of the extensive evaluation of all it does, programmes and support offered by the centre are finely tuned to meet the needs of users. The number of families from the reach area accessing the centre, or one of the outreach centres, is high, and 165 families from other reach areas opt to come to North City. The centre has a detailed understanding of its reach area and the issues faced by families. Case-study evidence is robust and shows that through highly effective multi-agency working the centre has had considerable impact on improving the well-being of the most vulnerable families in the community. The centre supports the sometimes complex and diverse needs of many minority ethnic families, a number of whom arrive in the area with no English and little or no financial or other support.

Through working with childminders, with the co-located pre-school and with the adjacent infant school, the centre has successfully improved children's learning outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. This year, in two of the three infant schools it serves children's skills, knowledge and abilities rose to above expected levels. Plans are in place to support the third school in improving outcomes, which fell this year. The centre is effectively addressing the shortfall of childcare in the area by encouraging and training parents to become childminders. The result of this dedicated and tailored provision is that almost all outcomes for users are outstanding. The development of future economic well-being is good rather than outstanding because as yet training opportunities provided by the centre have not yet reached the accreditation stage and the centre cannot yet demonstrate the impact of these services.

Strong partnerships arrangements have supported the centre in achieving this high level of impact. Partnership agreements are effective and are appropriately refocused when necessary to continue to meet the needs of users and ensure value for money. Although partnerships with health visitors are outstanding and mutually beneficial, the centre has no access to data relating to pregnant mothers from midwives or general practitioners. Health visitors are informed of the pregnancies of many mothers in vulnerable circumstances and share this information with the centre. This means that although it is able to meet their needs and the needs of known pregnant mothers, the centre cannot provide the universal support they have committed to in their core offer. They have too little influence relating to initiating breast feeding, encouraging smoking cessation or healthy eating during pregnancy. The local authority is aware of this, but as yet has not ensured that this information is made available.

Governance and accountability arrangements are good. The governing body and the advisory board challenge the centre in its work, and know the strengths and areas for development. However, although advisory board members work with the centre and the headteacher and governors visit the centre, most information about the centre is provided by the centre manager and quality assurance arrangements at this level are not as rigorous as at centre level. Although the centre has an appropriate and well structured development plan, it does not contain clear, ambitious targets or

precise timescales for improvement. These would enable the centre to further benefit users through a sharper strategic focus.

The centre's success is due to outstanding leadership and management and to the outstanding staff team and their team-working. Staff are highly-trained and multi-skilled and share a variety of roles. The high level of trust between them is clearly evident. Performance management and supervision within the centre are outstanding. The centre is developing increasingly incisive data regarding attendance from each locality in the reach area, which support the sophisticated evaluation of provision. The centre seeks excellence in all areas and is swift to tackle any identified weakness. It has outstanding capacity for improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should work with the health service to ensure that the centre is informed of pregnancies within the reach area.
- Ensure development planning contains ambitious, measurable targets and precise timescales to support the centre in further improving outcomes for families.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

A very popular and extremely effective feature of the centre is the café, which contributes considerably to the promotion of healthy lifestyles, and is open two days a week. Delicious, very affordable healthy food is cooked on site and served to children and their parents on a regular basis. The café has been influential in persuading diffident parents to take part in other activities. It has stimulated an interest in cooking, and at the request of parents, recipe cards are now freely available for all meals. Cooking workshops are a further development, for parents alone, or for parents and children. As the café is small, parents have to share tables thus developing relationships between users. Staff are trained support workers and as well as running the café can give informal quality advice and tips to parents. It is a true example of excellent practice.

As well as eating, children and parents join in the range of very exciting activities on offer in the friendship stay and play session, all carefully planned to stimulate learning or physical activity and to promote community cohesion. Children also grow vegetables, play in the outdoor area developed with the school, and enjoy another highly successful feature developed by the centre, the Forest Schools area. This supports development across the range of outcomes. Children are encouraged to manage their own risks in a natural environment, for example, they know they need to avoid stinging nettles and brambles. On joining the reception class at school, North City children demonstrate high levels of confidence and independence and help their peers in developing their confidence to explore the area. Parents also love coming to the Forest Schools sessions, some of which are run on Saturdays to enable

a wider group of parents and children to attend.

Children's behaviour is outstanding, demonstrating parents' response to the high expectations and excellent support of staff. Centre staff take every opportunity to develop parenting skills on an informal basis as well as in the formal, recently introduced parenting sessions. The centre is vigilant in ensuring the safety of users and staff, and gives outstanding support to parents in developing their understanding of how to ensure the safety of their families.

Everything the centre does promotes strong, positive relationships. Time and again parents said it has given them a shared sense of community. Baby massage helps not only parental bonding but also family bonding. Play activities enable parents and children to play with and alongside each other in a harmonious setting. Strong involvement in decision-making empowers parents to challenge the work of the centre in a productive, evaluative fashion. Parents who wish to join the 'Parent Voice' or advisory board are given committee training to enable them to take part effectively in these forums.

Training, development and empowerment are at the heart of the work of the centre. From enabling parents to have the confidence to leave their homes to supporting a young parent to enrol in nursing training, the centre actively encourages parents to progress. Accredited courses in family literacy and numeracy and also in English are being run, and are well-attended, but as yet no parents have reached the accreditation stage. One parent spoke about her aspirations for the future. She and her husband are focussing on learning English as they feel this will help them find employment. She feels that the crèche is very important so that she and her husband can attend together and concentrate on their learning. Some parents have successfully set up play sessions with the support of the centre and a number of childminders have been registered as a result of its support and training.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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	1
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	2

How good is the provision?

1

Provision is rich and wide-ranging. As a result, outcomes for families are outstanding. Centre staff are skilled at matching services to user's needs, particularly those in their target groups and the most vulnerable families. Staff draw on the wide range of partners available to help their families. These include, for example, those relating to safety such as ROSPA and the fire service, both childhood and adult mental health services, Embrace, an organisation who work on an individual basis with teenage parents, Job Centre plus, the youth service and the children with disabilities team. All avenues are explored to help overcome barriers and enable children and parents to succeed. Training and development opportunities are promoted, some initially through the 'Your aim, your gain' sessions, and are discussed with parents. Some parents are guided to the City College and some to the local phase one centres for wider opportunities such as courses in information, communication technology.

An emphasis is placed on providing activities of high quality which all promote purposeful learning across the range of outcomes. These create excellent opportunities for parents to interact with their children and ideas for them to take away to use at home. For example, young parents shared their enjoyment of singing the tooth-brushing song, learnt at the centre, with children at home. The centre is very attractive, well set out and well resourced. Staff are continually seeking to develop and improve their activities. Outstanding outreach services, such as the 'Learning through Play' session provided by the Family Learning Programme and the 'fantastically well-run' 'Music and Songs' session. Centre staff do all they can to ensure that the venues for these activities are as attractive as possible but are aware of the constraints of the buildings.

The centre has established an excellent level of care in all activities. Staff members are responsible on a rota basis for ensuring that the centre is set up for the day to the expected standard. Individual staff are responsible for different activities and areas and again ensure that these are safe and well-presented. They are keenly aware of safety and where necessary they are clear about ways that parents can keep their children safe, such as moving knives and forks out of the way of children.

Quality guidance is provided for users. Many displays and leaflets reflect the wider community and diverse cultural backgrounds of users, such as a multicultural cookbook, artwork by a local Sri Lankan artist and signs written in languages known to be used by families in the area. One mother expressed her appreciation that she could access information in her home language. A useful information book, relevant to local needs is available to signpost families to healthcare and police services in the area. Up-to-date leaflets, sufficient in quantity to ensure parents are informed but not overwhelmed, include subjects such as adult learning options, smoking cessation, healthy eating, childcare options and support for domestic violence. Young parents appreciate guidance regarding sexual health issues which, they say, are not of the same high quality elsewhere.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including outstanding at linked playschool provision; good and satisfactory for other 2. Centre has worked with high impact on linked playschool those in target groups	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups.	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The knowledge, drive and commitment of the centre manager, her insight, her ability to be flexible according to need and her very high expectations are echoed by staff. All aspects of the centre's running are considered carefully. As a result it is bringing about significant change, enhancing provision and improving the life chances of users. This vision and sense of purpose is shared by its partners, who were passionate in their endorsement of the quality of the centre's provision. Partnerships are chosen carefully to meet identified needs. For example, the centre found that the activities they were offering were not meeting the needs of younger teenage parents. The centre then commissioned Embrace to work with this group, with great success. All partnership working is highly effective.

Senior leaders and managers are very clear about the centre's priorities through their perceptive analysis of its current strengths and areas for development. Most notably, in the engagement with families and the community, the range of activities provided and the continual reflection on the quality, impact and real cost of activities. This results in outstanding value for money. Outcomes overall are outstanding; all areas with the exception of the promotion of economic well-being are outstanding, and this is good. The governing body and the advisory board ensure that the centre is run effectively and that users have access to quality services.

Evaluation of services is outstanding and runs throughout all aspects of provision. A range of methods are adopted, which include activity evaluation forms, surveys, questionnaires and phone calls. The views of children, parents and partners are gathered and used to shape services.

Inclusion of all children and families is central to the centre's work. The sense of community in the centre is tangible, with families from all backgrounds and cultures welcomed by staff and by each other. One parent commented 'It's so good to get together with people from other backgrounds'. There is a clear commitment to equality of opportunity. For example, holiday activities are opened up to older siblings to ensure that younger children are still able to access services.

Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. The centre knows that early intervention and support are key to improving life chances for children. Multi-agency working ensures that the wide range of professionals work together well to

safeguard and protect children and families. Effective quality assurance systems, through case file audits and supervision, ensure that children, including those with disabilities, are well protected and families are receiving appropriate support. Staff training is thorough and up-to-date. Safe recruitment practices are robust.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
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	1
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	1

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

The previous inspection report for Pavilion Playschool was read, and a telephone conversation was held with the manager. A meeting was held with the lead inspector of the parallel inspection of Angel Road Infant School and also with the Reception Year teacher of this school.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the North City Children's Centre on 19–20 October 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

To help us make our judgements, we observed activities, looked at documentation and spoke with a large number of service providers, professionals and parents and carers. Thank you very much indeed to all of you who helped us to understand the excellent quality of services provided by staff.

The centre manager and her team value you and your families highly. They are always prepared to listen carefully to you and seek your thoughts about all the activities they provide to make sure they meet your needs. Staff are passionate about creating an attractive, welcoming environment where you not only feel at home but are able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you feel valued by the centre and you trust staff, which means you have no hesitation in using the services regularly. You told us that you think that the centre is a safe place for parents, carers and their children. Inspectors agree with this view and think that staff to are vigilant in ensuring the health and safety of everyone who uses the centre.

The centre offers an outstanding range of services and activities for all families in the area, which are led by very skilled and dedicated professionals. Centre staff do all they can to help. They give excellent guidance and refer you and your children to other activities and services they think you would benefit from and enjoy. You told us that coming to the centre had increased your confidence and self-esteem. This is because centre staff and professionals from different agencies work so closely with you, and with each other, to find out exactly what help and support you and your families need and make sure this is provided. One of the centre's many strengths of the centre is the care, guidance and support it provides for you, often in your own home.

The centre has told us that staff do not run any specific sessions for parents before their children are born, although they would very much like to. We know that if the centre is aware someone is pregnant it readily provides help and support. However as it they not given the information about pregnancies centre leaders cannot set up, for example, ante-natal groups to discuss breastfeeding, healthy eating or preparation for having a baby. We have asked the local authority to help the centre get this information so that it can help you before your baby arrives.

We know that the centre is keen to continue to their very best for you. To help centre leaders to improve services even more we have also asked them to make their action planning even better so that you can enjoy outcomes which are even better.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk with you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We are very grateful for your help and we wish each of you every success for the future.

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

