

Inspection report for St John's Children's Centre & Extended School

Local authority	Lancashire
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Centre leader	Angela Aspinwall-Livesey
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Linked school if applicable	119586 St John's Catholic Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY420108 Portico at St John's

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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the senior leadership team, representatives from the local authority, representatives from the governing body, health services, Skelmersdale College, Jobcentre Plus, frontline workers, school representatives, parents and other users of the centre's facilities.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

St John's Children's Centre and Extended School is a phase one centre located in the Birch Green and Ashurst wards in Skelmersdale. The centre is co-located with St John's Catholic Primary School and Portico at St John's is the affiliated childcare provider. St John's campus provides provision for children from birth to 11 years and their families, and for disabled children and those with special educational needs up to the age of 17. Additional provision operates within four other local primary schools to accommodate services for families in the wider catchment area.

St. John's is situated in the heart of a deprived socio-economic area, which is characterised by overcrowding, high unemployment and poor housing conditions. The area is ranked in the top 30% most socially deprived and disadvantaged areas in the country with 29% of children aged from birth to four years living workless households. Most children enter early

years education with skills and knowledge which are significantly lower than what is usually expected, particularly in their personal and social development and speech and language skills. The very large majority of families residing in local wards are White British heritage with a small pocket of East European families.

The centre received designation in 2006 and it provides the appropriate range of services to meet the core purpose. A maximum of 53 children under eight years may attend Portico at St John's. There are 39 free, eligible part-time places in the nursery school. As with the school, separate arrangements are in place to inspect the childcare and reports can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk. The wider provision includes a breakfast club, evening activities for children in the community, holiday club for children aged five to eleven years and a holiday play scheme provided by Barnardo's for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The delivery of extended services has been delegated by the local authority to the headteacher of St John's School. The work of the centre is monitored by the governing body alongside a Children's Centre Collaborative Committee and the local authority. The strategic management of the centre is undertaken by the headteacher who delegates the day-to-day running of the centre to the deputy head of centre. The deputy headteacher also plays an active role in the strategic running of the children's centre. A childminding network exists, led by a designated childminding coordinator. Partner agencies include health professionals, schools, the speech and language service and children's social care. The outreach team provides targeted family support within the community.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

St John's Children's Centre and Extended School really is the 'hub of the community', providing children and families with exemplary provision, rightly targeted at those who need it most and which lead to good and outstanding outcomes in their health, safety, educational development and economic stability. This centre is strategically and passionately driven by an outstanding leadership team, firmly supported and challenged by a highly

effective governing body and local authority steer. The senior leadership team and staff at all levels, are an impressive team who maintain a tireless commitment to improve lives, raise aspirations and support children and families through times of difficulty and change. Parents comments such as 'This centre has changed our lives in ways I never expected', '... I'm a better person and mother, I never look back, only forward', confirm this view.

Systems to promote consultation with children and families are extremely effective, although a small minority of parents are unclear about the breadth of the centre's work and parents have yet to engage in governance at a strategic level. The centre is resolute in its task to engage the most disadvantaged families and this is reflected in the high levels of registrations and engagement within target groups. Furthermore, safeguarding policies and procedures are rigorous, highly effective and result in sustained improvements in the lives of children and adults who are most at risk. The centre's record of success and excellent performance confirms that overall effectiveness and the centre's capacity to improve further are outstanding.

Families benefit from a wide range of health services, activities and promotions which impact positively on their understanding and willingness to embrace healthier lifestyles. Well-developed outdoor play space and local obesity strategies related to 'BOAT' (Better Outcomes Achieved Together), have led to a three year decreasing trend in the prevalence of obesity in children in their Reception Year. A further trend of improvement is evident in relation to the percentage of new mothers sustaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks. Although these outcomes are positive and sustained, both remain below national comparisons, especially breastfeeding. However, further strategies to tackle this are firmly embedded within the centre's improvement plans.

Children and their parents make outstanding progress in their educational development and personal achievements. High quality Early Years Foundation Stage provision, coupled with innovative projects such as 'Best Start'; and the emphasis placed on outdoor learning within woodlands, ensures children receive excellent support in their learning and development, and in developing skills needed for their future success. Provision and outcomes for disabled children and those with special educational needs is equally impressive and effective. A combination of family learning and academic and personal learning has led to a significant number of parents making equally outstanding progress; therefore, increasing their economic independence or journey towards qualification and employment. A good number of parents are beginning to engage in an established volunteering programme, however, the breadth of work-based opportunities are limited and out-of-work fathers are yet to consistently engage with this process or formal training programmes.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further expand volunteering and training opportunities ensuring the breadth of opportunity meets the needs of all identified groups, specifically workless fathers.
- Build on current systems and procedures for consultation with parents by engaging them in governance arrangements so they may fully understand the breadth of work of the children's centre and purposefully contribute towards the shaping of service delivery and the driving of improvement.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

'I've learnt to cook from scratch; the children have learnt to swim and we go to Beacon Park more than ever'. Such testimonies from parents confirm that the wide range of healthy lifestyle initiatives and access to expert advice about weaning, immunisation, smoking and dental health enhance families good health and well-being. 'Speak Easy' successfully educates teen parents about how to look after themselves and avoid subsequent pregnancies, while, 'Eat Well for Less' courses have enabled parents to cook nutritious food on a budget. In fact, parents tell us that 'Cow Boy Hotpot' has become extremely popular with the children and somewhat of a healthy signature dish for the centre.

The centre is busy but calm and parents report, '...I couldn't feel safer', and, 'This is where I would come if I was worried or needed help'. Behaviour around the centre is exceptional, and parents show their understanding of how to keep children safe and well supervised because they follow guidance laid down in risk assessments. They describe how the 'Positive Parenting' course has helped them with strategies to tackle children's poor sleeping, eating and behaviour. Parents report, 'If tantrums happen now I ignore it and its over before it's really begun'. The Forest School initiative introduces children to risk taking in a safe and controlled environment enabling children to grow in confidence and learn a multitude of skills. One parent stated, 'My son told us the rules of the fire area, I was amazed'.

Powerful case studies provide evidence that families most at risk have increased stability and independence due to highly effective and coordinated support across multi-agency teams and the successful implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). As a result, the number of children subject to a child protection plan has reduced and stability within families has been effective and sustained. In addition, home safety interventions have resulted in a reduction in the numbers of children having accidents and needing hospital treatment. Sensitive nurturing and effective outreach support enable hard to reach and isolated parents to make those first tentative steps to long-term engagement. Parents consistently describe how they rarely went out of the house before attending the centre. Now, these parents talk about the blossoming friendships they have made and how they now attend, '...everything that's going'.

Despite children not achieving age-related expectations at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, children make outstanding progress in their learning and development given their exceptionally low starting points. Excellent support from the children's centre teacher, the quality of activities and the tracking of children's progress are pivotal to the progress they make. Targeted interventions such as the Language in Partnership Programme in Skelmersdale (LIPPS) and 'Best Start' projects make a successful contribution to narrowing the achievement gap, with early indications showing a secure improvement in children's speaking and listening skills, confidence and school readiness. High-quality family learning programmes such as 'Little Einstein's' and 'Supporting Your Child's Learning', empower parents with knowledge and confidence that they, too, can build on children's learning at home.

Parents consistently contribute to the running of the centre through formal evaluation processes and discussions with group leaders; hence they have led changes to the activity programme, been instrumental in keeping the baby clinic at the centre and contributed to the design and development of the outdoor area. However, their active membership on the governing body or equivalent is yet to be secured. Employment support from Jobcentre Plus alongside adult learning, training and volunteering programmes provide a secure route to gaining work-based skills and employment. Progression for parents is at the forefront of delivery. Consequently, a significant number of parents, especially those in target groups, move from family learning to a range of accredited courses, proceed to level one and two mathematics and English, gain employment or progress to university degrees in their chosen career and three parents have opened their own businesses. Furthermore, the local childminders network has just achieved accreditation and inspection outcomes continue to improve.

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	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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.	1

How good is the provision?

Early intervention is fundamental to the centres success so Early Notification Forms distributed at midwife book-in sessions provide a subtle opportunity for outreach staff to engage with families at an early point and assess their needs. In addition, multi-agency core group meetings provide a forum for professional agencies to agree a bespoke package of care and agree pertinent roles, therefore avoiding any unnecessary duplication of service. Intensive monitoring is intrinsic to the centre's success and enables leaders to have a thorough picture of the impact of their work with target groups in particular. For example, the centre has devised a sophisticated family tracking system which records interventions and the outcomes families make as a result.

'I might not come for a while but when I do, three or four people will shout my name and welcome me back, I'm never forgotten'. Such comments confirm the outstanding care, guidance and support provided to families. Parents constantly report how outreach staff provide excellent family support because they successfully nurture them out of the house and a life of boredom, into groups and courses and plans for the future. Staff are especially perceptive to need and provide discreet and individualised interventions which raise self-esteem and confidence. Safety messages are advertised everywhere and include useful statistics and anecdotes such as 'why not to hold hot drinks at the same time as feeding baby' and 'the safest way to run a child's bath'.

The activity programme is extensive, spread across the community and includes provision provided by a number of commissioned services such as Barnardo's. Children including those who are disabled or who have special educational needs enjoy holiday play schemes where they can access the whole site provision and resources. The 'Saturday Dad's' club is very well attended as is the 'Bumps Birth and Beyond' antenatal programme, which both mum's and dad's to-be attend. The growing number of East European families is carefully monitored to ensure their consistent engagement and, although there are no English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses directly provided at the centre, they are signposted to suitable provision at Skelmersdale College. The progression of services ensures families move from one to another such as, 'Baby Massage' to 'Baby Yoga' to 'Babble and Bounce', however, a small number of parents were not clear about the full extent of the services or the breadth of the centre's work.

Opportunities for educational and personal development are exceptional. There is a vast range of successful adult training programmes many of which lead to accreditation and qualification. Some, such as 'Eat Well for Less' and first aid provide valuable practical advice while others, such as Introduction to Teaching Assistant provide practical training and employment support. Taster sessions such as 'Nail Art and Alternative Therapies' provided by Skelmersdale College, and volunteering roles such as 'Breast Feeding' support and classroom assistants, provide valuable experiences and enable parents to consider a range of career paths before embarking on one, which may prove unsuitable. The 'Moving Forward' project run in conjunction with Edge Hill University, Children's and Young Peoples

Services and Jobcentre Plus for teenage parents has been particularly successful, leading participants to employment or enrolment at the university.

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	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Outstanding leadership and the rigour placed on the engagement of the most vulnerable families are at the heart of this successful children's centre. This, alongside the priority given to the continual professional development of staff ensures outcomes for families are significant. Staff are experts in their field and they embrace challenging opportunities to learn new skills which, in turn, provide greater enrichment within the provision. This is best seen with the 'Best Start' and woodlands initiatives, which are expertly led by confident outreach workers.

Improvement plans are well informed and supported by strict quality assurance measures, which provide an ongoing picture of the centre's performance. Action plans are based on a rigorous analysis of data, information and local intelligence alongside challenging targets which are consistently met or exceeded. As a result, the centre's strategic vision is secure. Strong collaboration with a wealth of partners, equally focused on turning lives around, provides an extension to each other's services and enables swift and well-planned interventions achieving maximum results.

The centre has achieved the Leading Parent Partnership Award and more recently, the Customer Excellence Award demonstrating their full commitment to securing parents active and meaningful engagement in decision-making processes. Parents make a valuable contribution to the self-evaluation process and the steer towards improvement plans by evaluating services and their effectiveness. However, parents do not associate this contribution to the work of the governing body or the impact of these views on further improvement.

Security is exceptional and safeguarding arrangements are exemplary and grounded in robust policies and procedures, which reflect safe practice across all aspects of the centre's work. A single central register of adult vetting is meticulously maintained and staff receive appropriate levels of training suitable to their role and they are well protected by effective lone working policies. Parents are fully informed of the centres statutory duties and information sharing protocols leading to a complete transparency to family support and outreach work in particular.

The building is exceptionally well maintained and equipped with an abundance of resources and multi-purpose space. Resources are constantly in use and support a multitude of services and activities accessed by professionals, partners and families alike. Excellent consideration is given to the sustainability of services and the non-duplication of roles and services. Engagement levels by all target groups and across all types of provision are consistently monitored to track and maximise impact. Consequently, the centre provides outstanding value for money.

The centre has an authentic inclusive ethos, hence extensive provision, which is sharply focused on tackling inequalities and narrowing the achievement gap. The two-year-old (childcare) pilot schemes, 'Best Start' and 'LIPPS' are improving children's readiness for school and their progress towards age-related goals. The positive impact of the centre's work is illustrated by the increasing number of young and lone parents and children with additional needs who attend the centre's activities as well as the number of these families who access adult learning opportunities. 'Every Dad Matters', 'Saturday Sessions', teen groups and close working links with Barnardo's help families overcome barriers to participation. 'As a teen mum I have been judged... but I have never experienced discrimination at the centre... I'm as good as other mums', states one young parent.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
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	1
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

Inspection outcomes for St John's Catholic Primary School and Portico at St John's have been considered as part of this inspection

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the St John's Children's Centre & Extended School centre on 1 and 2 February 2012.

We judged your centre as being outstanding overall.

First, we would like to say a big thank you for so many of you coming to talk to us during the inspection. It is very important for inspectors to hear your views because we really get to the heart of a centre and find out the difference it actually makes to you and your families. We are pleased to inform you that this children's centre really is the 'hub of the community', providing children and families with excellent services and activities, especially targeted at many families who really need it.

The centre provides you with some fantastic activities, which are making a very positive impact on your lives, especially where families are in crisis or because they have difficulty keeping their children safe and well cared for. When we investigated these things we found that families who receive outreach support or who allow the centre to work with them and other professionals make massive positive changes, which ensure families are much safer and happier. For example, parents who joined Positive Parenting classes or who had home safety advice were able to improve how they handled their children's behaviour and the advice about safety resulted in far fewer accidents at home or admissions to the hospital. This is excellent news!

We found that you get lots of good advice about how to lead a healthier lifestyle and many of you told us about how your children can swim now and how you spend more time outdoors or in the park. Cooking classes have also been very popular and these have helped you to cook nutritious food on a tight budget, and we believe recipes such as 'Cow Boy Hotpot' continue to be very popular. Despite lots of hard work by the centre, they know more has to be done to stop obesity levels rising again and they need to continue the steady rise in the number of mum's breastfeeding. The centre already has plans in place to continue with this work.

We were particularly pleased to hear that the centre give you lots of opportunities to share your views about what you like about the centre or what could be better. We know you have been influential in designing the outdoor area and for making sure your baby clinic is based at the centre and not at the health clinic, because this is better for you. However, you have not yet had the opportunity to join the governing body so you can be part of making very important decisions about the centre and its future development. So we have asked the centre to look at ways to make this happen.

It is very important for the centre to provide lots of different opportunities to children and parents, which will improve their learning and development and set them up with skills for a better future. We found that the centre does this exceptionally well because you all make outstanding progress in your personal development. Children do extremely well in their wonderful learning environments and they receive lots of extra support to improve their speaking, listening, social and independence skills. Things like, 'Best Start' and outdoor activities in the woodlands are really helping children to be ready for school, as well as giving them lots of new experiences and skills. Lots of parents are accessing training such as 'Supporting Your Children's Learning' and mathematics and English courses, and a significant number of these parents are moving forward into college courses, university and employment.

The centre is strongly committed to providing services for the most disadvantaged families and it works tirelessly to find out about your community, the people in the community and what they need. As a result, the centre has successfully registered most of their families and a large majority of those people are using activities or receiving support in the home. Parents told us that this is a place where they feel safe and extremely welcome because it is a place for everybody alike. So dads, young parents, people from different backgrounds all use the centre. However, one or two parents said they are still not sure all about the full range of activities available to them and we also found that males do not join training and volunteering as much as women. Again, we have asked the centre to encourage more males in the future, particularly those who are not working.

Many parents told us that the people who run the centre and who work with you do an excellent job because, 'They know everything there is to know about what we need and they help us to get it'. We agree with this. The centre leaders, staff, governing body and the local authority work exceptional hard to provide you with the things you need to improve your lives, but more importantly, they help you to recognise that with a little hard work and support, you can make many positive changes yourself!

Thank you again for speaking with us and we wish you the very best of luck in the future.

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