

Inspection report for Northallerton and Villages Children's Centre

Local authority	North Yorkshire
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Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow HMI

Centre leader	Sharon Jones
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Alverton Primary School URN: 121368
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.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

Inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, staff and parents. Meetings were also held with members of the steering group, local authority officers and partners. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documents.

Information about the centre

Northallerton and Villages Children's Centre is purpose-built and opened in 2007. It is located on the site of Alverton Community Primary School in the heart of Northallerton. The centre's families come from Northallerton, along with the adjoining villages of Brompton, and Romanby and a number of surrounding villages. In May 2011, a substantial extension was opened to meet the needs of the growing number of families accessing services. Staff deliver some services in families' homes and in community venues including regular sessions at the Methodist Church Hall in Northallerton. The centre serves a community of mixed social and economic characteristics. Areas of relative prosperity are interspersed with pockets of town and rural deprivation. Housing adjacent to the centre comprises mainly housing association rented properties, further afield there is a mix of privately owned and rented accommodation. There are approximately 1300 children under five years old living in the area. Around 800 children are registered with the centre. Most families and children in the area around the centre are of White British heritage. The proportion of children aged under four years living in households where no one is working and those dependent on benefits has risen since 2008, although most recent data available indicates the proportion remains slightly below the national average. The take-up of the childcare element of the working families' tax credit is high.

The range of services provided include support for expectant parents, parents with new babies, teen parents, fathers, breastfeeding support, sessions to promote children's learning and development and parenting courses. Weekly baby health clinics are also provided. Governance is provided by a strategic group that acts as an advisory board. This is made up

of a cross-section of partner agency professionals, including representatives from the public, private and voluntary sector. The centre also has a parents' forum. Children enter early years provision with skills and abilities that are often below that expected for their age. Early Years Foundation Stage provision is available at Alverton Community Primary School and through a range of private, voluntary providers and schools within the area. These settings are subject to their own inspection arrangements and their most recent reports can be viewed at www.Ofsted.gov.uk.

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
2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

Main findings

Children and families thrive in this good, inclusive, happy and caring centre and in the outreach work in community venues. The small centre team, 'punch above their weight', by working with their impressive range of volunteers and wide range of agencies successfully. They collectively provide a myriad of good activities, services and support so parents and children are safe and achieve well during their time here. Outcomes are good for all; particularly those with circumstances that make them vulnerable, and the care, guidance and support provided is outstanding. One parent summed up the views of many when she said, 'staff go over and above what they need to do to ...they know how to make us welcome ...but then they know just how to step in and help us in times of need'.

Safeguarding procedures are good, fully understood by staff and partners and secure the safety and welfare of children and adults well. Good information sharing with social services, ensure that the right support is provided quickly to families in times of greatest need. Partnership with adult learning services and activities within the centre are helping to build parents' skills to help move into employment or training or progress in their learning and development of skills. However, until recently the centre manager did not receive clear enough information to evaluate the impact of this partners' work fully. In addition, partnership with Jobcentre Plus is developing but has yet to make its full impact.

Leadership is good. Performance management arrangements and supervision of staff are robust and drive improvements in the centre's work and in its impact. The centre manager's vision for a centre to be at the heart of the local community and to make an outstanding

difference to the lives of all families in the area is being increasingly realised. This is evidenced in the growing numbers of children and families attending and their good outcomes. Consequently, the centre has good capacity to continue to improve. Staff, volunteers, and partners embrace the centre manager's vision fully. They have a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement due to their involvement in the evaluation of the centre's work. They work enthusiastically together to achieve their ambition to be outstanding in all respects. Detailed plans are in place and progress of priorities and actions are tracked meticulously by local authority senior managers and the steering group. Targets are in place for every priority, however, some do not describe precisely how much improvement is required. When this is the case, it is difficult for the steering group to know whether the targets are challenging enough or whether the progress made is good enough.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with local authority senior managers to:
 - improve arrangements to hold partners such as adult learning services to account for the actions they are taking to support improvement in families' future employment opportunities including their development of basic skills
 - develop relationships with Jobcentre Plus further so more families can receive the guidance and support they need to move into employment or training
 - ensure targets in the development plan are always challenging and measurable so that the steering group can evaluate the impact of all planned actions on outcomes for children and families.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Actions taken collectively by centre staff, volunteers and health partners are making a positive difference to the health and well-being of children and their parents. This includes the work of volunteer breastfeeding peer supporters to help mums get over any early challenges of breastfeeding. Mums speak very positively about how well they are supported, and as a result, a higher than average proportion sustain breastfeeding beyond six weeks. They particularly value the mobile phone line they can ring day or night to hear a helpful voice at the other end. Healthy cooking courses, international café events and healthy snacks for children are just a few of the many examples of work undertaken to improve the physical health of families. Particularly good work has been undertaken with young parents to help them cook healthy food for their children. They are now developing a healthy cookery book to help others. As a result of such work, and sessions such as 'Stay and Play' to get parents and children physically active, obesity rates are lower than average.

The centre's approach to safeguarding is good, especially for families who experience major challenges in their lives. This is because of the proactive work between the centre's staff and social care staff who work together to share information and identify needs so that actions can be taken quickly. As a result, virtually all families in the reach area known to social services are being well-supported by the centre's team to help build better relationships with their children and build their own confidence and self-esteem. Parents reported convincingly on the positive difference the work has made to their relationships with their children and to their skills as parents in keeping their children safe.

Staff and partners are well trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). Assessments are being used effectively to develop multi-agency team around the child plans for families in most need. This is helping to avoid escalation of some cases into formal social work proceedings and in helping to support other families who have recently stepped down from direct work with social workers successfully. Male staff provide good role models, and mums who are being supported because of domestic violence say this is particularly helpful to their children in helping them understand not all men are violent. Innovative work with the local prison is helping prisoners due for release to develop positive relationships with their children during fun days where centre staff work within the prison play area.

Good partnership with local authority Early Years Foundation Stage professionals, local schools and childminders alongside interesting activities such as 'Story Telling Wednesday' are helping do develop children's readiness for school and a love of learning. Recent tracking information from the local school shows children who have benefited from the centre's work are more ready for school and are making good progress in their learning and development. Centre staff work closely with the local authority's portage service to ensure the few disabled children and those with a special educational needs in the area are well supported in their settings or provided with fun activities within the centre such as 'POP'. This is adding to their successful inclusion into the centre.

The centre manager constantly seeks ways to gain parents' views. These are used effectively to adapt and change activities to meet families' diverse needs and to make sure that those who need the services most are coming to benefit from all that is on offer. As a result, attendance rates of targeted groups such as young parents, dads, the small but increasing proportion of families from minority ethnic communities are good and have improved well since 2011. There are many examples of how the views of parents have changed activities and services. For example, parents wanted activities where dads and mums could do things together with their children. This has resulted in well-attended, regular family fun days. Volunteering is a strength in the centre. Volunteers are well trained, supported and empowered to develop their own activities as long as they fit in with the centre's vision.

Good work with adult learning services and activities within the centre are helping over half of the families to be involved in activities that focus on building parents' confidence, relationships with their children and employability and functional skills. However, until recently the centre manager did not receive clear enough information about the impact of the work of some partner agencies. Effective partnerships with the Citizens Advice Bureau and Jubilee Debt, as well as emerging work with Jobcentre Plus, enables centre staff to sign post families to local jobs, good quality benefits and debt advice. Again, until recently the manager has not been able to fully measure the impact of such partners' work.

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	2
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 manager has a good understanding of the communities across the area. This is because of the good information sharing amongst professionals, local information from the staff team and the accurate information the centre holds at post-code level. Alongside outcomes from significant consultation with families, the manager uses such information to tailor activities to meet the needs and interests of families well. This is particularly true for those the centre has identified that would benefit most such as young parents and those facing significant difficulties of challenges in their lives. This can be seen in the wide range of sensitive and timely actions being taken by centre staff and partners to support victims of domestic violence successfully. The emphasis on improving parenting skills of those in most need, through programmes like 'Solihull' and 'Parent Puzzle' is helping parents to cope and reduce the challenges they face successfully.

A good range of well-planned, practical activities, including one-to-one support where needed, promotes the learning and development of children and their families well. Sessions observed by inspectors were of good quality. 'Stay and Play', 'Baby Massage' and the regular 'Dads and Male Carers Group' are well attended. It was great to see mums, dads, volunteers and children in the 'Stay and Play', working and playing together both indoors and out. The provision of health workers' 'one year old check' at the same time enables new parents to see the good quality activities available. Indeed, virtually all parents of children under the age of one now access activities within the centre.

The care, guidance and support provided to families are first class. No stone is left unturned by centre staff to support and meet the needs of all who enter. Staff, and well-trained volunteers are warm, welcoming, supportive and sensitive towards parents' and children's needs. Parents report they are confident in sharing their concerns and worries with staff because they know they will be taken seriously and any concerns acted upon. Parents talked passionately about how the centre has had a significant impact on their confidence and self-esteem, resulting in improved outcomes for themselves and their children.

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

Governance arrangements are developing and the steering group is growing into its role well. Minutes from the group's quarterly meetings and discussions with members show they

monitor progress of actions in the development plan carefully, tracking attendance rates, including those of targeted groups and new registrations meticulously. However, members are aware that more needs to be done to make sure targets in the plan are all measurable so they can always evaluate the impact of the centre's and partners' work fully.

Families who use the centre are fully involved in consultation and routinely share their views. Parents say they feel valued because they 'know their views are listened to and acted on'. 'Questions of the Week and Month' are just a couple of innovative examples of how the views of parents are taken into account. A strong parents' forum is in place. Parents on this group are very influential in the development of services and provision across the centre's area, in fundraising for the centre and for local charities. They state they do not want to be on the steering group so they meet regularly with the centre manager and members of the steering group to put their views forward. This information is then fed into the strategic group's meetings.

The centre manager is held to account well for her work through the quarterly steering group meetings, regular supervision with her local authority line manager and the annual conversation with the line manager and the chair of the steering group. The centre manager in turn holds her small team to account similarly successfully through supervision, which includes evaluation of progress against individual action plans, parental reviews of activities and random sampling of individual case files of families with whom staff are working.

All relevant checks are made to ensure that staff, partners and volunteers are cleared to work with children. Staff and volunteers receive high-quality child protection training and speak confidently and knowledgeably about their role in safeguarding children and what to do if they have any concerns. Risks are thoroughly assessed and minimised, ensuring that the environment is safe, including risk assessments for community settings and the range of one-off activities that take place in the community during the year.

Strong partnership working and successful development of volunteers ensures resources and expertise are maximised to deliver services that meet the diverse needs and interests of families in the area and to deliver good value for money. The impact of their collective work can be seen in the increasing attendances of those most in need of support and in the good outcomes for children and families. Work with partners is increasingly integrated, particularly with health professionals and social care colleagues. Partnerships with the local authority's early intervention team and attendance at 'Outcome Panels', enables the centre manager to discuss cases that are causing concern, with other professionals. This shared approach to problem solving helps to refocus multi-agency support to move complex cases on quickly.

The centre meets its duty to promote equality and diversity well. The inclusion of all, particularly those in most need lies at the heart of the centre's work. Staff are increasingly successful in supporting their targeted groups such as young parents and those in need of support to help their children be safe and breaking down barriers to help them achieve their goals. High expectations of how people behave in the centre makes sure that prejudice of any kind is quickly tackled, For example, when an incident was observed, the centre manager tackled it head on with the parent concerned. Other parents then got together and

developed an expected code of conduct for all people who use visit the centre and their poster now adorns the centre's activity room.

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 secures 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	2
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	2
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	2
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

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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Northallerton and Villages Children's Centre on 19 - 20 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall. You told us, and we agree that the care, guidance and support provided is excellent.

Thanks to those of you who took the time out of your busy lives to speak to us in meetings and in activity sessions. The information you gave us and your many comments on the activities and sessions you attend have been very important in helping us to come to our judgements. Those of you who spoke to us say you are very happy with the range of activities you can take part in and the support you receive from staff. Many of you told us how approachable and welcoming the staff are and how good they are at listening and helping, especially in times of great need. You also say staff are very good at making sure your children are safe and well-cared for.

Like you, we can see that staff provide a warm, welcoming and safe atmosphere to all who enter. Staff work well with services like health to help you get a range of advice and support

in line with what you want or need. For example, the centre provides many healthy activities and staff work with health professionals and breastfeeding peer-supporters to help you and your children to be healthy and to help those of you who are breastfeeding to continue to do so. It is good to see that the number of mums continuing to breastfeed is above that nationally and the number of children above the normal weight range is low. There are many activities and sessions to help both you and your children develop good relationships with each other and enjoy learning activities together, particularly through activities like 'Stay and Play' or 'Baby Massage'. Information the centre keeps shows that children who use the centre are well prepared for school and do well once they get there.

A number of you told us how much you have valued the parenting courses which have helped build your confidence and self-esteem. They have helped you to develop positive relationships with your children or manage your children's behaviour better. A good number of you take part in activities and sessions with centre staff and partners that help prepare you for your eventual return to employment or improve your basic skills. This is good, but until recently adult learning services have not been good at sharing the information they have about your achievements well enough. Jobcentre Plus is working more closely with centre staff to help more of you to gain the skills, confidence and qualifications that will help you achieve your future goals. However, there is still more to do to make sure more of you can have this support. We have asked the local authority to work with adult learning services to make sure they provide regular information to the centre manager about your achievements and to develop the work with Jobcentre Plus further.

The centre manager and staff try in many ways to listen to your views and are constantly adapting activities matched to your comments. They really welcome volunteers and have thirteen currently working in the centre and in the community venues such as the Methodist Church Hall in Northallerton. Volunteers speak really positively about their roles, their training and support and the opportunities they have to develop activities for themselves. I know the centre manager would like even more of you to join in and help so do go along and see what opportunities are on offer.

The centre manager has ambitious plans for the centre to be the best and at the heart of your community. These plans are checked regularly by senior people in the local authority and the centre's steering group. There are many targets to meet but sometimes these are not clear enough so it will be hard to check if all the targets have been met. We have asked the local authority to make sure targets are really clear so everyone can see whether the plans are working well.

Once again thanks to those of you who spoke to us and I hope even more of you come to the centre to take part in the good work and range of activities the centre has to offer.

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