

Inspection report for Norton Canes Children's Centre

Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	383532
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2011
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Centre leader	Sarah Rivers
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Norton Canes Community Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not 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.

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 district children's centre manager and district children's commissioner, groups of parents and carers, service providers, community, education, health and social partners, and representatives from the local authority.

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

Information about the centre

Norton Canes Children's Centre opened in February 2008. It is a phase two children's centre providing commissioned, privately run and partnership services for education, health and family support that take place on site, in local venues and in the home. In 2009, an estimated 922 children aged four and under lived in the reach area. Nearly all families are from White British backgrounds. The social and economic position of families is mixed. A below average proportion of children under five live in families that are dependent on workless benefits but this rises to above average for children aged four and under who live in one of the 20%-30% most deprived lower super output areas within the reach area. The proportion of lone parents is around 20%. The small number of teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers living in the reach area attend groups and services held at Cannock Chase Children's Centre. Almost all are in employment, education and training.

The centre is housed within Norton Canes Primary School with which it has a 50% usage agreement. The headteacher oversees site safety. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to nursery are below age-related expectations. Norton Canes Children's Centre works in partnership with Hednesford and Cannock Chase

Children's Centre whose leader has recently taken on responsibility for managing the provision across the district in partnership with the district children's commissioner. The local authority has responsibility for the governance of the centre in partnership with a locality partnership group comprising parents and carers, providers, partners and voluntary representatives. This links into a newly formed district management advisory board that supports the local authority's strategic overview.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Norton Canes Children's Centre is satisfactory. A suitable range of services and groups enable children and adults to make satisfactory progress in their learning and development. Outcomes for children and adults are satisfactory. Adults are signposted to accredited and non-accredited courses and training, although the impact of this is not effectively evaluated in terms of attendance and improved outcomes. Targeted support for teenage and young mothers results in many attending education and/or training or returning to work. Positive partnerships with health professionals promote satisfactory outcomes for children's health.

Parents and carers say that they feel safe and enjoy the range of activities at this and other local centres and venues. As a result, many come again and attendance is good. Parents and carers make a satisfactory contribution to the shaping of services, activities and resources through written comments and discussions with service providers. For example, they have made suggestions for additional toys for the toy library. 'Parent champions' represent parents' and carers' views at locality partnership group and district management advisory board meetings. There are few other formal ways to gather the views of children, or parents and carers to enable them to contribute fully to the development and shaping of services and activities.

Care guidance and support are satisfactory. Providers use observations of children's play, and feedback from parents and carers to plan the content of group activities. Procedures to track consequent progress and learning are in their early stages. Evaluations of activities tend to focus on what children have done rather than what skills and knowledge they have acquired. Assessment for families experiencing change, challenge and difficulties in their lives, including those conducted under the

Common Assessment Framework is good. Actions and support are tailored specifically to need and, as a result, improvements to families' and individual's emotional health and economic wellbeing and independence are good. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who attend groups at Cannock Chase Children's Centre make good progress. Diversity is promoted satisfactorily through the celebration of cultural events and through stories and songs from around the world. Users confirm that people from different backgrounds get on well together.

Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. In partnership with service providers, the headteacher and staff at Norton Canes Primary School ensure the site is secure and safe. The centre ensures that all service providers and partners follow local authority policies and procedures for checking the suitability of all employed adults and volunteers, and for ensuring that they attend child protection training.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Since taking over the management responsibilities for the centre in April 2011, the district children's centre manager and district children's commissioner have collected and analysed a range of reach-specific data. This has resulted in an accurate evaluation of the centre's strengths and those areas where it needs to improve. As yet, there has been too little time for district centres to share expertise and successful practice with each other. Recent improvements reflect the centre's satisfactory capacity to improve; for example monitoring procedures have been strengthened and there is now a greater and consistent focus on evaluating the success of services and groups against outcomes. However, this is not as effective as it could be as targets in the current action plan do not include precise measures against which to monitor improvements. Governance arrangements have been restructured recently to ensure that local views and evaluations inform strategic decisions at district and local authority level and enable the centre and its commissioned services to be held accountable.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the range of strategies in place to gather more effectively the views of all users and use these to inform decision making on services and provision.
- Establish consistent systems for tracking and measuring the impact of the learning and progress of adults and children: to better inform users and managers about progress and the impact of provision; and to tailor more precisely future training and learning opportunities and activities.
- Use data more effectively to identify focused improvement priorities that include detailed actions, and measurable targets against which to monitor success.
- Use expertise across district children's centres, providers and partners to spread successful practice in planning, assessing and tracking learning.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Parents and carers' attendance at baby clinic is good. Most babies are a healthy weight. Mothers and fathers like being able to 'socialise with other parents and carers and to share experiences' including weaning and toilet training. The centre promotes healthy snacks at all groups and so parents understand the importance of children eating healthily. The proportion of children in the Reception Year who are overweight or obese is below average. The proportion of mothers choosing to breastfeed their babies is below Staffordshire and national averages. Good emotional support enables new mothers to overcome post-natal depression successfully. The centre is successful in helping those who commit to give up smoking although the number who do commit is low.

Parents and carers who attend groups say that they feel safe. Children are confident to seek help from adults such as spreading glue and sticking shiny shapes on their paper to make bonfire pictures. Child protection procedures are good. A good number of children are de-escalated from the different levels of concern due to the effectiveness of assessments under the Common Assessment Framework. The centre does not have precise figures about how many families have benefitted from advice and guidance about fire and accident prevention in the home from the local fire service. The number of accidental injuries admitted to hospital across the district meets the national average. There are no reach-specific figures. The centre gives effective support to an increasing number of adults experiencing domestic violence.

Children who attend the numerous stay and play groups make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development to reach age-related levels by the time they start nursery. The focus on developing children's communication skills is satisfactory. Many children start nursery with communication, language and literacy skills that are below age-related expectations. The proportion of children achieving six points in personal, social and emotional development and communication language and literacy is close to the national average by the end of the Reception Year. The centre does not track the progress of the individual children who attended centre activities to evaluate its contribution to this outcome.

Adults are encouraged to attend education and training courses and a phone is available in the entrance that is directly linked to Jobcentre Plus. There is currently little follow up to evaluate how many have used the phone or have attended signposted training. There are a small number of volunteers at the centre and in local schools to give practical help, including respite to those families experiencing change, challenge and difficulties in their lives. Meetings and training for childminders are effective in helping them provide good quality child care.

Positive relationships ensure parents and carers who access group activities return time and time again. Parents say that everyone gets on well together. This creates a friendly and supportive atmosphere in stay and play groups and baby-focused groups. Many chose to attend groups at other local centres and at the library because they know they will receive the same warm welcome. Surveys, comment books and feedback sheets enable parents and carers to express their views.

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	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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	3
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	3

How good is the provision?

3

Providers give parents who attend groups a warm welcome. There is a strong focus on children and adults learning and playing together and so parents and carers enjoy having fun while learning with their children. 'Twiglets' provides suitable opportunity for those who attend to grow and cook vegetables and fruit, and to learn about how to compost and recycle any surplus. Planned activities in stay and play groups celebrate cultural events and respond to users' interests. There is a thriving stay and play group for grandparents to support those who provide child care for their grandchildren. A wide range of toys and resources give children choice and promotes independent and inquisitive learning. Some people attend groups held at other local children's centres and community venues, including groups for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, baby clinic and baby massage, parenting courses, and songs and rhymes at the local library.

The Family First service assesses the needs of the majority of families on a four-point scale to identify the level of support required. Most are signposted to universal services while a small number are accelerated through the Common Assessment Framework process for child protection or children in need plans. Cases automatically flag up a 'red alert' if open for nine months so that a re-evaluation of support can be planned. The needs of a number of lone parents and families who live in the 20-30% local super output area are met through this service in partnership with Health Net, and volunteers from Family Focus. Assessments of adults' and children's learning are at an early stage of development and are not yet resulting in planned next learning steps in groups and activities. The progress of adults who attend training and further education courses are not usually tracked unless they are being supported by Family Focus, Health Net and/or Families First services. Citizens Advice Bureau have had good success in ensuring families receive the benefits to which they are entitled and in reducing debt.

Parents and carers receive satisfactory guidance and support for keeping their families healthy and safe. As a result, outcomes are satisfactory. Outreach services give good care and guidance, and practical support for target groups. Most families experiencing change, challenge and difficulties in their lives from time to time regain confidence and independence quickly. While planning for stay and play groups links to learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, evaluations of activities sometimes focus on what children have done rather than the learning that has taken place. As a result, the development of children's early language and communication skills is not always sufficiently focused in groups. Data to show the impact of guidance for adult education and training is not available.

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 those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The district children's centre manager and district children's commissioner have worked closely together over recent months to gain an accurate view of the centre's work. The collection and collation of reach-specific data has resulted in a renewed focus on raising aspirations and outcomes for children and adults who live in the reach area. They have shared a vision for improvement with all providers, partners and voluntary groups. As a result, partnerships with commissioned services are good, and partnerships with health and Jobcentre Plus have strengthened this year. The focus on monitoring for impact against outcomes is improving and a detailed action plan identifies accurate improvement needs. However, targets do not include measures against which to evaluate success.

Governance has been restructured this year in response to the reorganisation of staffing and children's centres across the local authority. The current arrangements build on previous ones and ensure decisions at local level feed into district and county levels to inform strategic planning across the local authority. Quarterly performance reviews have a greater focus on the quality of provision and not just attendance at groups. This has increased accountability for the performance of commissioned services. Representatives from all partnership groups attend to enable the sharing of information and a cohesive approach to supporting target groups. Parents and carers are increasingly involved through 'parent champions' attendance at meetings. The centre is unstaffed for most of the time and while it is accessible, there are few signs and posters in the entrance to inform 'drop ins' how to find further information about what the centre offers at this and other venues. Parents

and carers say that they would like to be able to give views anonymously and so be encouraged to say what they really think and not 'what they think providers want to hear'.

Safeguarding procedures ensure the safety and welfare of those attending groups and services. All local authority safeguarding procedures including those relating to child protection have been adopted and are followed by providers and users. This ensures a multi-agency approach to keeping children safe. Close partnership with the adjoining school staff ensures the site is safe and secure. All partners attend safeguarding training at level 1 or level 2 and attend annual updates to ensure their knowledge and understanding of procedures are current. The Common Assessment Framework process is working well in the early identification of children and adults in need. The sharing of expertise and effective practice across the district children's centres is in the early stages of development.

The centre ensures everyone has equal opportunity to access centre services. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities attend groups at Cannock Chase Children's Centre. All families signposted for a particular service or group are taken to meetings and groups if necessary. Crèche facilities facilitate the attendance of parents and carers at meetings and parenting courses. The gap between the lowest 20% and the rest is closing at a similar rate to the national. The centre gives satisfactory value for money. Leaders have worked effectively to ensure that groups and activities have continued despite a significant budget cut last year. Attendance at groups is good and take up of nursery education is high. Rooms are welcoming and are nearly always in use either by the centre or the adjoining school. The outdoor environments are not always used during play and stay sessions to give children an additional area in which to play and learn.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to	3

meet its core purpose	
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	3

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

The inspection of Norton Canes Primary School contributed to the children's centre's inspection and report.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Norton Canes Children's Centre on 3–4 November 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for telling us about your own and your children's experiences at the centre. It is clear that relationships are positive and that you enjoy having fun and playing with your children at groups like 'Stay and Play', 'Twiglets', 'messy play' and baby clinics. You told us that you particularly like being able to socialise with other parents and carers and to learn from each other about your children's learning and development. Your children develop the skills they need to start nursery confidently.

The centre provides a satisfactory range of activities for you and your children to enjoy. Outcomes for you and your children are satisfactory. You receive clear guidance on feeding your families and most babies and children are a healthy weight. Fewer mothers than average breastfeed their babies. You all know how to keep yourselves and your children safe when out and about and when at home. Some of you attend training to give you the skills necessary for getting back to work if you choose although the precise figure is not known as attendance and progress is not tracked. Children reach the levels expected for their age in personal, social and emotional development when they start in nursery, but many do not start with expected levels in their speaking and listening skills. Planning ensures you all enjoy the activities but does not always focus precisely enough on how to develop the children's early speaking skills. Those of you experiencing change, challenge and difficulties in your lives receive good support to help you get back on your feet.

The district centre manager and district children's commissioner provide satisfactory leadership and management. They have made a good start in identifying what the centre does well and what it needs to improve next. In partnership with the numerous organisations, individuals and voluntary groups, they have a clear plan on

how to do this. Everyone works closely together to ensure you and your children's safety when at the centre. Recent improvements are secure.

We have asked the centre to improve four areas. We have asked it to set targets that include measures against which to monitor improvements. We know that you can express your views about what you like and what you would like to see improved through conversations and written comments. We have asked that you and your children have more formal opportunity to do this so that you can make a stronger contribution to the development of activities and services. We have also asked providers to assess your children's and your own learning more closely especially in their early speaking and listening skills and to help those of you who choose to attend training to help you get back into work. Adults who work across a number of children's centres in the area, including Norton Canes, have particular expertise in planning, assessing and tracking learning. We have asked the centre's leadership to implement opportunities for them to share this expertise more regularly.

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