

Inspection report for Stockport Central Children's Centre

Local authority	Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Inspection number	365853
Inspection dates	1–2 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Janet Glover

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Shanon Parker
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	

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.

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, senior leadership team, members of the advisory board, two local authority representatives, health professionals, children's social care professionals and local community partners. They observed the centre's work and looked at sessions in operation within the children's centre. Inspectors also looked at a range of documentation including the centre's operational plans, evaluations, case studies, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the centre's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- The effectiveness of data and case studies to inform analysis and decision making that impacts positively on the provision.
- The effectiveness of partnerships to meet the needs of users.
- The effectiveness of local authority support and challenge to the centre.
- The impact of leadership and management on the provisions and the outcomes for users.

Information about the centre

Stockport Central Children's Centre is located in the town centre. The centre serves a community that experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage with areas of 5% 'most deprived' and others 20% 'most deprived'. The centre serves a predominantly White British population. There is an increasing demand for social housing. The centre manager leads and manages two children's centres and there are links with the local authority for monitoring and supervisions of the provision. There is a small team in place with most posts being part time.

The centre operates a range of services delivered from the centre base including health, education, parenting and family learning. The centre uses a number of community venues including schools, churches and the central library to deliver services. Services are taken to where they are needed. The centre has a childminder support group operating from a primary school in the reach area. Most children enter early education with knowledge and skills well below those expected for three-year-olds.

Governance is through the local authority. An advisory board is in place consisting of partners, members of the community and parents. The role and membership of this board is currently being reviewed. There is a parents' forum which meets regularly.

The centre serves a transient community due to the nature of some temporary accommodation in the reach area. The centre engages well with vulnerable families who may only be residents in the reach area for a short time. The centre is serviced by a multi-agency team and works as an integrated service.

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 users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Stockport Central Children's Centre meets the needs of users well. Parents and users of the centre value the inclusive and welcoming environment that it offers. They appreciate the friendly, approachable staff who build high levels of trust among families. The view, shared by all who are connected with Stockport Central, that the needs of each individual child and their family are of the highest importance underpins the good care, guidance and support it provides. The centre manager, who leads and manages two children centres, is particularly flexible and responsive and goes out of her way to ensure that all users are welcomed and respected. Relationships between staff and children, parents and carers, are excellent, promoting positive cohesion in the community. Children and their families are at the heart of the centre and this is evidenced in the wide variety of activities that families, particularly the most vulnerable access. It is well led and managed and provides high quality activities for children and families.

The centre manager successfully shares her vision of how integrated services can improve lives. The result of this is a team who work tirelessly to provide very effective services even though most of them work only part time. Outcomes for users are good. Multi-agency partnerships are well established and responsive to meeting the needs of families. The centre provides a wide range of services that are effectively raising the knowledge of parents and carers about healthy lifestyles and keeping children safe. One of the most popular programmes for parents is the first-aid training which aims to positively impact the number of visits to accident and emergency services. Relationships between agencies are highly productive and transfer of knowledge between key partners is prompt and effective. There is a very efficient and supportive relationship between the centre and a local support service. The centre is an inclusive setting and promotes equality well. Provision is carefully adapted to meet the needs of all members of the community, including the most vulnerable, and is impacting positively on lives. The centre is working very effectively to keep users engaged and increase the numbers of parents who are taking advantage of the good range of opportunities. A comprehensive assessment ensures good support is provided to vulnerable families and children and those who need support in times of crisis, through the particularly effective outreach support team. Staff and other adults consistently give the highest priority to safeguarding all children and their families.

Senior local authority leaders have a good understanding of the strengths in provision and how the centre can be improved. For example, they are very well aware of the need for more structured support and guidance with the Early Years Foundation Stage, in particular for those children in transition to nursery education provision or school.

While the centre evaluates the quality of provisions regularly and uses that information to determine its priorities, managers do not consistently measure outcomes. For instance, monitoring and evaluation identify qualitative outcomes more clearly than quantitative outcomes. The centre has started to plan, implement and evaluate services more sharply which should result in self-evaluation demonstrating more consistently the impact the centre is having on making a difference to users.

The centre has successfully raised outcomes for users since its opening and has strong and dynamic leadership. The advisory board does not effectively challenge and direct the centre and currently this is under review and a new advisory board strategy is to be set in motion. The local authority increasingly provides robust quality assurance. This provides the centre with capacity to build on its successes and further improve outcomes for families and children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure better outcomes for children's learning with the support of educational specialists, to help link programmes and development to the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Strengthen the advisory board for the centre through additional recruitment to provide better challenge and support, and bring about further improvements.
- Ensure the assessments and evaluations are sharply linked to the impact of service on the outcomes to users and inform planning for future developments.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for children and families are good and improving. The centre provides a good range of activities that are developed particularly well in partnerships with other agencies and parents. The strong integration of this work, with the child being central to all activities, is at the heart of the centre's success. Children and parents are supported to make healthy choices through a series of planned activities including adventure walks and bug hunts in local accessible parks, a number of which were unknown previously to parents. The very pragmatic approach of the centre lead and her team ensures that children and their parents are supported to recognise the importance of balanced food choices. Programmes such as 'Cook your weight to health', soup bags and recipe books help parents to understand the need for, and develop their skills in, preparing healthy food. The weaning course provided for the young parents group resulted in many young mothers preparing their own baby food and encouraging others to join the course. Take-up of many programmes is high and professionals take every opportunity to advise and support attendees, as well as signposting prospective mums, teenage mums and parents to specialist services.

Midwives and health visitors are based at the centre and provide all services from mothers 'booking in' clinics, through to developmental checks all at the centre. As a result, parents are often fully engaged with the centre well before their child is born. All staff have had breastfeeding awareness training and breast feeding is well promoted throughout the centre. There is a strong breastfeeding support group who meet regularly. The Parent Engagement Worker is to undertake a course to become a breastfeeding peer mentor to strengthen this within the centre. The 'Baby Moves', 'Toddler Moves' and other programmes have a high take-up and promote parents understanding of child development and develops home-based activities that they can do with their children. There are plans to increase these sessions where possible. There is an active approach to smoking cessation and it is working closely with the appropriate health and charity organisations and is embedded in all activities where possible. There is a regular session from the oral health promoter with initiatives to get parents to use appropriate fluoride toothpaste with their children.

All services in the centre help to keep users safe. The excellent relationships with

families and their children allow staff to identify any safety concerns within families and intervene quickly. Case study evidence and discussions with parents provide strong evidence that access to good quality behaviour management support, with strong support from sensitive centre staff, improves relationships, behaviour and home safety for users with their children. Staff model safe practices well and the centre is a safe and welcoming place to be.

There is currently little support available from an Early Years Foundation Stage specialist in helping to prepare children successfully for the transition to nursery and mainstream school. The centre staff try to provide high quality learning experiences that are impacting positively on their learning and development. Evaluations currently show that many three-year-olds are entering early education with knowledge and skills well below those expected for their age. Learning is carefully planned, implemented, evaluated and future activities planned using reflective practices. This ensures that all children are supported in achieving well and developing good personal and social skills. Parents' and children's enjoyment is evident through the consistently very high attendance at many activities. Some programmes could be filled a number of times if staff capacity allowed.

Several parents spoken to felt that their economic stability and independence had improved as a result of the opportunities the centre has provided. Many parents have gained confidence and have gone on to further training and gained employment. The Parent Engagement Worker herself began as a volunteer and this is her first paid job.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

A highly affective assessment process is identifying the needs of all children at an early stage and is ensuring that all children make good progress. Assessment of individual cases is robust and the Common Assessment Framework is successfully

ensuring that teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families identified as in need.

The centre provided a good range of services. Well planned activities like, 'Baby Moves' and 'Toddler Moves', 'rhyme time' and 'early days' are helping parents to enjoy parenthood.

Centre staff constantly seek ways to identify the needs of specific groups and to tailor activities accordingly. For example, the young parents group meet up in another venue out of the town centre so the children's centre took its services to where they met. They are now working closely with this group to develop story sacks. The centre recognises even more can be done to engage the hardest to reach families, and to ensure that those who want to can access services. They are working very closely with partners to gain the information they need to target these families and to identify other venues to ensure that all who want to can access programmes.

Parents report that the quality of individual support is both outstanding and exceptional, and available for as long as needed. For those whose needs are greatest, children and family workers provide close, personal support. Care strategies are in place to ensure parents can build their confidence, parenting skills, and be supported to independence, at a pace that is appropriate to them. It very effectively supports those who may be young, lone parents, have dependency issues, or someone who is new to the area. They give parents the confidence to attend the centre where excellent relationships encourage them to take part in activities such as 'Incredible Years Parenting', which gives valuable help and advice in childcare and behaviour management. For the families involved, evidence suggests the support makes a difference between improving life chances and an inability to cope.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre leader is highly experienced and leads a well motivated and enthusiastic team. They are all passionate about making a difference to children and families in

the local area. Inclusion of all is central to the centre’s vision. Positive role models and resources, reflecting all members of the community, highlight the centre’s determination to include all groups who may be subject to discrimination. The centre actively promotes equal opportunities and has many anti-discriminatory practices. Diversity is celebrated and is implicit in all aspects of the work of the centre.

There are good safeguarding policies and practice in place. Good security systems are in place to ensure children are safe on site with surveillance cameras in place. Risk assessments are carried out daily and each activity is assessed as well as the venues used. These risk assessments are also cross referenced to appropriate local authority policies. The plans for each session detail the risk assessment points that need to be covered. There is a central register of suitability which is accessible from the centre. Routine checks are made on partner organisations and staff are required to sign a declaration periodically to check ongoing suitability.

The centre’s development plan addresses local and national priorities effectively. All plans are based on a robust analysis of regional data and information. It links to area-wide priorities in order to improve the provisions and outcomes for its users and has high aspirations while ensuring realistic timescales and budgetary considerations. Although the quality of evaluation is good, it is not always linked to the impact of services on the outcomes for users in order to inform future planning and development. The management information system supplied by the local authority is beginning to provide useful information about the reach area. Analysis of this, although at an early stage, is providing a clear starting point for further improvement.

Although there is strong leadership and supervision through the local authority managers, the advisory board does not effectively fulfil its role. This gap has been identified by the centre and its senior team and there are plans to re-recruit and reform the group.

Partnership working is very effective and good use is made of shared resources to develop services where needs are identified. The centre lead deploys staff and resources well across the settings to provide flexible and responsive provision and ensure that the centre is used well. This and the use of venues at little or no charge results in the centre providing good value for money.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2

The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community 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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected Stockport Central Children's Centre on 1 and 2 February 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. It provides some excellent support to you and your families, in particular in the way it helps you to lead healthy lives and achieve both educationally and personally. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you and professionals.

The centre has many strengths, including the actions taken to support you and your children's safety and well-being and the outstanding quality of care, guidance and support offered by all staff who work with you and your children. The centre is working with many organisations such as schools, local support services and parenting, health and social care professionals to improve the range of services that

are available to you. Using these partnerships is helping many families and children, particularly those who are most disadvantaged, to have a start in life. You have given us many examples of how the centre has helped you to gain confidence and build up good parenting skills.

The centre offers a good range of programmes and activities, including those aimed at improving the health of people in your town. It is good at working with young mums and all those who choose to breastfeed their babies. The recent 'Cook your weight to health' programmes are helping parents to help their children eat healthily. Future mums can now book in with the midwife at the centre. It tells mums about the help available on breastfeeding, from mums who have successfully breastfed their own children and know the good things and the concerns from experience.

Those of you who spoke to us describe the centre as providing a safe and welcoming environment, you are confident that your children will be secure and well cared for. Some of you explained just how important the centre is in your and your families' lives. You told us that staff listen to you and help you to get the right help and support. We found that the centre was excellent in helping families at times in their lives when they most need it. The support is provided quickly and professionals and others work closely together to support both families and children. This includes teenage mums and some who are new to the area.

The centre makes sure that they check whether you have enjoyed any courses or sessions in the centre and they respond by making changes based on your comments. Those of you who take part in courses like 'Baby Moves' say how good it is in helping you understand your children's development, in building confidence and self-esteem and in helping you to develop good relationships with your babies.

The centre is respected in the local community because of the leadership from your centre lead and her team. You told us how much you value them all individually. The centre lead knows that there needs to be a stronger advisory board and will be looking at ways to broaden and strengthen it. The parents forum is thriving and supports the centre in knowing what direction it needs to travel. The centre lead knows that she needs to make the centre even better by making sure that she has even better information on the difference that the centre is making to families and children's lives. She and her team want to use this plan for more activities and also to ensure that even more people can use the good things that it is providing.

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

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