

Staffordshire - Cannock

C/O Cannock Chase Children's Centre, Cannock Road, Staffordshire, WS11 5BU

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|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| Inspection date | 5–6 March 2014 | | |
| Overall effectiveness | This inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
| | Previous inspection: | Not previously inspected | |
| Access to services by young children and families | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| The quality of practice and services | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management | | Requires improvement | 3 |

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Not enough families are yet accessing children's centre services.
- The centres do not have access to all the required data they need, such as live birth data, and leaders do not routinely analyse all data available to them. Consequently, leaders are unable to demonstrate if all resources are targeted at where they are most needed.
- Systems to monitor, track and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the centres' services are not thorough enough. Consequently, the quality of practice across all provision varies and centres are unable to show the difference they are making to all children and families they engage with.
- The local authority's priorities for improvement, although mostly accurate, do not include timescales for implementation. As a result, it is difficult to measure the centres' effectiveness.
- The profile of adult learning and progression, although improving, is not strong enough. The centres do not do enough to promote employability skills, especially English and mathematics skills.
- Partnerships with the midwifery services are under-developed. Consequently, parents are unable to access universal antenatal provision at children's centres.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Most partnerships are strong. As a result, families identified as most in need, receive the help they need to make positive changes in their lives.
- Centre staff are effective in encouraging targeted families to register with the centres and to access the good range of parenting programmes. As a result, parents are more confident and better placed to look after and contribute to the development of their young children.
- The large majority of families eligible for free early education places for two-year-old children take up this entitlement. The quality of this provision is good. As a result, these more vulnerable children make good progress in their learning and development.
- Volunteers are encouraged and supported in delivering services within the community. They make a valuable contribution to engaging families who would not necessarily access services.
- Good quality training and support for early years providers and childminders is provided. This is having a positive impact on improving children's well-being, learning and development.

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 Cannock Chase Children’s Centre, Hednesford Children’s Centre and Western Springs Children’s Centre.

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

The inspectors held meetings with: the strategic leads for targeted services and commissioning; district leads for commissioning and targeted services; the local authority’s data officers; health and education professionals; partner agencies; family support workers; and representatives from the district management advisory board. They also spoke with partner agencies and parents, observed the centres’ work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centres’ self-evaluation, development plan, annual conversation report, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures and children’s development records.

The inspectors visited all three children’s centres as well as satellite centres. The district leads for targeted services and commissioning attended all team meetings

Inspection team

Joy Law, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Jan Smith

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Deborah Sanders

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the group

The Cannock Group comprises three children's centre clusters in Staffordshire. The centres were established as a group in April 2013. The three designated centre catchment areas mirror the realignment of local authority children's services with early intervention. Services and activities across the three centres and in venues out in the community are delivered directly by the local authority 'Families First' targeted and specialist services, commissioned services and services delivered in partnership by private providers, community groups and partner agencies.

Cannock Chase, a phase one children's centre, is located in Chadsmoor and links with two satellite centres, Bridgtown and Huntington. Hednesford, a phase two children's centre, is co-located on the site of Hednesford Maintained Nursery School and links with one satellite centre, Norton Canes. Western Springs, a phase two children's centre, is co-located on the health centre site and links with one satellite centre, Churchfield. Cannock Chase is open full time, Hednesford and Western Springs are open part time. The range and frequency of activities and services provided vary at each centre.

The Cannock Group is managed under the leadership of a District Management Advisory Board with operational management overseen by the Local Authority District Targeted Services Manager and District Children's Commissioner.

The group offers a range of services to meet its core purpose, including family support, adult learning and health services. In addition to activities that take place at the centres, services are also delivered directly in the community, where parents are able to access them easily. Outreach work within families' homes is a key feature of the centres' work.

Within the district, there are 27 primary schools, seven secondary schools, 56 early years providers, and 58 childminders. Cannock Chase has onsite childcare provision managed by a private provider. These providers are subject to different inspection arrangements. Reports can be found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>.

There are 6,582 children under five years of age living in the area served by the centres. Twenty eight per cent of the district population experiences high levels of deprivation. Over 18% of children live in low-income households. There are approximately 23% of children aged under five years living in households with parents claiming unemployment benefit, of which 31% are lone parents. The locality has a higher than average rate of teenage and young mothers but this trend is decreasing. The very large majority of families living in the area served by the centres are White British, with a low, but increasing, proportion of families from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The levels of skills and knowledge of children when enter early years provision vary across the area. The centres' target groups are: pregnant teenagers and teenage parents; children with special educational needs and their carers; low income and workless families; and families affected by substance misuse, domestic violence and mental health issues.

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

- Improve leadership, governance and management of the centres by:
 - implementing robust quality assurance processes across all children’s centres’ services including commissioned and non-commissioned services
 - setting realistic and achievable targets for improvement activities, which are regularly reviewed.
- Increase the number of families who access the services, particularly those from target groups by:
 - working with the local authority and partners to obtain good-quality, relevant and timely data, particularly new birth data
 - making better use of data to identify and target support to those who are not accessing services
 - reviewing the delivery of services to ensure these are accurately matched to needs and accessible to the families who need them most.
- Improve systems to track children’s progress, families signposted to other services, and families who disengage with services, so that the centres can evaluate accurately the difference they are making to children and families.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- The centres’ strategies are not sufficiently effective in engaging with a minority of families in the locality to access the full range of services. Nevertheless, activities including health visitors informing parents of the services available and staff going out into the community on market days are effective in promoting services to the majority of families including those expecting children.
- The centres have accurate records of how many children receive one-to-one family support, particularly those children subject to a child in need or child protection plan and looked after children. However, not all providers and leaders routinely analyse attendance data and, therefore, do not have an accurate account of how many families accessing services are from the target groups.
- Centre staff are effective in encouraging targeted families to access the good range of parenting programmes. A recently introduced community-based programme run by trained volunteers and operating across the district provides support to help mothers continue breastfeeding after the first few weeks.
- The large majority of families eligible for free early education places for two-year-olds take up this entitlement. This is having a positive impact, particularly on those children with speech and language and behaviour difficulties. However, for children aged three and four years, the take-up is lower than the national average, particularly in the Hednesford area. Consequently, a minority of children do not benefit from this provision.
- Parents are charged a fee to access sessions provided by commissioned services. Although a free referral pass scheme card has been introduced to ensure fees are not a barrier to parents accessing the centres’ services, the centres have not evaluated this scheme to ensure that it is effective in meeting the needs of all families.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Health outcomes for families in relation to sustaining breast feeding beyond six weeks, the number of mothers smoking during pregnancy and the number of children who are obese at Reception age, are not good enough. Links with midwives and midwifery services are not well established within the centres. Consequently, this leads to inconsistency in what is available resulting in some of the most vulnerable parents being less likely to engage in antenatal services.
- The weekly on-site clinics, and sessions such as baby massage, mean that those parents accessing these services receive good access to advice and support regarding issues such as physical and emotional health of the baby, weaning and breastfeeding support. However, not all parents are aware of what services are provided and how to access them. The centres miss opportunities to promote services and register parents.
- Practice across all provision to track and monitor children's progress is of variable quality. For example, in some sessions, such as 'Stay and Play', children have 'learning journeys' and parents are involved in these. However, this good practice does not take place across all sessions. Consequently, the centres are unable to demonstrate the impact of the full range of provision on children's progress, particularly in preparing them for school.
- The centre has facilitated access to a range of appropriate and interesting adult programmes in previous years, including family learning. With the reduction in resources and move to a more substantial commissioning model, these opportunities are currently limited. Consequently, opportunities for parents to access training and education to promote employability skills, especially English and mathematics skills are not good enough.
- The volunteer breastfeeding support programme benefits mothers as well as the volunteers that run the groups. Volunteers gain new skills and knowledge through the training they receive for this role. They value the opportunity to network with other volunteers across the district and to contribute to the community. The confidence, skills and experience they gain in this role is helping to equip them for future employability.
- Family Voices is becoming established at all seven centres to ensure parents' views are captured and used to shape and deliver provision. However, this is at an early stage of implementation.
- Teenage parents are supported well in having their needs met, particularly with access to housing, benefits, and parenting skills. Targeted provision such as baby and toddler parenting programmes are delivered across the district and well attended. Parents report that they are gaining an understanding about their children and feel more confident in supporting their children's learning and development at home.
- Free, good quality training and support for early years practitioners and childminders is provided and take-up is high, resulting in high quality provision. This combined with good sharing of information between providers, health visitors and speech and language therapists, means that outcomes for children are improving.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The local authority has been through a period of significant change. As a result, some aspects of the newly established district model for children's centres are not fully embedded and the number of families engaging in services has reduced.

- The centres have access to a varied range of data, but not all the required data they need, such as live birth data is made available to them. Information is obtained from different sources and presented in different formats, resulting in fragmented and incoherent management information. Additionally, leaders do not routinely analyse all data available to them. Consequently, leaders are unable to demonstrate how effectively they are reaching target groups and if all resources are targeted at where they are most needed.
- The local authority and the centres' leaders have identified clear priorities both for the group as a whole and its individual centres. The local authority and its strategic and centre leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and key areas for development within the group. Priorities set out in the centres' action plan are mostly accurate but do not have timescales. Therefore it is difficult for staff to evaluate the effectiveness of improvement work.
- The quality of practice and provision provided across all the centres' services are inconsistent. There are quality assurance systems in place for commissioned services, not all of which have been implemented. There are no systems to monitor the effectiveness of non-commissioned services. Consequently, the local authority does not have an accurate picture of the quality of services families receive.
- An adequate range of services is provided overall but attendance is variable. Some sessions, particularly those aimed at target groups such as teenage parents, are well attended. Other sessions such as 'Baby bounce and rhyme' are not well attended. Consequently, the centres' services are not fully effective in meeting the needs of all families.
- Governance requires improvement as a result of the significant change to the way children's centres' services are now managed. Although the district management advisory board is very committed and supportive towards improving outcomes for children and families within the locality, there has been insufficient time for new partnerships to become established. Furthermore, members do not have access to data that is relevant and provided in a useful format. Parents' involvement and attendance is limited and this has a negative impact on their ability to contribute to how services are shaped.
- Effective partnership working with the 'Families First Service' ensures prompt and accurate assessment of need and appropriate packages of support tailored to need. Consequently, outcomes for children subject to a child in need or child protection plan and looked after children, are improving at a much faster pace. Partners stated that 'Joined up working is having a massive impact on preventative work'. The Common Assessment Framework procedures are implemented well, and referrals and case management are completed to a high standard.
- Appropriate performance management and professional supervision are in place. All staff receive a range of mandatory safeguarding training. Safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and well implemented in the majority of cases. However, there are some inconsistencies in practice regarding risk assessments of rooms before sessions take place.
- The centres aim to promote equality well to ensure that all children and parents within the area are able to access services. For example, they take resources out into the community and have introduced free passes to allow those on low incomes to access activities. However, too few target families are engaging with services.

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

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|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Unique reference number | 80618 |
| Local authority | Staffordshire |
| Inspection number | 443630 |
| Managed by | The local authority |

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Approximate number of children under five in the reach area | 6,393 |
| Group manager | Sarah Rivers |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected as a group |
| Telephone number | 01543 469894 |
| Email address | sarah.rivers@staffordshire.gov.uk |

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 20556 Cannock Chase Children's Centre
- 21444 Hednesford Children's Centre
- 23533 Western Springs Children's Centre

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