

# Inspection report for Stonebroom Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	366911
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Marian Pearson HMI

Centre governance	Derbyshire County Council
Centre leader	James Green
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Stonebroom Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Nursery Rhymes Day 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.

## 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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre coordinator, the district manager, staff members, representatives of the advisory group, local authority staff linked to the centre, a range of partner agencies and volunteers and users. Inspectors observed the centre's work and looked at sessions in operation at the children's centre and in nearby locations. They also looked at a range of documentation, including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

## Information about the centre

Stonebroom Children's Centre is situated on the site of Stonebroom Primary School in the district of North East Derbyshire and operates a satellite centre from Mickley Infant and Nursery School. The centre is a phase two children's centre which was designated in November 2007. The centre is governed and managed directly by the local authority with a district manager providing the principle local authority leadership. The centre co-ordinator took up post in April 2008 and the majority of staff joined the centre in autumn 2008. A team of staff including the volunteer coordinator, healthy eating coordinator, crèche coordinator, toy library worker, children's librarian and 'Dads' support worker are employed on a district basis to deliver services across several children's centres, including Stonebroom. Centre staff and district staff work together with other professionals, including health workers, social care staff and tutors from adult and community education, to offer a range of services and activities for children and families at venues across the area.

Many of the villages served by the centre are ex-mining communities and the closure of the pits has had a profound effect on these communities resulting in the decline of small businesses and high rates of unemployment. Unemployment rates are above the national average, especially for young people aged 16 – 24 years. Over half the

children under five within the centre's reach area live in the top 30% of the most deprived areas in the country. The number of people accessing long-term benefits for disability is also higher than the national average.

The villages are situated in rural locations; public transport is not always readily available and, as a result, communities throughout the area rarely connect with other neighbouring villages. The population is relatively stable with strong family links. Almost all families are of White British heritage. This rural and cultural isolation has had a major bearing on families accessing the centre and its services.

Admission arrangements vary for the seven schools in the centre's reach area. Three schools have a nursery with children starting at three years of age, while in the other schools children do not start until they are four or five. Evidence indicates that the children enter early years provision with levels of skills and knowledge which vary considerably from area to area and from year to year but are generally at or below those expected nationally for their age.

The centre's designated early years and childcare is provided by a local private provider, Nursery Rhymes Day Nursery which was inspected in January 2009. The report for this inspection 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 users and the wider community**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

Stonebroom Children's Centre provides a satisfactory range of services for the children and families who use them, although participation is variable and is low for some services.

The centre supports good outcomes for families in developing healthy lifestyles and supporting their economic well-being. As part of a long-term strategy to reduce obesity levels in older children, the centre successfully coordinates a wide range of initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles, including access to family fitness projects, the development of cooking skills and advice about nutrition and weight management. Family learning and vocational courses have been popular and those attending have been well supported to gain a range of skills to aid their future

employment prospects.

Care, guidance and support is also strong within the centre and families are able to access a wide range of services which provide them with helpful information about career choices, benefit claims and job vacancies. Parents value the parenting courses which they say have developed their confidence in managing their children's behaviour and providing a calmer environment in the home. For the most vulnerable families, outreach work has been effective in bringing together a range of agencies to offer a coordinated package of support.

Safeguarding arrangements protect children, families and users satisfactorily. All staff and most volunteers have been trained in safeguarding procedures, but some are less clear about their responsibilities, in particular, volunteers who have not accessed training in relation to their responsibilities with regard to safeguarding procedures when helping at parent and toddler sessions.

Equality and diversity is promoted satisfactorily with registered users, but limited by a lack of precise data about the profile of the reach area. The centre can not demonstrate that it is reaching all groups in the footprint, or which families are actively using the services. Data is not analysed sufficiently to identify or used to inform future provision of services.

The centre shows a strong commitment to partnership working. Professionals from different agencies are mutually respectful and the effective transfer of information between key partners ensures the needs of the most vulnerable families are quickly met. Health workers have established a regular forum to address any specific needs identified by workers in the community. Advisory group meetings are well attended and are valued as an opportunity to network and share information about service delivery. Members attending recognise that this enhances their own effectiveness in signposting families to the most appropriate agency to support their needs. One partner shared the feeling that he was 'missing out' on not being able to attend these meetings. The advisory group contributes to the centre's self-evaluation and business planning but does not provide sufficient scrutiny and challenge to assess how effectively the centre's work is impacting on outcomes for children and families.

Community development initiatives have been a priority for the centre. Grant funding has been secured to refurbish one of the halls in the reach area, creating a much needed additional venue in the village. The development of a parent and toddler network across the district has provided opportunity for toddler group committees to seek information, gain advice and share good practice. This has enabled committees to successfully apply for a range of grants to fund additional resources for their groups. Volunteers have been recruited to support the day to day running of the sessions to extend the capacity of the small staff team to deliver services. However, some of the initiatives are not fully embedded and inspectors found that some volunteers and parents are not clear about their roles and responsibilities in running these groups.

Users who have had lengthy involvement with centre services speak enthusiastically about the difference the support and activities have made to their lives and how their aspirations have been raised. Some users have joined the advisory group and are able to put their views forward about how the centre's services should develop. Other users are not yet at this stage and the centre does not have mechanisms in place to seek the views of users and those in the wider community who do not currently engage with the centre about the range of services it offers.

As a result of the lack of up-to-date data related specifically to the reach area, the impact of services provided and the work of the centre is yet to be clearly demonstrated in all the outcomes for children and families. This has also affected the centre's ability to set sufficiently well-focused and ambitious targets. Consequently, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes and provision by:
  - increasing the participation rate of families and children in centre services and activities
  - ensuring the views of parents and the wider community consistently contribute to determining and shaping services
  - monitoring the impact of community development initiatives in improving outcomes for children and families.
- Improve leadership and management by:
  - ensuring that accurate, up-to-date local authority and health data specific to the reach area are available to the centre
  - increasing the use of these data to monitor the impact of the centre's work and inform planning
- Strengthen the way in which the local authority and advisory group act as critical friends in setting well-focused, ambitious targets and holding the centre to account for its work.

## How good are outcomes for users?

3
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Health professionals are proactive in working with the centre to ensure families access their services. As a result, clinics such as the baby weigh-ins are well attended. Breastfeeding is well promoted, with midwives holding antenatal breastfeeding awareness sessions at the centre. Once babies are born, health visitors and a team known as 'Little Angels' provide group and individual peer support sessions to encourage mothers to continue to breastfeed. It is not clear how effective this support is as, despite being collected by front-line workers, data is not provided regularly by the health authority and does not cover the specific reach area of the centre. Baby massage sessions are offered by centre staff which parents and

carers report have helped them to feel more confident in their parenting.

'Cook and eat' sessions have resulted in improved diets. Fruit and vegetable boxes provide easy access to fresh ingredients locally at economical prices, encouraging families to use their newly-acquired cooking skills instead of buying pre-prepared meals. Families report that children are trying new foods and the myth that healthy foods are bland and uninteresting has been dispelled. The centre's healthy snack policy introduced through toddler groups has encouraged parents to think about what snacks they provide for their children at home.

Messages about healthy lifestyles are reinforced through attractive, eye-catching displays around the centre. One parent taking part in the health, exercise and nutrition for the early years programme stated: 'Everyone should do this course. Me and my family have changed a lot since the first week. I've still got a long way to go but there is light at the end of the tunnel.'

Adults and children feel safe when using the centre and its services. Robust security procedures are in place and adhered to within the centre. Participation in a scheme to promote safety in the home has resulted in a number of families being able to purchase safety equipment at low cost, reducing the potential for accidents in the home. Funding has been secured to provide safety cups at all venues removing the danger of scalds from hot drinks. Risk assessments for outreach sessions, including the parent and toddler groups have been conducted and have identified the main hazards within the premises. When an additional risk was identified, the centre responded quickly to minimise it. In partnership with the youth service, the centre has organised a course to promote safer babysitting. However, no follow up was undertaken to assess how useful this had been in practice.

Early identification of need is established effectively through the use of the Common Assessment Framework, and support is swiftly coordinated from a range of agencies to support vulnerable children and their families.

Good reciprocal links have been established with local early years and childcare providers, including childminders. They promote the centre's work to parents and carers, and use the activities offered by the centre to enhance the children's and their own learning. The settings have also worked well in partnership with the centre to provide places for two-year-olds whose families have benefited from the provision of respite care. Parents and carers say that when attending courses, they are confident to leave their children with well-trained crèche workers. They say they know that they can focus on their own learning as the children will be safe and well cared for. Sessions are planned to support children's development based on the Early Years Foundation Stage. Observations are undertaken during the sessions and useful feedback provided to parents. However, the centre does not track children's progress over time to demonstrate the impact of its provision on outcomes. The toy library service has extended parents resources in the home. This has been supported by 'Stay and Play' sessions where equipment is showcased to advise parents how to extend their children's learning.

Effective volunteer recruitment has led to users running the fruit and vegetable box cooperatives and providing on-going support to toddler groups. Some volunteers say that this is motivated by wanting to, 'give something back to the centre for what it has given to me.' Those parents who attend the advisory group contribute to discussions about future planning and service delivery.

The centre supports parents and carers well in developing skills for the future. Although no formal link has existed with Jobcentre Plus, the agency has been successful in supporting users back into work. Several lone parents were helped to gain employment when a superstore opened locally and students on a pre-employment training course celebrated their completion with a 'passing out ceremony'. Family learning courses enable users to develop literacy, numeracy and information communication and technology skills. As a result of the 'Demystifying Computers' course, parents and carers say that they no longer find computers 'scarey'. One user was keen to share how she developed her 'IT skills through the centre to become a confident IT tutor'. Another said, 'I am accessing maths and got 83% in my last numeracy test. I am so proud.' In partnership with a local Citizens' Advice Bureau, the centre has installed a kiosk where users can access various websites. An analysis of the data indicates that the most popular websites are those providing information and advice relating to career development and employment opportunities, supporting users back into work.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</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 users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users 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 are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**3**

Initial priorities have focused on developing infrastructure support as this provides a firm platform to encourage users to participate in other activities. The centre rightly recognises that new initiatives have to start from where the users feel most comfortable and confident. The family support worker has a demanding case load, working with the most vulnerable families locally. Good partnership working based

upon accurate assessment of children's needs is used well to ensure that appropriate multi-agency support is provided for families in need. Existing users receiving these services value them, highlighting increased confidence socially and managing their children's behaviour as benefits gained. As a result of these interventions, one parent stated: 'My life has changed completely. I'm a lot more happy and confident.'

A range of adult learning opportunities is available and user evaluations show that those attending enjoy their learning. Individualised programmes of learning are agreed with the students and, as a result, retention and success rates are good with tracking showing that many students progress from one course to another. Parents have been supported to make puppets and games to help with story telling and reading; they use songs and rhymes to help their children learn to count. One parent overcame a lack of confidence in reading to her children to bring in a story she had recorded on tape to share with them. Classes which promote development of parents' and carers' skills are well attended. However, despite the advantages gained by parents who do attend, those activities where children and adults learn together are less popular and some sessions offered have had to be cancelled. An exception to this has been the innovative way of attracting fathers to join in activities using construction materials to develop numeracy and problem-solving skills together with their children. The few users who attended the structured sessions for parents, carers and children to learn together talked enthusiastically about the books that they were making. These recorded their observations of the children and contained useful information from the discussions they had had in the group about such topics as why young children have tantrums and how to manage them. During the observed session, children and adults were working together to make a 'treasure box' which staff discussed with parents, providing activities for them to engage in with their children during the week to extend their children's learning.

Although users say that they find the parent and toddler groups useful to meet new people and socialise, some parents are less happy with the provision offered for children. These groups have been set up to operate independently of the centre with staff attending some sessions to facilitate activities. A number of parents and carers expressed concern that not all children were supported by their parents and carers to join in activities. Adults attending groups do not always remind children about how they should behave and provide explanations for them about safe behaviour in group settings. Some parents and carers made a valid point when they highlighted that this does not help children to learn about right and wrong.

The centre works in partnership with a nearby children's centre where services are provided for specific groups including dads, teenage parents and disabled children. The centre coordinator recognises that not enough is done to engage with pregnant teenagers and teenage parents in the reach area to better identify and meet their needs locally. Services for disabled children are, in the main, provided by specialist centres, but the childcare inclusion officer is working on a project known as 'Together at Home' to develop the confidence of those caring for disabled children to support them at home.



Parents and carers appreciate the friendly approach of the staff and know that they can approach them, as confirmed in comments such as: 'We can walk in and ask to speak to someone at any time. The staff are always smiling, helpful and patient.' As a result of family learning courses attended, over half the students sought information, advice and guidance to inform their future career choices. Some users share their experiences of developing confidence to take their learning further and undertake additional courses leading to recognised qualifications. One parent who had been supported by the family support worker was referred to the 'Connecting Families Project'. She says: 'I was feeling depressed. I have attended an information advice and guidance session and have started courses in English and maths. I know that I can support the children with their homework. I am feeling better in myself.'

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

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

The local authority provides regular support and is developing their role of challenging and holding the centre to account for impact upon outcomes. Staff working at the centre are well managed. They are clear about lines of responsibility and value the supervision sessions with their manager as these provide them with opportunity to discuss and seek guidance on complex cases. Staff working in administrative and financial roles understand their responsibilities and how they contribute to the centre's work. The centre's accommodation is used to maximum effect with staff from partner agencies 'hot-desking' when in the neighbourhood. This facilitates joint working and timely sharing of information about families and their needs. It provides a welcoming and safe environment for users. The use of 'district' staff across all children's centres in the area provides specialist expertise in service delivery, which supplements the skills of the centre's own staff. Use of volunteers has enabled effective deployment of centre staff and is helping to sustain community initiatives. The centre does not hold the data to demonstrate how well its services and provision is accessed. Therefore the value for money is satisfactory.

Users are protected satisfactorily because recruitment procedures meet current safeguarding requirements. The centre has ensured all staff are subject to Criminal Records Bureau checks, including those from other agencies who work with centre users. Safer recruitment policies and procedures of the local authority are followed in appointment of staff. Robust systems are in place to ensure the safety of lone

workers. Safeguarding training is being made available to parents and carers.

Staff work hard to promote positive images of all groups and challenge stereotypes through centre displays and literature. Resources are sensitively chosen to reflect the wider society. Users are encouraged to widen their knowledge and understanding of other cultures through outings and by the introduction of less familiar foods. The centre is also beginning to establish its role in the community, having successfully broken down barriers which exist in some communities so that families can engage with new initiatives. Some families are still proving difficult to engage and the centre has effectively used the experience of other agencies to adapt its methods for promoting the work of the centre to potential users. Recent 'playground promotions' have been successful in increasing registrations and there is demonstrable year-on-year increase in the number of children registered with the centre. However, the centre lacks clear tracking information to gain a better understanding of which families access the services and how frequently.

Strategies to evaluate the work of the centre are being developed. All users are asked to complete evaluation forms and children in the crèche are encouraged to draw a 'smiley' or sad face to feedback their views. Some services are now monitoring how users have benefited from activities after two months to better assess the impact of their work. As a result, the healthy eating coordinator found that attendees at cookery courses had continued to use their new knowledge and skills to good effect on a regular basis to improve their families' meals and had developed a better approach to healthy eating. Overall, however, evaluations are not sufficiently well analysed to inform the future direction of services.

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
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## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection**

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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Stonebroom Children's Centre on 2 and 3 March 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We know from the discussions we had with you and the feedback on the forms you fill in that you are pleased with the services you access. You think that the centre staff work hard to help you to improve your skills and confidence as parents and to promote healthy lifestyles. We heard how much you and your children have benefited from the 'cook and eat' sessions; these have helped you to improve your family's diet and encouraged you to try new foods. The fruit and vegetable boxes have obviously been appreciated as sales are growing.

You told us how much you have gained from attending the parent and toddler sessions and how these enable you to meet people. Some of you felt that during these sessions some children needed more support to engage in the activities and positive explanations of how to behave well at these groups. You value the crèche facilities which enable you to have peace of mind that your children are well cared for while you learn. The activities and courses offered by the centre are helping you to develop skills which are useful to you when you are ready to start work. We heard how your confidence in your own abilities has grown and how some of you are now using these skills in the jobs you have gained.

Arrangements are in place for keeping everyone safe when they are at the centre. All the partnership agencies attached to the centre work well together so that when families do have difficulties you are soon provided with the help and support you need to improve the situation. Some of you told us that access to childcare places or specialist advice and information had helped you to cope when you were dealing with a crisis.

Those of you who are members of the advisory group are able to share your views about what services should be provided. We have asked the centre to find out what more families in the area would like the centre to offer and to increase the number of families who use the centre's services.

Some of the information about the services the centre offers is not supplied regularly enough and it does not contain enough detail to help the centre to assess how well it is performing. So we have asked the local authority and the health service to improve the information provided to the centre.

We have also asked the advisory group and the local authority to review more thoroughly all the information available to demonstrate how well the centre is helping you and your children. This will help to set the priorities for the centre's work in the future.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak with us or provided information for us. We are very grateful for your involvement in the inspection and 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).