

# Inspection report for Stainforth Children's Centre

Local authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	383723
Inspection dates	18–19 August 2011
Reporting inspector	Lorraine Rowson-Clark HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Mrs Denise Akers
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Junction Road Stainforth Doncaster South Yorkshire DN7 5DH
Telephone number	01302 849088
Fax number	
Email address	denise.akers@doncaster.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Little Corkers 318120

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.

**Published:** September 2011

## 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 centre managers, staff members, members of the advisory board, local authority representatives, partner agencies, parents and users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Stainforth Children's Centre is a phase one centre located on the outskirts of Doncaster. It was designated in November 2005 and offers early education and childcare, family support, counselling services for adults and children, health services, activities for parents and children and links with Jobcentre Plus. The local authority is responsible for all aspects of the governance and management of the centre including the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development.

The centre serves an area recognised as being in one of the 10% most disadvantaged areas within the country, with very high levels of unemployment. The large majority of the population is of White British heritage with a small number of families from minority ethnic backgrounds. Additionally there are two Travellers' sites and one fairground site located within the centre's reach area. There is a mix of socio-economic backgrounds with high numbers of families living on benefits, including lone parent benefits, as well as a range of working parents. The majority of families live in social and rented housing. Local facilities include a small supermarket, a sports hall, a health centre and a park.

The centre's reach area has an approximate population of 637 children aged under five years, of which 50% are registered with the centre. Full day care, for a maximum of 42 children in the early years age group, is provided on site through Little Corkers Nursery which is run by a private provider. This is subject to a separate report. The nursery is open from 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday. Currently, there are no other forms of childcare within

the centre's reach area. Most children enter early years provision with a range of skills and abilities broadly in line with those expected for their age, with the exception of communication skills which are less well developed.

Over the last year there have been significant changes to the centre, which moved in January 2011 from two sites into one newly extended centre. The current manager has been in post since April and also manages another nearby children's centre, plus the Integrated Family Support Service for the area.

## 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

Stainforth Children's Centre is currently providing a satisfactory service overall to the community it serves. It has been through a period of significant changes to the staffing and accommodation. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. This is because, although the systems to manage the centre on a day-to-day basis are effective and the new leadership team has identified priorities for further development, the procedures for governance and holding the centre to account are inadequate as a result of some inconsistent practice in monitoring and weaknesses in ensuring the advisory board contributes to decision making. This has limited the rate of progress the centre has made and the quality of self-evaluation. For example, some targets for development are not specific enough and lack clearly identified and recorded success criteria against which the centre can be effectively measured. The local authority acknowledges these shortcomings and is committed to working with the centre's leadership team to make improvements.

The centre's safeguarding and child protection procedures are satisfactory due to recent effective staff training and clear leadership from the centre manager. Staff demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding of the centre's safeguarding policies and procedures. In addition, family support workers are maintaining comprehensive notes of their work with children and families whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

This is a warm and welcoming centre with a range of high-quality furnishings and equipment. Many parents and carers told inspectors how the recent changes to the building have improved the centre and that they enjoy attending activities with their children. They explained how the staff are supportive and kind to them and their families. Although the centre is not fully aware of the needs of all families within its reach area, once families are known to the centre they are quickly provided with appropriate, sensitive support and help. Children's services report that centre staff are particularly effective in times of crisis when they can be relied upon to provide what social workers describe as 'excellent' care and support to families.

The centre has made significant inroads in encouraging some hard-to-reach groups to engage with its services, including teenage parents and members of the travelling community. In addition, there are plans to engage more with fathers in an effort to make the centre more inclusive and welcoming to them. Information displayed within the centre promotes equality and diversity and the centre is accessible for people with disabilities to ensure that all children and adults, regardless of background, aptitudes or other differences, have access to the range of services and activities on offer.

Users of the centre are encouraged to give feedback on the activities they have attended and how they feel about the centre overall by talking to staff, using the comments box and putting wishes on the wish tree. The centre has acted on some of these suggestions and wishes, such as putting a mirror in the quiet room so that individuals can check their appearance before leaving what can sometimes be emotional counselling sessions. As a result, such responses have improved the centre overall. However, currently there are no adult users or local community groups represented on the advisory board, nor are they systematically involved in the decision making of the centre. Additionally, staff have not had the opportunity to get out into the local community to talk to residents about what the centre could do for those who do not use their services in order to meet their needs and help improve their life chances.

The centre offers an appropriate range of activities and services to meet the needs of most users and outcomes for users are satisfactory and improving. Families are encouraged to live healthy lifestyles and the counselling service provided at the centre is particularly effective in helping to improve the emotional health and well-being of children and adults. Individuals and families report that the counselling service helps them overcome personal difficulties and problems and increases their confidence and self-esteem. Consequently, this service is making a discernable difference to the lives of those who use the centre.

Children's learning and development is enhanced and encouraged through a variety of play and activity sessions which help them socialise with other children. The 'Chatterbox' sessions, targeted at those children who may benefit from help to develop their speech and language, are well regarded by parents and professionals alike and are having a positive effect. Additionally, parents have some opportunities to increase their own knowledge and understanding of child development and are learning how to support better their children's learning at home.

Adult learning opportunities and support for helping adults into employment programmes, however, are less effective. There has been a decline in some partnerships over the last year, from which the centre is only just beginning to recover. Links with adult education services and signposting to Jobcentre Plus have resulted in some adults embarking on training programmes to meet individual needs, but these are not sufficiently embedded to raise adults' aspirations within the centre's reach area and improve employment prospects.

Taking into account the swift action and rapid progress made by the recently appointed management team, together with appropriately identified plans for future development and the satisfactory outcomes for users, the centre has satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- The local authority should work with the centre's management team to ensure self-evaluation, development plans and performance management systems are effectively recorded, refined, kept up to date and monitored regularly against clearly identified success criteria.
- Work with partner agencies, the local community and centre users to ensure that
  - membership of the advisory board is fully representative of the community the centre serves
  - board members fully understand their roles and responsibilities to the centre and actively contribute to decision making.
- Work with Jobcentre Plus and adult education services to identify, plan and deliver adult learning programmes to meet the needs of the local community in order to raise adults' aspirations and improve their employment prospects.

## **How good are outcomes for users?**

<b>3</b>
----------

Across all of the five areas outcomes are satisfactory. This is because the centre provides a suitable range of activities which are developed in partnership with other agencies and professionals. The centre works appropriately with health services to help individual families lead healthier lifestyles. Parents and carers told us how it is easy for them to access the baby clinics and seek advice and guidance on immunisations because these are all delivered from the centre. The centre's breastfeeding support group has been effective in helping mothers continue to breastfeed their babies and that without this group some would have given up breastfeeding. As a result, more mothers are breastfeeding their babies for longer. Additionally, the cook and eat sessions offer useful advice on how to cook healthy, nutritious meals on a budget. This is well received and attended by many parents and carers including Travellers. These strategies are having a positive effect on the health of those families

accessing the services; however, the centre has yet to ascertain how many more families could benefit from such services.

Safety within the centre is assured by staff, who check that the areas are safe for both adults and children alike. In addition, risk assessments, carried out with partner agencies, ensure that supervised contact sessions undertaken within the centre are managed appropriately to ensure children and adults are appropriately safeguarded. Outcomes in this aspect are satisfactory because some procedures are new following recent training and do not yet have their maximum impact. Appropriate use of the Common Assessment Framework and the recently revised systems for record keeping have improved the support available to vulnerable families in an effort to prevent situations from reaching crisis point. Parents, carers and children explained to inspectors how the interesting and entertaining activities with the 'Lollipop Hero' (school crossing patrol) have helped children understand how to keep themselves safe near roads and how to cross roads safely. Children were observed at all times to behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others, sharing toys and showing care and concern for one another.

Children's learning and development is enhanced and encouraged in the drop-in play sessions which help them socialise with other children. Children make progress as staff have knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage and activities are planned with children's development and learning in mind. The 'Chatterbox' sessions involve children and their parents in activities designed to encourage them to talk and communicate effectively. These sessions help parents learn simple techniques to promote their children's language development. Staff also encourage parents to reflect on and identify the progress that their children are making and to keep accurate records in the children's learning journals. Data show an increase in the number of children within the centre's reach area reaching 78 points across the assessment scales of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the gap between outcomes for the children most at risk of not achieving and others is narrowing, albeit slowly. However, staff do not systematically receive data on the progress individual children make so it is difficult for them to identify exactly how much difference the centre is making. In addition, there are fewer opportunities for parents to develop their own learning through adult learning programmes. These are areas of development already identified by the centre and plans are being developed to secure appropriate courses and encourage take-up.

The centre satisfactorily helps to promote families' economic stability, for example, by effectively supporting children to develop skills for the future and helping families to secure benefits and advice for debt management. The centre demonstrates recent success in supporting some adults seeking further training and future employment by offering work placements during training. However, links with Jobcentre Plus and adult education services are not yet well embedded.

The centre provides a range of opportunities for users to make a positive contribution. Children behave well at all sessions and they are learning to share and take turns. Families develop strong relationships in the centre and show respect, care and concern for others. There are some opportunities for parents to express their views through regular evaluations

of activities, although this is generally reliant on users feeling confident to discuss their feedback with staff or write down their comments, which may inhibit some from expressing their satisfaction levels. Parents and carers are not yet represented on the advisory board, although partner agencies are. Additionally, board members are still developing their understanding of their roles and responsibilities and do not yet fully challenge and ask pertinent questions of the centre. The advisory board does, however, have a realistic view of the centre overall and knows that they need to raise the centre's profile and engage with more members of the community.

*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>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 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>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

**3**

The centre offers satisfactory provision in all areas of the core offer; activities and services are publicised through posters, published timetables and by word of mouth. A qualified early years teacher is employed to work at the centre part time and provides support to early years staff, thereby ensuring activities make an increasingly effective contribution to children's development. The provision helps to improve outcomes for children who come into the centre as well as those families who receive more individually targeted support in their homes.

When working with individuals or families the children's centre is effective at assessing their needs and providing appropriate care, guidance and support. It works well with partner agencies to ensure that assessments carried out under the Common Assessment Framework are suitably informed. Social work teams also report that the centre can be relied on to undertake swift and effective crisis work whenever this is needed. Support for families is appropriately targeted and users make sufficient progress in the outcome areas. However, while centre staff have good local knowledge of the immediate community, the analysis of strategic data relating to live births and other potential user groups has yet to be undertaken to fully determine whether it is meeting the needs of all those within the reach area. Consequently, the use of assessment is not yet fully effective.

There are programmes in place to promote the health and social well-being of users, including a strong emphasis on providing emotional support to boost confidence and raise self-esteem. Parents and carers report how their family support workers are always on hand to advise and support them and that they feel valued and listened to. Some spoke about how they 'couldn't have managed without (their) support worker and the centre', particularly those who had suffered from post-natal depression. Family support workers are also successful in engaging with some hard-to-reach groups, such as teenage parents and Travellers, some of whom now regularly attend centre activities. The centre has, however, yet to engage with fathers sufficiently. This is an area identified for development in the near future and plans are in place to set up a 'dads' group.

Some examples of outreach and support work include 'stay and play' sessions and physical activity classes run from local schools. Health services, including health visitor baby clinics, immunisation clinics and access to a GP, run weekly from the centre and help to introduce families to other services on offer. The centre signposts adults to Jobcentre Plus and, to a lesser extent, adult education services for help and support with training and employment, although links are not as strong as they were due to the withdrawal of some support sessions from the centre as a result of financial restraints.

The centre is aware of some of the difficulties and challenges it faces; for example, it recognises that the lack of local employment opportunities has resulted in increased inter-generational unemployment and a lowering of aspirations. In order to address these issues the centre is beginning to work with partner agencies to raise individual aspirations and encourage more families to see the benefits of employment opportunities further afield.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>3</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>3</b>

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

**3**

Although the day-to-day management is now largely effective, the procedures for governance and accountability were not rigorous enough to ensure the best progress was made during a period of staff change and development. As a result, staff training in some important areas and the development of some provision has been limited. Additionally, the advisory board has only recently become involved with the centre and is still determining its terms of reference. Consequently, it is not yet involved in decision making at any level. The local authority has begun taking steps to bring about improvements but, at present, this aspect remains inadequate. The centre is effectively evaluating and monitoring its current



work to ensure immediate priorities are identified and acted upon; however, priorities for development in the longer term are not specific enough to ensure they can be effectively monitored.

Centre managers and staff demonstrate commitment to improvement and managers consistently communicate high expectations to staff, leading by example. All staff show enthusiasm for their work and are committed to making a difference to all families within the community. Staff know how each of them contribute to the centre's effectiveness and are now working effectively together to improve the centre.

The centre promotes the inclusion of all children and families. It is aware that Travellers can be disadvantaged within the community and is therefore working hard to promote equality and an understanding of diversity. The centre is sensitively meeting the needs of the travelling community and has had some success in encouraging Travellers to engage with some activities. Staff are working hard to ensure that all children and adults, regardless of background, aptitudes or other differences, have access to the full range of services and activities on offer. Information displayed within the centre promotes equality and diversity and the centre is accessible for people with disabilities. Room names are displayed both in text and in Braille and the centre has devised an innovative way of helping users find their way to centre rooms by painting different coloured lines along the corridor walls for users to follow. Publicised activities are subsequently colour-coded according to the rooms in which they are being offered. These initiatives positively encourage families to participate in activities, although the extent to which the centre is engaging with fathers is currently limited.

Partnerships between agencies are developing and strengthening. Staff report that they work collaboratively with partner agencies, particularly health and children's services, to improve outcomes for users. A new management structure is in place with appropriate day-to-day line management responsibilities. Centre staff feel suitably supported and there are appropriate arrangements in place to safeguard all users. Recruitment and vetting procedures for new staff, as well as those from partner agencies, are relevant and suitable, and records of recruitment checks meet requirements. Centre staff have recently updated their safeguarding training, although the governance arrangements did not recognise the need for the centre manager, as the designated person for safeguarding, to undertake refresher training. Consequently, this has lapsed. However, in the meantime, the centre's acting deputy has been nominated as the designated person for safeguarding issues. All staff show awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities and can identify and respond appropriately to potential dangers that users may encounter. Suitable procedures and protocols for sharing information are in place and these, together with sound satisfactory partnership arrangements, ensure that children and families at risk or in need are prioritised appropriately.

The centre manager has used finances effectively to refurbish and re-equip the centre well. The leadership team focuses on activities that are sustainable, building upon existing provision and sharing costs and resources, including staffing, with other agencies where

possible to secure value for money. More effective targeting of vulnerable groups and individuals is ensuring the centre provides satisfactory value for money overall.

The centre is working appropriately with partner agencies and uses staff's local knowledge of the community sufficiently well to encourage the wider community to engage with services provided at the centre. Users report that they are satisfied with the services provided and a small number have volunteered to work with the centre to provide some activities, such as breastfeeding support. However, users do not currently contribute in any formal way to the management of the centre, although their views are sought on the effectiveness of the services they receive.

*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>4</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>3</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>

## **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](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 Stainforth Children's Centre on 18 and 19 Aug 2011 and judged the centre as satisfactory overall. As part of our inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you, staff and others who work with you. We would like to thank those of you who took the time to come and talk to us. It was really interesting to hear how the centre has helped you and your families. Many of you told us how the recent changes to the centre have made it more welcoming and how the staff are supportive and kind to you and your families. It is clear that once families are known to the centre they are quickly provided with support and help. In particular, some of you told us how the counselling service has helped you overcome personal difficulties and problems and we can see what a difference this is making to your lives.

We found that the centre works well with some other services like health to help you lead healthy lifestyles. In particular, some of you told us how it is easy to access the baby clinics and seek advice and guidance on immunisations because these are all delivered from the centre. Some of you also told us how valuable the breastfeeding support group has been in helping you to continue breastfeeding your babies. Additionally, the cook and eat activities have given you some good ideas on how to cook healthy, nutritious meals on a budget. We could see for ourselves how these services are having a positive effect on the health of you and your children.

All of you who spoke with us said that the centre is a safe and comfortable place to be, and we agree with you. The building is bright, welcoming and is filled with high-quality resources so that you and your children can play and learn actively together. The centre staff check the centre before you arrive to ensure that the areas are safe for you and your children. Some of you also told us how the interesting and entertaining activities with the 'Lollipop Hero' have helped your children understand how to keep themselves safe near roads and how to cross roads safely. We could see for ourselves that children behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others, sharing toys and showing care and concern for one another.

The centre offers a range of activities to help your children's learning and development. For example, the drop-in play sessions help your children learn how to socialise with other children and the Chatterbox sessions involve you in activities designed to encourage your children's speech and language. It was clear to us that these sessions help you understand how your children learn and develop and many of you told us how you have carried on some of these worthwhile activities at home.

Some of you we spoke to told us how you are asked to give feedback on the activities you have attended and to let the centre know how you feel about the centre overall. You told us that you talk to staff, use the comments box and put wishes on the wish tree. We could see how the centre has acted on some of these suggestions and wishes, such as putting a mirror in the quiet room, and how this has improved the centre for you. However, we noted that none of you are currently involved in the advisory board and have asked the centre to work with you and the local community in order to get more of you involved in the decision

making of the centre. Some of you had good ideas for the centre and we would encourage you to talk to staff about how you can become more involved so that you can help improve the centre and make sure the services meet your needs better.

The centre has recently been through a period of significant change in staffing and in how it is led and managed. There have been difficulties to overcome, such as staff absence over the last year and issues that the local authority and other services have had to deal with. Some of the effects of this have been that the ways in which the centre could work in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and adult education have been limited and staff have not had the opportunity to get out into the local community to talk to residents about what the centre could do for them. However, people now in charge of the centre are doing a satisfactory and improving job in working with other agencies to make sure future services meet your needs. The new centre manager has quickly and correctly identified priorities for improvement and, together with the leadership team, has taken swift action to make the necessary changes. The centre is now improving because all the staff are in place and partnership working is beginning to take place. However, more needs to be done and we have asked the centre to work with the local community and other agencies to ensure that appropriate activities, including training and help with finding employment, are available to meet your needs and help improve your life chances.

Although the day-to-day management is generally effective, procedures to make sure the centre is doing its best have not been rigorous enough to bring about some necessary improvements. The local authority has started to address this but this aspect of governance and accountability currently remains inadequate. Therefore, in order to make sure the centre continues to improve, we have asked the local authority to work with the centre to regularly assess what it is doing so that further improvements can be identified. In addition, we have asked the local authority to monitor the centre's progress regularly to ensure the centre is held to account.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. We are very grateful for your willingness to tell us how you feel about the centre and we wish you all every success in the future.

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