

Nantwich and Rural Children's Centre

Dog Lane, Nantwich, Cheshire, CW5 5GX

Inspection dates	24–26 September 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

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.

- Leaders at all levels play a vital part in the success of the children's centre. The ambitions and drive for the continued success of the centres in the collaboration are shared by all leaders, managers and staff, and those responsible for the governance of the centre. Consequently, the centre has a positive history of improvement.
- The centre is very successful at engaging with the very large majority of children and families, and especially so with those families that the centre has identified as most in need of its services and support, and those identified as being in greatest need.
- All three- and four-year-old children living in the reach are benefiting from the early education offer, and the large majority of early years provision in the area is good.
- Children make good progress in their learning and development from their low starting points. In the area, almost two-thirds of children achieve a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Families, at times of crisis, receive consistently good-quality care, guidance and support. Parents who made their comments known all spoke of the centre with very high regard.
- Recruitment, vetting and supervision arrangements are effective, and leaders provide good support for staff and their continuous professional development. The highly reflective and well-qualified staff work very well together to ensure the needs of families are met and that children are safeguarded.

It is not outstanding because:

- Too few two-year-old children who are eligible for early education funding take up the offer, especially those living in rural areas.
- The advisory board has yet to reach its full potential when it comes to challenging the centre, and to hold its leaders to account.
- There are some inconsistencies in the way that casework is recorded across the three centres, leading to some gaps in information.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Improve the take-up of two-year-olds' early education by those children who are eligible for government funding, especially those children living in rural communities, by:
 - working closely with early years providers to ensure there are sufficient accessible places in good-quality settings.
- Strengthen the leadership and management of the centre by ensuring that:
 - the advisory board takes a more active role in the process of challenging the centre's performance during planned leadership meetings and the annual conversation
 - all aspects of case file recording are of consistently high quality, reflecting the best practice seen at the centres.

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. It was carried out at the same time as two other children's centres in the collaboration, which were The Brooks Children's Centre and Oak Tee Children's Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager; the locality manager; senior leaders from the local authority; education and health; early intervention and family support workers; early childhood providers; headteachers of local primary schools; volunteers; health and social care professionals; an educational psychologist; a speech and language therapist; Home Start; adult education and the skills and employment team; commissioned services; parents and centre users; and representatives of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited a range of services offered, including baby and toddler sessions, the lone parent support group, Stay and Play sessions, the 'You Make the Difference' group, Sticky Bobs, Cherubs breastfeeding group, the local food bank, and adult learning provision, including English for Speakers of Other Languages provision. The inspectors spent time in each of the centres and linked provision, meeting children and families.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including a wide range of case files and casework, and carried out joint observations with centre leaders.

Inspection team

Deborah Udakis, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Parm Sansoyer	Additional Inspector
Cliff Rose	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sarah Drake	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Cheshire East County Council has 11 children's centres organised into two stand-alone centres, and three groups of collaborations.

The Crewe Locality Children's Centre collaboration group was established in 2009. Nantwich Children's Centre is part of a collaboration of four children's centres in the Crewe and Nantwich locality, which are located in the South area of Cheshire East. The collaboration is part of the Cheshire East Family Service (CEFS) South Locality. The CEFS team offers support to children and young people aged up to 19 years across the full spectrum of need, with a focus on early help. The locality covers a significant rural community and areas of affluence as well as two areas within the highest 30% levels of deprivation nationally. The centre is led, on behalf of the local authority, by a family service manager. Together with the family service manager, the locality manager holds responsibility for each of the four centres. Some 1,781 children under five years of age live in the centre's reach area.

The centre delivers a range of services, including family support, early childhood services, adult learning, parenting support, health services, speech and language therapy and family welfare. Governance arrangements, via an advisory board, are shared by the four centres.

A high number of families living in the area experience emotional and economic hardship. A smaller proportion of children under five years are living in homes dependent on workless benefits than seen nationally. The majority of families living in the area are of White British heritage, with approximately 12% of families from different minority ethnic backgrounds. A few families attending the centre speak English as an additional language.

Services within the group are targeted specifically at children-in-need and those on child protection plans, looked after children, children with disabilities and special educational needs, lone parents and those at risk of isolation, and families living with domestic violence.

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

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The excellent take-up of early education funding by three- and four-year-olds is not reflected in the take-up by two-year-old children, especially in rural areas. As a result, some children who would benefit from access to high-quality early years and childcare provision are not doing so. The centre closely monitors those eligible two-year-olds who are not accessing early education, to ensure their needs are being met.
- Because of the determined and concerted efforts of everyone involved in the centre, including parent champions, the numbers of children and families who regularly and routinely engage with the centre's groups and services are very impressive and continue to increase. Families are well supported from pre-birth and beyond, including lone parents, families experiencing domestic violence, and those at risk of isolation.
- All children targeted for priority support and services are known to each of the three centres. Leaders talk with confidence about those children who are subject to a child protection plan, who are in the care of the local authority, children identified as in need, and children with disabilities and special educational needs. Those few children in these priority groups who do not regularly attend the centre are being well served by key partners and organisations. The leaders continue to monitor the children's progress and development in consultation with key partners to ensure the children

continue to thrive.

- The small number of Traveller families living in the area are well supported within their community because of the good-quality partnerships with the local schools. The centre has assigned a family support worker who has built sustained and trusting relationships with these families. Consequently, the children of Traveller families attend school regularly and access relevant additional services when required.
- Case studies clearly demonstrate the removal of any perceived inequalities, discrimination and barriers, to ensure that families are able to sustain their engagement with the centre.
- To help families living in the most rural areas to access support, the centre provides a range of pop-up groups and services in outlying villages. For instance, effective partnerships with the local primary school in Wrenbury have led to the regular delivery of parent and toddlers groups, baby massage, and Stay and Play sessions in the village. These groups and activities are proving to be an essential link to children and families living in isolated areas.
- The effective partnership with the Community Policing Unit ensures that families who experience domestic violence receive prompt attention and support.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- New referrals for family support are well managed. Many families who experience poor emotional well-being are initially supported in their own homes. The family support workers skilfully build trusting relationships with children and families, secure good and improving outcomes and reduce inequalities.
- The centre delivers a good range of services open to all and services for families that the centre has identified as most in need. Case studies provide powerful and compelling evidence of how targeted support for those children and families in greatest need has resulted in improvements in the life chances of those children involved.
- The good-quality outreach provision is well supported by key partners including housing, the food bank service and the local Women's Institute. They all play a vital role in the delivery of services to the most rural communities. Consequently, those families at risk of isolation, lone parents, and those experiencing emotional ill-health are able to access good-quality support close to their homes.
- Staff make effective use of findings from serious case reviews, inspection events and annual conversations to review and update their practice. For instance, case file recording has been improved significantly in the last year. However, some aspects of information are not always consistently recorded in case files.
- Taster courses skilfully engage those parents otherwise unwilling to return to education, and lead to many taking up places on subsequent programmes. Success rates for both accredited and non-accredited courses are very high.
- The centre follows up engagement in adult education and tracks parents' development well. Staff contact parents at regular intervals after they have attended programmes to discuss how they have used what they have learned and any further programmes they might benefit from.
- School readiness courses, run in partnership with local primary schools, rural schools and early years settings, help families to get their children to school on time each day, and ready to learn. As a result, children are making good progress and almost two-thirds achieve a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Schools report that sessions to support adults' literacy and numeracy skills are having a positive impact on parents' involvement in their children's learning.
- The centre is increasing the use of volunteers and parent champions to build on their capacity to provide services. Through an effective programme of professional support, the volunteers and champions are building confidence and enhancing their employability as they positively engage with families in their reach areas.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**Good**

- The success of the centre is, in no small part, due to the highly effective key partners and commissioned organisations. For instance, speech and language support is an essential part of the early help offer, and plays a vital role in supporting children's improved attainment in communication and language at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The effective deployment of staff and resources across centres and agencies helps to avoid duplication of services and any waste of valuable assets.
- Staff training and development opportunities are closely matched to the centre's priorities. As a result, staff have the skills, qualifications and expertise to meet the evolving demands of the centre's work.
- The centre has a designated data champion who is highly skilled in the collation and analysis of information. Consequently, leaders and staff are provided with a wealth of information. The leaders carefully monitor the increases in the levels of engagement with families, improvements in the proportions of families who are registered with the centre, and the improving outcomes for children and families across a range of agreed measures.
- The family service managers are very knowledgeable and experienced leaders. Considerable training and workplace learning takes place routinely and regularly regarding safeguarding, including online safety and security, and child sexual exploitation. Child protection policies and procedures are well embedded and understood by all leaders, staff and volunteers. Consequently, all staff are well versed in the indicators of abuse and they expertly identify risks to children and parents.
- Children-in-need, those subject to a child protection plan and those on the edge of care are closely monitored and well supported. Staff make expert use of the Common Assessment Framework and multi-agency referral processes, and take swift and appropriate steps to protect children from risk of serious harm.
- Performance management arrangements are well embedded and are very robust. Staff are closely monitored and are well supported by leaders in their work with families. Casework is supervised effectively and staff are quick to pick up on changes in children's behaviour, appearance and welfare. Consequently, outcomes for children and families are improving.
- Senior leaders in the local authority have a good awareness of the challenges and key priorities facing the centre. They rigorously hold the centre to account through key leadership arrangements, including the annual conversation process, with strong evidence of continuous improvement.
- Leaders, managers, parents, staff and governance at all levels play an essential role in the evaluation of the effectiveness of centre services and provision. The leaders provide accurate information about the centre's performance, its strengths and areas for improvement.
- Members of the recently established advisory board are already having a positive impact on the good-quality governance arrangements as they make constructive contributions to the promotion of the centres' services. Members act as ambassadors for the centres within the locality and they promote the use of social media sites to advertise groups and deliver key messages to families. However, many members of the board are new to their role and, consequently, they are not always confident to challenge information provided by centre leaders during meetings.

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

Unique reference number	22081
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	447557
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,781
Centre leader	Colette Mercer
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01270 375390
Email address	colette.mercer@cheshireeast.gov.uk

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