

Stoke-on-Trent – North Locality

Bishop Road, Chell Heath, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST6 6QW

Inspection date 12–14 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group is good.

- The group is very well supported and challenged by a strong partnership board. Parents' views are well represented through the 'parent voice' group. As a result of this good leadership, management and governance, the impact of the centres is improving.
- Close working relationships with the YMCA-led Start Up programme have led a number of parents into further education and employment for the first time.
- The centres recognise that there are some groups such as the Traveller community who would be unlikely to access services without support, and have been effective in developing a relationship with families in this community.
- A good training and supervision programme ensures that volunteers' training needs and career aspirations are identified and their development is closely monitored.
- Through a collaborative approach with other local agencies, the centres have mapped needs and services very effectively to an area and street level.
- Specialist services, such as support for teenage parents and disabled children and those with special educational needs, are delivered according to local need and complement but do not duplicate existing provision.

It is not outstanding because:

- Not all activities are of an equally high standard. Staff do not consistently place a strong enough focus on teaching parents about the prime areas of learning and development; opportunities to plug key issues on safety and health consistently in some play and learning sessions are missed.
- As yet the centres are not using outcome and retention data well enough to evaluate the provision robustly, particularly for adult learning and training.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Burslem Children's Centre, Milton and Baddley Green Children's Centre, Norton and Ball Green Children's Centre, Stoke-on-Trent North Children's Centre and Tunstall Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives from the local authority and advisory board, the senior leadership team, early years practitioners, outreach workers, representatives from professional partnerships, volunteers and parents.

The inspectors visited a range of activities across the centres. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Kathryn Gethin, Lead Inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Debora Barazetti-Scott	Her Majesty's Inspector
Parm Sansoyer	Additional inspector
Megan Dauksta	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

In April 2011, children's centres in Stoke-on-Trent were split into three locality areas, North, Central and South. Stoke-on-Trent – North Locality is a group of children's centres made up of five centres: Burslem Children's Centre; Milton and Baddley Green Children's Centre; Norton and Ball Green Children's Centre; Stoke-on-Trent North Children's Centre and Tunstall Children's Centre. Milton and Baddley Green Children's Centre is a phase 3 centre and is incorporated with Norton and Ball Green Children's Centre. All the centres are in close proximity to each other. In April 2012, a second re-structure saw the introduction of collaborative partnerships for each centre.

Governance for the group is provided by the local authority with a single partnership board serving the group. The group offers a wide range of services to meet its core purpose. These include: antenatal appointments; play and learning; family support and adult and family learning opportunities. There is also one private childcare provider, 'Huggies Day Nursery' on the Stoke-on-Trent North site. This provider is subject to separate inspection arrangements. The report can be found on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

There are 5,747 children aged under five years living in the area. The large majority of families in the locality live in communities ranked within the top 30% for deprivation nationally. The group focuses its work in these communities. Unemployment rates, families on benefits and the proportion of adults without any qualifications are high. Most of the population is White British with smaller percentages of families from minority ethnic groups. A number of families from Traveller backgrounds live on a dedicated site. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those typically expected for their age when they enter early years provision.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Ensure all evaluation and tracking systems are equally effective in measuring progress and outcomes, in particular for those in adult learning and training.
- Ensure all activities are of an equally high standard by:
 - observing practice for all providers on a regular basis
 - staff having a clear focus on learning outcomes in 'stay and play' sessions and extending children's language through skilful questioning
 - using sessions to re-inforce key messages on safety and health, and teaching parents about the importance of play and language.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Through close collaborative working with other statutory and voluntary agencies, the centres have undertaken a comprehensive mapping exercise to identify services available across the locality. Through signposting and support, they are able to ensure that families access the right service to meet their needs and the large majority of families from target groups now engage with relevant services.
- Community development workers focus very effectively on identifying families who may not otherwise know about or use centre services. They use a range of strategies, such as engaging with local supermarkets, to promote centre services as well as delivering services through outreach locations, such as community playgroups.
- Outreach work is used well. The centres have been very effective in developing a relationship with families in the Traveller community. This has resulted in a level of trust being developed that has ensured children have accessed services which support their school attendance, and behaviour and social skills.
- The centres work with a range of partners including health, education and adult learning organisations to ensure that families with young children in the area are aware of centre services. In some centres, health visitors have a permanent base, and regular health clinics and midwife-led antenatal clinics are delivered within children's centre settings.
- Through universal services such as the toy library, the centres are able to engage with children and families who are the most isolated. Within the centres and in outreach venues, 'stay and play' sessions, baby massage and antenatal classes provide an introduction to centre staff and services that help families who need more targeted support to be identified.
- Specialist support includes the provision of effective antenatal care for teenagers. All pregnant teenagers are known to the centres and are supported to attend the groups. Appropriate support packages are in place for disabled children and those with special educational needs. These include home visits by the Portage team.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- An appropriate balance of universal and targeted services makes a good contribution to the personal development and well-being of families. However, the quality of universal groups is varied. For example, in 'stay and play', staff do not reinforce key messages consistently on health, safety and teaching parents about the importance of play and language.
- Family support work is of a good quality overall. Targeted intervention, prevention and early help provided through the centres and partner agencies have a significant and positive impact on children. Through working with local housing providers, the centres have improved the life chances and reduced inequalities for those families who struggle to integrate, such as those seeking asylum, by providing assistance with accessing domestic abuse services, food bank vouchers, and debt management.
- A large majority of targeted families with an identified need attend parenting courses. They improve their ability to deal with their children effectively. For example, one parent is now able to respond appropriately to his child's behavioural issues. The group measures well parents' self-assessment of improvements to their skills and understanding. Tracking records show almost all improve their self-confidence and parenting skills.
- The centres provide access to a large number of courses to improve parents' literacy, numeracy and employability skills. The majority of parents complete these courses successfully and view the provision of an on-site crèche as crucial to their ability to attend. However, as yet, the centres are not using outcome and retention data well enough to evaluate the provision robustly.
- Good partnership working is in place through the YMCA Start Up programme, employment agencies and local colleges. A significant number of parents have engaged with the Start Up programme and,

through confidence-building courses and training, are improving their chances of employment.

- The number of volunteers is good and increasing year-on-year. They provide a useful service; for example, one volunteer mother uses her language skills to settle Eastern European children into the crèche. Another mother runs a breastfeeding group. Several former volunteers are now employed by the centre.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The local authority re-design of the centres has led to sharper ways of working. Resources have been used effectively and efficiently by bringing together all key partners through new collaborative arrangements. This increase in information sharing has led to a more robust analysis of family's needs and better identification of priorities. To date, the centres are on course to meet the large majority of their targets.
- Governance is well embedded. Leaders and the local authority know the centres well, have a clear vision and communicate this well. Reports on outcomes are produced quarterly. These provide invaluable information and are used well by leaders and the partnership board to monitor the centres' performance, challenge on the progress towards targets and make informed decisions in order to drive improvement and continue to reduce inequalities for children and families.
- Partnerships with health visitors and social care are particularly strong. They provide an integrated package of support for families. Barriers have been successfully broken down. For example, live birth data are now made available to the group and joint visits are undertaken. As a result, the centres are much better placed to identify need and to work together.
- The culture of safeguarding is clearly evident. Managers have a good understanding of the need to ensure safeguarding and the welfare of children; these remain priorities. Strong links with other agencies, such as the police, children's social care and domestic abuse services demonstrate this; these collaborative relationships help to ensure children who are most in need are identified and risk of harm is effectively reduced. Policies and procedures set out expectations and practice is compliant with these.
- Parents' views are gathered effectively through the 'parent voice' group, parent ambassadors and membership on the partnership board. These are used to help shape services and contribute to decision making. Requests from the Saturday 'dads' group', changes to name badges and changes to times of sessions have all been listened to and agreed. Parents speak movingly of how the centres have been a 'lifeline for them'.
- Evaluations are completed on a regular basis and most families report a high level of satisfaction. However, not all services delivered by partners are monitored by the centres. Consequently, the centres cannot be secure that the level of service is of the expected standard.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's well-being and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Children's Centre Group details

Unique reference number	80332
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	427648
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	5747
Group manager	Danielle Holdcroft
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01782 232977
Email address	Danielle.holdcroft@stoke.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- URN 22941 Stoke-on-Trent North Children's Centre
- URN 20515 Burslem Children's Centre
- URN 22022 Milton and Baddley Green Children's Centre
- URN 22211 Norton and Ball Green Children's Centre
- URN 23364 Tunstall Children's Centre

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