

# Inspection report for North Thatcham Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	West Berkshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	404548
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 September 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Wendy Ratcliff HMI

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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	EY363871 – Little K's

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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**361**

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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 centre manager, representatives of the local authority, members of staff, partner agencies, including a representative from health and members of the advisory board. They also held informal discussions with families using the centre services.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. This included key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, the centre's development plan and data about users of the centre.

## Information about the centre

North Thatcham Children's Centre is a phase 2 children's centre. The centre was designated in 2007 and is run directly by the local authority. The day-to-day management of the centre is the responsibility of the children's centre manager. The current centre manager took up post in 2011. The centre employs two part-time family support workers, a part-time administrator, a caretaker and a part-time apprentice. At the time of the inspection the centre had a vacancy as one of the family support workers had recently left to become a manager at another centre in West Berkshire. The centre manager also manages the three part-time toy library staff. The children's centre works in close partnership with the South Thatcham Children's Centre. The two centres share an advisory board and some service delivery.

The joint advisory board contributes to the management of the centre and includes representatives from a number of community and statutory partners and parents. The centre is open from 9.00am to 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday, for 52 weeks of the year.

Overall, the centre serves one of the 70% most deprived areas nationally. There is a mix of both rural and urban areas and areas of higher need and deprivation. Around 95% of families in the wider community are White British. There are smaller percentages of families from minority ethnic groups, which include 2% of Eastern European heritage. There are around 800 children under five years of age living in the area. There are no data available to identify the proportion of children living in households dependent on workless benefits. Overall, children's skills, knowledge and abilities when the children enter early years provision is typically at the levels expected for their age. However, the skills, knowledge and abilities of children living in the areas of higher need and deprivation are below the levels expected for their age when they enter early years provision.

The children's centre is based in a large refurbished Victorian school. Space is shared by a range of different partner agencies and services. These include West Berkshire toy library, Action for Children, West Central Children's Services Team, speech and language therapists and Little K's early years registered provision. The centre offers a range of services for families with children under five years of age. These include child health services, family support including outreach and signposting for those seeking employment.

## 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

The centre provides satisfactory support for children and their families and, as a result, outcomes are satisfactory but beginning to improve. The centre is becoming a hub within the community and is located in one of the two main areas of deprivation. It is accessed by families from the reach area and beyond. Friendly and approachable staff have built high levels of trust with families and, as a result, families feel well supported, especially when they are experiencing a difficulty in their lives. Parents told inspectors that they value the services and support the centre provides and see the centre as a safe, warm and friendly place. 'The best bit is staff who are always welcoming, approachable and encouraging,' was a typical comment. The recent satisfaction survey supports this view, with 98% of families satisfied with

the centre's services.

The range of services is designed to meet the needs of families and, as a result, is accessed by a growing number of families. Around 62% of families from within the area have accessed services in the last twelve months. Established partnerships with health at a local level result in coordinated services, such as the post-natal support group. Sessions are run by family support workers and health professionals. The programme includes sessions such as 'happy mummy, happy baby' and 'sleeping and settling'. Mothers told inspectors that the group provides an opportunity to meet other new parents, share experiences, prevents isolation and increases confidence in parenting skills.

The centre is doing some good work with individual families who benefit from the positive partnership working of the agencies that operate from the centre. All required safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and the centre works effectively with key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to those using the centre. There is evidence of improved outcomes for children on child protection plans due to the centre's timely interventions.

The centre has a satisfactory capacity to improve further. Self-evaluation is accurate although lacks evidence of impact to securely demonstrate how well the centre is improving outcomes for families, particularly those from target groups and identified as more vulnerable. The development plan includes appropriate targets and the steps needed to move the centre forward, which can be linked back to strategic planning. The new joint advisory board has held two meetings and is developing its effectiveness in holding the centre to account and providing a sufficient level of challenge.

Parents feel their views are heard as staff involve them in evaluating sessions. They offer suggestions when services require amendment to meet their changing needs, for example timings of sessions and requesting story and rhyme time being included at all sessions. The centre recognises that families need to be more systematically engaged in the governance of the centre and is in the process of re-establishing the parent forum.

The local authority has recently made strides in providing the centre with specific data about the reach area. This data profile pack was provided to the centre in August and leaders are already using this information to plan for improvement. However, the local authority recognises more work is needed to improve the availability of data, particularly health data, in order to support the centre in assessing local needs and measuring the effectiveness of services, particularly in relation to key performance indicators, and on improving outcomes for all families.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- The centre, in partnership with the local authority, should:
  - work with health partners to improve the range, quality and presentation of data specific to the reach area
  - sharpen the analysis of information to shape services for those families in greatest need
  - measure the centre's performance in relation to key performance indicators.
- Improve the effectiveness of the advisory board in holding the centre to account for its services and providing more challenge.
- Re-establish the parent forum and systematically engage families in shaping services and in the governance of the centre.
- Continue to develop the systematic evaluation of the impact of its work and analyse data more precisely in order to monitor the progress and outcomes for families, in particular those in target groups and most in need of intervention and support.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>3</b>
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The evidence available demonstrates the positive contribution the centre is making to improving the outcomes for children and families.

The centre has good working relationships with health visitors so they can positively support the emotional well-being of individual families. For example, health visitors refer families to baby massage courses, which are encouraging parents to bond with their babies. The 'well baby' clinics are well attended, with 365 families seen in the last 12 months. Families have access to a range of health information from breastfeeding to weaning. The centre has recently received some limited health data. Obesity rates for Reception class children in 2010 were around 8% and 18% for children in Year 6. Data for breastfeeding at six to eight weeks are not yet available. The centre is beginning to analyse available data to assess further the needs of the community.

The centre promotes the safety of families soundly. Families feel the centre is a safe place to bring their children. Some parents are gaining confidence and develop their parenting skills as they attend the Incredible Families parenting course. They receive good support to help promote the positive behaviour of their children. Family support work is tailored to support the most vulnerable families, including a few whose children have been identified as in need or subject to a child protection plan. Staff are trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework, but they have not yet instigated this work. Case studies and family files show how well families respond to this support and show improvements in their understanding of how to keep their families safe. The Parents as First Teacher (PAFT) programme is tailored for

individual families including low income families, families with children with disabilities and teenage parents. Parents develop confidence to support their children's development in the home. One parent said, 'Staff help us with any parenting concerns we have.'

Adults access a range of courses in order to improve their economic stability and develop employability skills, such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), first steps to food hygiene, first aid and preparation to helping in schools. Some courses lead to qualifications, for example National Vocational Qualifications and Skills for Life entry qualifications. The centre is not yet tracking the longer-term impact of such courses.

Families show good levels of respect for each other. Children and their parents actively engage in a range of well-planned activities, which help the transition to pre-school and nursery. Data for the reach area show that 62% of children achieve a good level of development at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest reduced to 25% in 2011, which is narrower than seen nationally. In 2011, ten children received funding for two-year-old places and all children in the area took up their three- and four-year-old funded places. The centre is usefully beginning to build closer links with the early years settings in order to promote the learning and development of the most vulnerable children in the area.

*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>3</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>3</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>3</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?**

**3**

The staff use their local knowledge and work with partners to ensure the range of services are matched appropriately to the needs of the families in the area. They have begun to use recently available data to assess whether services are appropriately matched to need. However, the narrow range and lack of precision in

the data provided hinder the centre's ability to identify and reach those families who are hardest to engage. The centre has good relationships with health at a local level so it can support vulnerable families. However, the centre is not yet receiving the full range of health data, including information about new births in the area, in order to make initial contact with all families so it can target services more precisely.

Satisfactory quality care and guidance, together with the positive sense of care and mutual support between centre staff and families, ensure an atmosphere of trust exists. Family support work is effectively matched to individual families' needs. This one-to-one support is making a discernible difference for those families in most need of support. One parent said, 'The centre has boosted my confidence and increased my parenting skills.' Family support workers make timely and appropriate referrals to partner services so families receive the correct level of support, such as speech and language therapy, West Berkshire Benefits Information Service and Newbury College.

The centre is committed to promoting the learning and development of all families and ensuring their enjoyment. They effectively display children's artwork. Children receive good quality care when they attend the crèche while their parents access courses. Adults receive certificates to recognise personal achievement when they complete a course. The centre is developing stronger links with adult community learning in order to access data about families who attend courses.

Families make good use of the toy library. There is a reduced membership rate for target groups and vulnerable families so all families can access high-quality toys and equipment.

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

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

**3**

Staff are committed to the community they serve and to improving outcomes for families. Day-to-day management is well organised, professional supervision is conducted regularly and staff have clear targets for their work. Effective partnerships with health professionals and other key agencies, such as the West Central Team, ensure centre staff target services to supporting families identified as at risk of greatest need. However, the local authority recognises that the quality of the information it provides to the centre on the demographics of the area needs to improve in order to support staff in extending their reach into the wider community.



The local authority is working with health partners at a strategic level to improve the data available at centre level.

The centre is developing systems to demonstrate the impact of its work, for example it is developing its use of Estart to monitor more precisely specific groups accessing services. Staff recognise the need to use the range of data that is available from partners in order to monitor the progress and outcomes for families. The centre staff know what they want to improve and they have identified priorities based on data recently provided by the local authority, the annual satisfaction survey and anecdotal evidence from partners. There is clear success criteria for each of the centre's identified priorities so the centre can measure progress.

Governance and accountability arrangements are in place but not consistently understood. The local authority has reviewed the format used to monitor the centre's work as part of the annual conversation. However, key performance indicators are not yet used to measure the centre's performance and the impact it has on outcomes. The advisory board, whilst undertaking its role satisfactorily, is not yet providing a sufficient level of challenge for the centre.

Positive partnerships exist between the centre and other agencies. West Berkshire Benefits Information Officer regularly attends activity sessions and provides families with information and advice on calculating which benefits they are entitled to. The speech and language therapist helps staff to focus an appropriate emphasis on developing children's language and communication skills using the Every Child a Talker (ECAT) programme when planning activities for 'stay and play' sessions.

Centre staff promote an inclusive environment for families. One parent commented, 'It is such a welcoming environment where everyone is included.' Sessions targeted at particular groups, for example Polish families, have encouraged their attendance at the centre. The crèche facility for parents attending adult and family learning courses plays a key part in enabling adults to develop their knowledge, skills and experience. Parents with children with disabilities receive specific guidance to support their children's particular needs through parenting courses such as 'Parenting special children'.

Accommodation is used well. Several different partners are based at the centre and space is made available to different community groups, including childminders. Family support workers have a range of skills in order to cover the various aspects of the children's centre's work and providing satisfactory value for money. Staff are appropriately trained to safeguard children. Policies on child protection matters are clearly understood by staff. Targeted work with families is successful and has a positive impact on keeping children well protected and safe. Effective systems, such as recruitment checks, are in place to ensure those who work with children are suitable to do so.

The views of parents are satisfactorily taken into account and used to help shape services. However, families are not systematically and routinely involved in the

governance of the centre through the advisory board and the centre is looking to re-establish the parent forum to address this.

*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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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**

None.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the North Thatcham Children's Centre on 19 and 20 September 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

During the inspection, we held meetings with the centre's staff, some of the other people who work from the centre and members of the local authority and advisory board. We looked at evaluations of the centre's work and a range of other documentation. We were pleased to be able to talk to some of you about the centre

and the activities. We agree with you that staff at the centre are caring and welcoming and provide you with appropriate guidance and support, especially when you need it the most. The centre is becoming a hub within the community and an increasing number of you are accessing the different activities the centre provides. You told us how much you enjoy and value the different sessions and how the range of activities stimulate and develop children's knowledge and skills. The recent satisfaction survey supports your view as 98% of families who completed the questionnaire stated their satisfaction with the centre.

The range of services is designed to meet the needs of families and, as a result, is accessed by a growing number of families. Around 62% of families from within the area have accessed services in the last 12 months. Established partnerships with health at a local level result in coordinated services, such as the post-natal support group. Sessions are run by family support workers and health professionals. The programme includes sessions such as 'happy mummy, happy baby' and 'sleeping and settling'. You told us that this group provides an opportunity to meet other new parents, share experiences, preventing isolation and increasing confidence in parenting skills.

We heard how some of you are benefiting from individual family support. Staff are appropriately trained in how to safeguard children and the centre has effective systems in place to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable to do so. Staff work well with other agencies to ensure you and your children access the right kind of support, including health visitors, speech therapists and the benefits officer when you need them. It was good to join some of you during the Incredible Families session as you discussed different ways to play with your children.

The centre knows what it does well and what it needs to do better. Centre staff are developing the system to evaluate how well the services they provide are helping you and your families. They know that some of you are accessing adult learning courses, such as ESOL, but they do not find out what the longer-term impact of attending this training has for you and your family. The centre has set itself appropriate targets and the steps it needs to take to move the centre forward. The new joint advisory board is developing its effectiveness in holding the centre to account and providing a sufficient level of challenge.

We noticed that you have some opportunities to share your views as staff involve you in evaluating sessions. You offer suggestions when services require amendment to meet your families' changing needs, for example timings of sessions and requesting story and rhyme time is included at all sessions. The centre recognises that you need to be more systematically engaged in the governance of the centre and is in the process of re-establishing the parent forum.

The local authority has recently provided the centre with some specific data about the reach area. The centre has already started to use this information to inform its work. However, the local authority knows it needs to improve the information it

provides the centre about the area, particularly information about health, in order to support the centre in assessing the needs of the community and helping it to measure whether services are effectively helping you to make changes in your lives.

You can support the centre by sharing your views and getting involved as a volunteer, an advisory board member or joining the parent forum.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us during the inspection and we are grateful for your views and comments.

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