

North East Shropshire

Market Drayton Infant School, Longflow Road, Market Drayton, TF9 3BA

Inspection date 20–21 May 2014

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 is a good centre.

- Highly effective partnerships with key agencies including health, early education and social care have been developed and are nurtured to secure timely early help and support for children and families.
- The group and its partners regularly and routinely engage with over 80% of all children and families living in the area. Children and families access a range of good quality activities, groups, family learning courses, and support. Therefore, outcomes for most children are good and improving.
- At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, many more children achieve a good level of development than seen nationally, especially in the Whitchurch area. Most early childhood provision in the reach area is good. As a result, most children make rapid gains in their learning during their time at these settings.
- The success of the children's centre group lies with the consistent application of high expectations and shared ambition for the two centres by the leaders, governance and management at all levels.
- Virtually all children who are entitled to early education funding are making effective use of their entitlement in good quality early childhood settings.

It is not outstanding because:

- Although the centre is improving, the group's quality assurance processes are not fully established as a means of driving continuous improvement. Consequently, leaders cannot be fully assured that all services and groups are consistently good.
- In 'Stay & Play' sessions, insufficient attention is paid to the monitoring and recording of children's developmental progress.
- The progress that adult learners make is not tracked well and as a result leaders and managers are not clear about their achievement.

What does the centre/group need to do to improve further?

- Further the success of the children's centre group and continue to drive improvement by:
 - developing the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of all activities;
 - ensuring that children who are attending 'Stay & Play' sessions have their progress closely monitored and recorded; and
 - improving the tracking of adult learners' progression and achievements overtime.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre 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 Market Drayton Children's Centre and Whitchurch Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre group's area leader, the centre group coordinator, senior leaders from the local authority, education and health; early intervention practitioners; early childhood providers, volunteers; health and social care professionals, adult education and commissioned services; parents and centre users; and representatives of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited a range of services offered, including local schools, parent led playgroups, 'Stay and Play' sessions, 'Bumps to Babies', and an adult learning course.

The inspectors visited each of the children's centres. They observed the group's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including case files.

Inspection team

Deborah Udakis, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Aileen King	Additional inspector
Mary Dudley	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

There are twelve children's centres in Shropshire organised into five groups. The North East Shropshire Children's Centre group was established in April 2013. The group is led, on behalf of the local authority, by a centre group manager. Together with the centre leaders they hold responsibility for the daily management of each centre. Some 2081 children under five years of age live in the group's reach area.

The North East Shropshire group consists of two Children's Centre areas; Market Drayton Children's Centre Area and Whitchurch Children's Centre Area. Each of the centres deliver a range of services to meet the core purpose, including early childhood services, adult learning, parenting support, health services, speech and language therapy and family welfare. Governance arrangements for the locality are provided by the local authority and the advisory board.

Registered early years provision is located in both children's centres areas. None of the early childhood settings were inspected at the same time as the centres. The most recent inspection reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The group covers a large predominantly rural area and around 11% of children under five years are living in homes dependent on workless benefits. The centres serve families who are predominantly from White British backgrounds with an increasing proportion of families of Asian and Eastern European heritage. Both Children's Centre areas serve an established Traveller community. Very few families attending the centres speak English as an additional language.

Services within the group are targeted specifically at teenage parents, low income families, disabled children, families living in the most deprived areas and children being supported by social services.

Children's skills and understanding on entry to early years provision are below expected levels for their age.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- Highly effective interagency and joined-up working ensures good information sharing across organisations. This is proving particularly successful when targeting vulnerable families for support and early help. This successful partnership working ensures efficiency and value for money as agencies work well to ensure children and families access the right levels of support at the right time.
- Virtually all children who are entitled to early education funding are making effective use of their entitlement in good quality early childhood settings.
- The centre is successfully engaging with most children and families living in the area including; young parents, Traveller families, children with disabilities and/or special educational needs, families in difficulty, and lone parents. Outcomes for these groups of families are improving and for many are good.
- Children are developing the habits of effective learners as they arrive at venues on time and ready to participate in activities. This good attendance and punctuality is promoted by the centres, early childhood settings and the linked schools. Consequently, attendance at both schools has improved.
- The centres and their partners provide effective and flexible responses to help overcome barriers to access. For instance, home visits and outreach work provide highly personalised support and early help, and are proving very effective at engaging with families who have been reluctant to access the centre group's services.
- Most children are thriving in their learning because most access good quality early childhood provision. 'Stay and Play' sessions are both Children's Centre and community/parent led and are run every day, in various venues throughout the locality. These groups provide essential play and learning, and social opportunities for children and families, particularly for those who are at risk of rural isolation.
- Leaders are making increasingly good use of social media to promote further engagement and to aid effective communication. Careful attention is paid to the possible associated risks by the digital champions at the centres. They provide good quality advice and guidance to help raise families awareness of the safe use of social media forums and sites.
- Strong partnership working and robust systems for sharing information ensure that those families most in need of targeted support access an appropriate range of relevant services to help them deal with and overcome any difficulties they are experiencing.
- The centre group offers a range of good quality family learning opportunities at different skills level, from one off workshops to accredited courses. However parents' journeys through the different learning opportunities and their achievements and progress is not tracked or recorded in any systematic way.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- Children; including disabled children and children with special educational needs, make good progress in their learning and development. This is because most children access good quality services; get early help from speech and language support where appropriate; and parents are encouraged and helped to play a role in their child's learning. The gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers is considerably narrower than seen nationally and continues to close.

- In 'Stay and Play' sessions there is not a consistent system of recording children's developmental progress over time. Therefore, it is not always clear how these groups are supporting the good levels of achievement seen at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Children and families are well-supported during times of transition. Consequently, children move from the children's centres and other early childhood settings into the school environment with relative ease and confidence.
- Children and families access a good range of community based services as well as those aimed at meeting specific and targeted needs. Consequently, for the large majority of families, engagement with the centre and services provided by partner agencies is making a significant difference to their well-being.
- The quality of care, guidance and support provided for families is good and effectively reduces inequalities. One-to-one support, through home visits and specialist work, for those families considered to be most in need helps them overcome often complex problems. For instance, those experiencing bereavement, child protection concerns and domestic violence, access intensive support promote their well-being and to reduce risks of further harm.
- Parents speak enthusiastically about the parenting support they receive. Structured courses such as 'Understanding Your Child', have enable parents to become more confident parents and to develop a better understanding of their child's behaviour. Highly individualised parenting support for targeted families has led to improvements in the home lives of children and parents.
- Young parents thrive in the centre due to the consistent support they receive and because the centre staff encourage them to become increasingly active in the life of their community. For instance, a few young parents have become volunteers at the centre and are developing their skills and expertise in a range of centre related activities.
- Healthy lifestyles are well-promoted. Parents' views on health promotion are positive. Parents who made their comments known said they are aware of safety issues and feel the centres offers good advice on health and welfare matters. Parents welcome and act on the support and information they receive to support their family's good health.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Strong leadership and governance is clearly articulated by the very able senior centre staff, local authority leaders and the advisory board. Leaders at all levels encourage the centre staff to perform at their best, 'to make every contact count', and help to drive organisational success. As a result, morale is good and staff are motivated.
- Proactive, skilled and enthusiastic leaders, at all levels of management and governance, have effectively led the reorganisation of the two individual centres into a coherent and successful group. Resources are used very well to ensure good outcomes for families.
- The leaders provide an inclusive approach to self-assessment, with contributions from parents, staff, the advisory board and key partners. They are effective at taking stock of the group's strengths and shortcomings and at taking steps to improve. However, the group's written self-evaluation and the development plan do not always reflect the leaders' clarity and success at driving improvements. The leaders are very aware of this and are taking appropriate steps to address this.

- Support and reflective learning is promoted well by leaders and helps to maintain a skilled and confident workforce. The strong culture of workforce learning and development ensures that all staff are able to develop the skills and confidence they need to do their jobs effectively and to meet organisational priorities.
- Highly effective partnerships are carefully nurtured by centre leaders and staff. Consequently, there is a wide range of good quality provision available to children and families at a range of locations across the area.
- The strong partnerships with linked schools is reaping rewards for children and families as they start school having established secure relationships with teachers from the outset.
- Performance management arrangements are fair and understood by all staff. Leaders provide staff with regular opportunities to discuss agreed objectives and competencies. They use these meetings to discuss those areas for development employees need to address in order to achieve expectations and realise their potential.
- To ensure the quality of the services and activities provided by the centres and key partners, the leaders have recently developed a programme of quality assurance monitoring. However, leaders do not monitor the quality of all services and activities provided. Therefore, they cannot be confident that all provision meets the group's required quality standard.
- The centre leaders and staff have a fundamental commitment to safeguard and protect children and their families. Looked after children, children subject to child protection plans and families in times of crisis, are well-supported by the local authority's Early Help strategy. Trained and skilled staff make effective use of the early help assessment form (EHAF), MARAC and child protection processes to protect children from further risk of harm. Strict compliance with the local authority's safeguarding protocols and procedures help to ensure rigorous safe staff recruitment arrangements. Leaders and staff make good use of the findings of serious case reviews to implement recommended practice.

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 wellbeing 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	80218
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	444771
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	2081
Centre leader	Alex Morris-Perkins
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	01691 656513
Email address	Alex.morris-perkins@shropshire.gov.uk

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- Market Drayton Children's Centre (URN 21932)
- Whitchurch Children's Centre (URN 23575)

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