

Inspection report for Action For Children Montagu Street Children's Centre

Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	383611
Inspection dates	9–10 November 2011
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Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	None

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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 the head of the centre and centre staff, a representative of the local authority and a representative of Action for Children, the organisation managing the centre on behalf of the local authority, five members of the advisory board, health professionals and partners who provide services, and parents. Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation.

Information about the centre

Established in 2003, Montagu Street is a phase two children's centre providing the full core offer to a community which is in the 70% most deprived wards in the country. The neighbourhoods of St. Mary's, Brambleside, William Knibb and St. Andrew's form part of the centre's reach area. Some pockets of the area have high levels of deprivation.

Northamptonshire County Council has subcontracted the delivery of the work to a national charity, Action for Children. The centre has an advisory board and a parents' forum. The children's centre manager and her deputy assisted by 18 staff work in this centre as well as children's centres in Desborough and Thornton.

The centre facilities are run from a purpose-built centre based in the heart of Kettering and an adjoining outreach centre. The range of provision includes an on-site crèche, ante-natal clinic, weekly sessions from the workers of Citizen Advice Bureau and Relate and monthly sessions for the guidance and advice for families run by Jobcentre Plus. With the agreement of the county council, the centre is working both within and outside of the reach area to provide targeted family support. The centre is one of two centres in Northamptonshire of high intensity family intervention project, the only provider of obstetrics clinic with a consultant, workshops and

groups on domestic violence, post natal depression, smoking cessation and for the siblings of the disabled children. The centre won an award from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Maternity for Women and Child Health in 2009 for its work with the health authority. Action for Children has piloted a web based data system. This is now rolled out across all 50 children's centres in Northamptonshire.

Since its establishment the area boundaries within which the centre operates have been changed on four occasions. In November 2011, 55% of the users are from out of the area. The centre has registered 61% of the 951 children under five in the area. Over the last 6 months 1779 users have benefited from the services of the centre.

Almost all the residents in the area are of White British heritage. Some 2% of the residents are from Indian heritage. The centre is situated in a mixed area of private housing, private landlords and social housing. Pockets of the area have a transient community. The number of residents dependent on benefits is at the national average. The skills, knowledge and abilities of children on entry to early years' provision are in line with 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Montagu Street Children's centre provides a good service for its local area and the residents of Kettering. It acts as a hub of the community where users can get access to valuable advice and help on a range of matters that are otherwise not easily available. Highly professional staff and managers are extremely thorough at identifying the wide variety of needs of the families under stress and meeting them promptly. In the words of one parent, 'The centre is a lifeline.'

An outstanding partnership with the local health authority has ensured that teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers attend high quality ante-natal care on-site in good numbers. This ensures that any complications are dealt with promptly and the newborns are given a healthy start in life. Mothers fully understand the benefits of

breastfeeding for their children. Help and advice on employment, financial and relationship matters is timely and highly effective.

Parents and their children feel extremely safe in the centre and regard it as a 'safe haven'. Parents learn useful skills to assess the risks and protect themselves and their children from any emotional and physical harm including domestic violence, sexual abuse and neglect. Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. The facilities in the centre including the range of rooms, toys and other resources are excellent. Staff provide a wide range of useful, fun activities that develop children's communication, language and literacy skills. Parents learn to enjoy their children and fully participate in the activities. Positive behaviour learnt at the centre provides a good start for the children to develop into well-behaved pupils at school. Staff are highly knowledgeable and caring. They provide excellent care, guidance and support on a range of matters; helping families to deal with many complex issues successfully.

Day-to-day management of the centre is excellent. Staff are very professional. They benefit from extremely valuable training and support from the subcontractor. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The centre is making good contribution to alleviate poverty and empower its current users to re-engage into society fully. However, it has not been able to target sufficient numbers of vulnerable groups such as lone parents, minority ethnic groups and workless households. The centre has revised the arrangements to improve the effectiveness of its recently reformed advisory board. Parents make good contribution to develop and evaluate the provision; however the mechanisms to feed their views to the advisory board are not fully developed.

Action for Children has set challenging targets for the centre and have continued to increase the range of its provision to ever greater numbers of users from its local area and beyond. However, the local authority has not set targets for engagement and outcomes of families and users. In recent years it has received written reports on the performance of the centre without setting challenging targets and resolving issues of participation from out-of-reach area users.

The centre's work is very highly regarded by the high numbers of beneficiaries from across Kettering and the professionals in the field. Other centres draw valuable professional support from the staff at Montagu Street.

Action for Children has demonstrated that it has good capacity to improve and sustain its services from this centre. This centre does not target its provision to vulnerable groups effectively enough because it lacks accurate and timely locality and reach based data from the local authority and strategic partners.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Enhance the effectiveness of the recently re-established advisory board by developing formal channels through which users can present their views on the provision.
- Increase the services to various vulnerable groups including lone parents, workless households by securing accurate and timely data.
- Enable the children's centre to extend its influence, reach and effectiveness by:
 - establishing better data sharing arrangements with other strategic partners to produce accurate data on vulnerable groups at the area level
 - setting specific and measurable targets for engagement and outcomes to manage the performance of the subcontractor more effectively
 - establishing a fair system to give due credit to the centre for the vast numbers and percentages of users from 'out-of-reach' area.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Health outcomes for children and their families are good and excellent for teenage mothers and pregnant teenagers. The consultant obstetrician reports 100% attendance at the on-site ante natal clinic, an increase in the number of normal births and at-home births. Vulnerable groups such as drug users and those experiencing domestic violence are identified quickly and supported appropriately. Mothers suffering from post natal depression learn about trigger points and how to overcome depression. Many make good friends and develop positive networks of support. The number of mothers breastfeeding is high and increasing and they continue to breastfeed for longer. Adults learn about the dangers of smoking to their own and their children's health through very well used 'Stop Smoking' sessions. Users receive helpful advice on the benefits of eating well during pregnancy. Cooking sessions are used well to promote healthy ways of cooking. Children learn to eat healthy food including fruits and vegetables, thus encouraging healthy lifestyle. Children exercise as they participate in many activities in carefully designed outdoor play area. The obesity levels of children in the area have lowered.

Users including children display good awareness of risks and safety precautions. Staff conduct thorough checks during home visits to the homes of vulnerable adults and provide basic home safety equipment. Parents are more confident at recognising and reporting abuse to the staff in the centre. Staff are proficient in the use of Common Assessment Framework and work extremely well with other agencies to protect children from emotional, sexual and physical harm as well as neglect. In the words of one parent, 'Many parents would not have their children with them except for the excellent work of the centre staff'.

The centre adds a significant value to the enjoyment and achievement of skills and knowledge of all its users. It has played a key role in raising the achievement levels and narrowing the attainment gap between the lowest 20% and the national average. Children's score for the Early years Foundation stage are high. They develop their communication, language and literacy skills well through self-talk, talking with parents and playing with other children. They learn to share toys and

working collaboratively with other children; mostly behaving positively. This prepares them well for school. Parents enjoy caring for their children and join in the fun activities such as 'Messy Play', 'Jumping Jacks' and 'Action Kids', often undertaking similar activities at home. 'Positive Parenting' courses have helped parents develop sound understanding of the difficult task of parenting. They learn to reinforce positive behaviour, enforce discipline and the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. A few dads attending the centre have developed a strong bond with their children.

The timely help from the Citizens Advice Bureau has helped families to budget better; while some families have been able to claim their full benefit entitlement. The centre has supported a few vulnerable families by purchasing washing machines from the funds they secured from local charities. Jobcentre Plus provides valuable service to the families by providing calculations detailing the financial impact of them taking jobs. Users become aware of job opportunities and seek help with making applications. A few parents have attended classes and gained qualifications in literacy and numeracy. Some have progressed to higher qualifications. Users attend many valuable courses, some of which can lead to external accreditation. The centre has not considered offering external qualifications that may open up possibilities of entering various careers.

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	2
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	2
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	2
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?

2

The centre knows its community very well. The number of registered users is high and is increasing. The attendance rates are high in most sessions. The registration of some of the vulnerable groups such as lone parents, workless households and from families with disabled children or disabled parents are low. The centre is highly flexible in its approach to needs assessment and establishing the provision. Relate provides a key service in the centre on a weekly basis that helps users deal promptly with their relationship issues. Family intervention project team provides high intensity support for families with multiple needs often dealing with more than one child and a

range of difficulties in their lives. This service plays a crucial role in the whole of Kettering to prevent abuse and keeping families together.

The centre provides and promotes a broad range of purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for the parents and children. The sessions and workshops are well planned and have a logical and clear structure. Staff including, well-trained volunteers, provide clear explanations to the parents. Parents enjoy the emotional bond they develop with their babies through massage. They enjoy courses knowing that their children are well cared for in the on-site crèche. 'Rhyme Time' and 'Sing and Learn' play sessions provide encouragement to children to develop their language. Other fun activities and courses for parents and children include 'Messy and Creative Play', 'Bumps and Tinies' and 'Action Kids' that encourage them to move to music. Children love making models and playing with sand and jelly. First-aid, sleeping, weaning and behaviour management and potty training are some of the other examples of purposeful learning that add to the enjoyment of individuals and groups. The numbers of male users of the centre are low.

The quality of care guidance and support to families is exemplary. In the words of a parent, 'The businesses could learn a thing or two about the excellent customer care from the centre staff.' Staff are kind, caring and compassionate. They are extremely knowledgeable about the services in the locality and refer families promptly when they cannot provide the required help and support. Support from the midwifery, health visiting service and counselling service is excellent.

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	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The arrangements for governance and management are clear and are well understood by all staff. Regular team meetings, reflection on their practice and debriefings are routine. Web-based data systems are excellent and used well to record the activities, monitor performance and evaluate the impact of the services. Regular staff appraisals evaluate their performance against targets. Accountability arrangements with the local authority are not sufficiently thorough. An increasing number of users attend the centre due to its close proximity to the town centre. Many are from out of area. The local authority has not found a satisfactory solution to give credit for this work.

The centre's self-evaluation report uses broad ranging evidence. The report is

accurate, detailed and evaluative. It is clear about the work it needs to do and the barriers. The development plan is thorough and has resulted in improvements. Partnerships are outstanding. All partners work extremely well to the benefit of the families. The centre is providing excellent value for money.

Equality and diversity is well promoted in the centre. Users feel included in all its activities. The centre is fully accessible for wheelchair users and triple buggies. Staff have good awareness of equality and diversity issues. They promote cultural diversity through many activities in the centre such as bilingual books in Polish, an excellent sensory room and nursery rhymes in various languages. The staff celebrate mainly Christian festivals and as the numbers of minority ethnic heritage residents in the area is low, Users are not fully prepared for the ethnic diversity in our society.

Action for Children rigorously checks the suitability of the staff, volunteers and other staff delivering services from the centre from the partner agencies. Staff are well trained in the Action for Children's safeguarding framework that includes the indicators of abuse and neglect. Managers provide valuable advice and guidance promptly using mobile phones. On occasions managers have successfully challenged the decisions of social health and care services to protect the children from neglect and harm.

The centre engages families in the reach area through careful targeting and following up referrals. Staff respond promptly to the users' views by changing the programme times and the activities and keep them informed about the actions taken. Children take photographs of activities that they like and dislike. These are used to develop appropriate provision. Parent satisfaction surveys are very positive about the service.

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	2
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	2
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	2
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Action For Children Montagu Street Children's Centre on 9–10 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. There are some outstanding aspects to its work.

We would like to thank you for taking the time to talk to us and offer your opinions of the centre. Many people enjoy coming to the centre to seek high quality help, support and guidance. Some of you have explained how the centre has made a significant difference to your lives and has enabled you to tackle various problems confidently.

We agree with you that locating various services such as ante-natal clinics, smoking cessation, classes and workshops related to parenting and child rearing have made it very convenient for you to seek help. Similarly having staff from the Citizens Advice Bureau, Jobcentre Plus and Relate in the centre have helped you to deal with financial, employment and relationship matters. You have told us that you feel very secure and welcome in the centre and we agree with you. The centre conducts regular checks on the suitability and background of staff, volunteers and the workers from various services.

The centre staff organise a broad range of enjoyable activities for you and your children. Families learn the value of play to the children and participate in activities well. Parents receive helpful advice, guidance and support from the staff and from each other by sharing experiences. Children's behaviour is good and they are prepared well for the school. Although the centre is welcoming, not many dads are taking part in activities. The centre does not have accurate data on vulnerable groups in the area. Therefore their participation is low.

The centre staff are highly knowledgeable and very professional. They work very hard to provide services for you. They evaluate their work with you thoroughly. They have made many changes to the activities and services at your request. Although your views are sought to develop and improve services you do not directly contribute to the discussions of the advisory board of the centre.

To improve the services further, we have asked the centre staff to involve parents more fully in the advisory board and to obtain more accurate data and relevant information to meet the needs of all vulnerable groups. We have also recommended that the local authority sets the centre staff more specific targets to engage with various vulnerable groups.

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