

# Inspection report for Stanley Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Durham
<b>Inspection number</b>	384177
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 February 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	June Cramman HMI

<b>Centre leader</b>	Rhonda Earl
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
<b>Centre address</b>	Clifford Road Stanley County Durham DH9 0AB
<b>Telephone number</b>	01207 232048
<b>Fax number</b>	01207 299689
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:rhondaearl@nhs.net">rhondaearl@nhs.net</a>

<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	EY288945 Emerald Nursery

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.

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

The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings with senior managers from the centre, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners, health and children's social care professionals. In addition, they met representatives from the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and adult education. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Stanley Children's Centre is housed in purpose built premises and originates from a Sure Start Local Programme. It is a phase one children's centre, designated in January 2004. It has a total reach of 990 and of these children, 418 fall into the top 30% most deprived in the country. Located on a hilltop between Chester-le-Street and Consett, the town lies south west of Gateshead. The centre is easily accessible in the heart of the town centre. Over recent decades, Stanley, a former mining community, has suffered hard times economically, with the closure of the coal pits followed by the loss of major employers across the region.

The centre is situated within the Havannah South ward. It serves a relatively deprived area and is linked to 12 super output areas, five of which are in the top 30% of areas of deprivation. At February 2012, there were 990 children under four years living in the area and 39 lone parents. The percentage of children under four years living in households dependent on workless benefits is 27% with 62% of families claiming some kind of benefit. The majority of families are White British; the number from minority ethnic backgrounds is very low. Most children enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and skills than are expected for their age. The proportion of children who are disabled and those with special educational needs is low.

The local authority has recently undergone a significant restructure and Stanley Children's Centre now sits within the One Point service. This service delivers support, advice and a range of activities for families and their children aged from birth to 19 years. Stanley Children's Centre is managed by a hub manager based at Stanley Hub, an annex to the Louisa Centre and two senior lead professionals, one of whom is based at the children's centre. This cluster also encompasses Catchgate, Burnhope and Craghead Children's Centres. Historically, the centre has been led by an advisory board, this has recently been reorganised as part of the One Point restructure.

The centre hosts the separately managed Emerald Nursery, which is registered to care for 36 children under the age of five years of age at any one time. It is open 51 weeks a year, Monday to Friday from 7.30am to 6pm. This provision is subject to its own inspection and the report can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

## 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

The centre provides satisfactory and improving provision for children and families with good support, advice and guidance for families. 'Without the centre I would have been lost. I know I can come here and discuss anything and not be judged, and get the help and advice I need', said one parent about the centre. Outcomes for children and families are satisfactory with some good elements, such as the falling obesity rates as well as the improving picture for children achieving expected levels in early learning goals at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, breastfeeding rates are low. Those parents who attend the centre are developing their confidence in parenting and in helping their children to learn. A small number of parents gain qualifications but there are not enough opportunities for parents to develop employability skills. Families benefit very well from the CAB sessions, with many finding good solutions to debt issues and/or gaining good advice on benefits. Unfortunately, the centre is not sufficiently monitoring outcomes for all learners and using this information enough to plan provision.

While the provision received by children and parents who attend the centre is satisfactory overall, a significant minority, including some of the centre's target

families, are not yet accessing this provision. Managers are aware of this and are putting plans in place to address it.

Individual assessment of cases is thorough with families referred to the centre receiving good quality, multi-agency support. However, assessment and recording of children's progress are not well developed in some activities. Good care, guidance and support together with improving multi-agency working are ensuring that families are accessing the right support. Staff have an improving knowledge of the reach area and are using this adequately to support families. However, the centre does not yet fully evaluate this information to effectively develop support further.

The centre has recently experienced a significant restructure, which has had some benefits; including a renewed enthusiasm and focus on quality improvement by the senior management team as well as broadening the staff team well through an influx of staff from a range of disciplines. Staff are beginning to work well together, using their various expertise to the benefit of families in the area. During this period of upheaval, the centre has maintained the numbers of families coming through the centre. The centre's arrangements to safeguard families are satisfactory overall with good processes for monitoring child protection cases but with some developments being delayed by the restructure.

The centre's arrangements for self-evaluation and monitoring in relation to improving key outcomes, such as breastfeeding rates and improved economic stability, are not always sufficiently rigorous to ensure that challenging targets are set. Due to the restructure, the pace of change has been slower than managers planned and users of the centre have not always been sufficiently consulted throughout. However, the 'annual conversation' has been effective in identifying the main areas for development, demonstrating the centre's ability to be self-critical and evaluative in order to plan constructive improvements.

Historically, the centre has worked with partners well and the restructure is increasing partnership working in the multi-disciplinary team. However, at present not all families in the target group are benefiting from them. Managers and partners are working on strategies to engage the remaining families who are not yet benefitting from the centre. In addition, the centre has not initiated joint planning to ensure well-mapped provision with in-built progression routes.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Develop the use of management information and self-evaluation in order to:
  - set challenging targets and create effective action plans to engage the wider community, particularly those in identified target groups
  - enhance the delivery of targeted services to improve outcomes especially in relation to breastfeeding rates.
- Ensure parents are able to contribute meaningfully to the governance of the

centre and to developing and improving provision.

- Support families to improve their economic stability and independence through participation in training and/or adult education that meet their learning needs and interests.
- Develop further safeguarding practices by giving wider safeguarding information for families on issues such as internet safety.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>3</b>
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Stanley Children's Centre has made some genuine changes, improving outcomes for some of its local parents and children. 'Because of this weaning course I'm much more aware of what's in the food we eat and am much more likely to use fresh vegetables and cook a meal rather than reach for a tin', stated one parent, while others commented on how much impact the centre had on their lives, providing a 'lifeline' for many.

The centre has developed a range of services aimed at promoting families' understanding of how to adopt healthy lifestyles. As well as the popular and effective weaning sessions in which parents are also given some free cookery tools, such as an electric hand blender and cookery books, parents really enjoy the 'Messy Cooks' sessions. This combined with some effective partnerships, including good working relationships with health visitors and family workers and a peer support group for breastfeeding, together with specific events, such as a charity bicycle ride, are beginning to change local attitudes to adopting more healthy lifestyles. The centre has also had some success in tackling obesity rates with the current rate being below both the authority's average and the national average. While the peer support group for breastfeeding is enthusiastic in working with young mothers and the centre has tried various strategies to improve breastfeeding rates, rates remain low in the area and, in fact, have fallen every year in the last three years.

Children and families are appropriately safeguarded in the centre. Security within the building is good, supported by a range of effective risk assessments. Centre staff use home visits to give good advice on safety in the home, although due to budget cuts on a wider council level they no longer have a stock of free safety products to offer parents. The centre offers women the opportunity to engage with a programme designed to raise awareness and understanding of domestic violence issues. The centre's arrangements for working with children who are subject to a child protection plan or the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) are comprehensive. Outreach workers work well with the most vulnerable families in the community. Behaviour of children in the centre is generally good, however, some parents commented on poor behaviour by a minority of children feeling that in some cases staff do not always correct this behaviour. Prior to the restructure parents had always felt 'at home' in the centre, however, after the restructure some parents felt that this was no longer the case as with so many new staff members in the building they did not always

recognise all staff. The centre asks the local Primary Care Trust for information on hospital admissions, but up to now has been unable to obtain this information.

The extent to which parents and children, including disabled and those with special educational needs enjoy and achieve is satisfactory. The percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and all children in Durham has narrowed considerably over the past four years. Case studies and discussions with parents highlighted the positive impact of courses at the centre in improving their parenting skills. The 'in-house' speech and language support is also having a significant impact on children's development. The proportion of children achieving at expected levels at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved steadily over the past two years and is now 54%, just above the Durham average but still under the national average.

Parents are developing the confidence and skills to help their children develop. Group sessions provide good opportunities to share concerns or gain advice about issues such as breastfeeding or weaning. More formal courses give opportunities to gain qualifications, however, the centre does not collect information on outcomes for adult learners in any systematic way so does not fully understand what impact the activities and courses are having on improving adults' skills. Parents feel they have a voice within the centre through opportunities to evaluate activities. Historically, the 'Parents Action Group' met regularly and parents felt this gave them a more powerful voice, however, since the restructure there has been only one meeting, although managers have more planned. The Advisory Group has recently been re-constituted and parents are not yet represented on this, though the centre again has plans to do so.

The centre can demonstrate some success in relation to supporting parents and carers to improve their economic well-being. A satisfactory range of courses, such as food hygiene, literacy and numeracy and information technology, has enabled a small number of parents to gain accreditation. The partnership with adult education is well established; however, this service has also been restructured recently and has a limited range to offer. The partnership with CAB is well established and is having a significant impact on the economic stability of families accessing the service. The centre has no regular face-to-face Jobcentre Plus sessions, however, it has a jobs board that is updated weekly and staff signpost parents to the Jobcentre as needed. However, the centre is not giving enough training and employability support for parents in their area.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from</b>	<b>3</b>

<b>target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

**3**

Individual assessment of cases is thorough with families referred to the centre receiving timely, good quality, multi-agency support as necessary. Parents who access the centre are developing good parenting skills, helping their children to learn, are generally increasing their confidence as parents and are working towards independence at a suitable pace for them. Assessment of children is inconsistent across activities, although the qualified teacher has been working well with Emerald Nursery staff to improve assessment and tracking processes there.

The various activities in the centre engage families who attend well with many commenting on the positive influence the courses and groups have on them. The centre provides a reasonable range of provision from activities aimed at babies to pre-school work that stimulate and engage both parents and children. In addition, there are some tailored groups and activities to meet the needs of specific families. For instance, disabled children play together in a bespoke group and have access to the sensory room for specific activities.

Good care, guidance and support together with improving multi-agency working are ensuring that families are accessing the right support. As a result, sensitive, individualised and tailored support is provided to registered families, with parents reporting that they feel supported by the centre. Effective working partnerships have been established between some relevant agencies, including the speech and language team. Staff demonstrate a wide breadth of knowledge on a range of topics including smoking cessation, safety and infant feeding. Highly qualified and experienced staff ensure that families have access to good quality information, advice and guidance.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>



## How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The local authority has recently completed a significant restructure across all its children centre provision. As a result, the new senior leadership team and strategic managers have a renewed focus on improvement. The centre's management team has made a clear commitment to developing improved monitoring systems and a new delivery plan is being developed based on generally sound management information. Staff are supported through effective supervisions, although for a minority of staff these have been delayed by the restructure. Continuous professional development for staff is good and ongoing. Staff have been relocated into the centre and are forming good relationships. Managers have been implementing a plan to further cement working practice with the new team and build a shared understanding of their new direction; however, staff remain unsure of the future.

There are effective systems in place in relation to the vetting and recruitment of staff. All staff have a good understanding of policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding children and are confident to follow these as required. However, some developments to widen centre policies have been slightly delayed due to the restructure. For example, the centre has not yet fully developed policies and information with regard to internet safety. Effective financial management systems are in place and there is an adequate take-up of services and use of resources by local families resulting in satisfactory value for money.

The centre promotes inclusion of all children and their families across the area. It has satisfactory systems in place to evaluate the engagement of specific target groups of families. It has a range of projects and initiatives designed to reach vulnerable groups, including teenage mothers, people from minority ethnic groups and fathers. Staff are sufficiently trained in a range of equality and diversity issues. There are some initiatives throughout the year to actively promote equality and diversity but these are limited on an ongoing basis. The centre also needs to attract more families from target groups in the area.

Partnerships are developing satisfactorily. Historically, the centre has worked with partners well and has some embedded partnerships that benefit those people who attend the centre well. The restructure is increasing partnership working in the multi-disciplinary team who were previously located in other offices. These partnerships across healthcare workers, school nurses, midwives and family workers are having a good impact on those families contacted.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>

<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection**

Stanley Children's Centre hosts a full-time childcare provider (Emerald Nursery) for children aged from birth to school age. Information from their most recent Ofsted inspection has been taken into account when writing about outcomes for children in this report.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected Stanley Children's Centre on 8 and 9 February 2012. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you and the centre staff. Following this work, we have judged that the centre provides satisfactory and improving support to you and your families. We found that the centre is particularly effective in giving you and your families support and guidance and help on a range of often difficult and sensitive problems.

We found that families who were experiencing many difficult challenges in their lives were well supported by the centre staff, working in partnership with a range of professionals from other services, such as health. These families were given a good range of options and an individual care package that provided a 'lifeline' to them. You told us that you generally felt very safe in the centre, though a few of you found the recent staffing changes a bit unsettling. We found that you and your children have a reasonable choice of activities and courses and that you really enjoy the weaning courses and the 'messy cooks' provision. Those mums who come to the breastfeeding sessions appreciate the help and encouragement they get from both

staff and peer support workers. However, there are still too few mums choosing to breastfeed their babies so we have asked the centre to look at ways to support breastfeeding further.

Crucially, despite the changes over the past few months, you tell us, 'you trust the staff', and are always able to find someone to talk to when you need it. Once families are known to the centre we found that different people and organisations worked well together to create a package of support. However, while many in your community have registered with the centre, there is still a significant number of families that are not participating in the activities given by the centre. We have asked the staff at the centre to think of ways to encourage more people into the centre and to develop a plan of action to do this. Some of you have benefited from training and adult education courses; however, the number that has done so is relatively small. The centre is planning to work with existing and new training providers to make sure that you have a wider range to choose from. We have asked that the centre looks particularly at developing courses to help as many people back into work or further study. We hope you will take up these opportunities.

The centre has recently gone through a major restructure with changes to staffing and to some resources. We know you are aware of some of these changes as you told us about some of them during our visit. Managers and staff are determined to improve provision and make it really fit the needs of the community. This has not been an easy transition and we know some of you have been unsure about the new direction the centre is taking. Managers have been improving systems and processes to be able to better plan and evaluate provision. They are also writing action plans as we have asked to make sure the provision is better planned. The centre is looking at ways they can better increase your involvement in improving provision and we hope you will take up the opportunities to have your say through the Parent Action Group and on the new advisory board.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us. We are very grateful and we wish you every success for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).