

# Inspection report for Stockbridge Village (Acorn) Children's Centre

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Local authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	383475
Inspection dates	3 - 4 November 2011
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Linked school if applicable	Stockbridge Village Primary School 136222
Linked early years and childcare	Tree Tots Nursery EY433796

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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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with members of the advisory board, parents, carers and service users and representatives from the local authority. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Stockbridge Village (Acom) Children's Centre was first opened in April 2009 and designated as delivering the full core offer of services in December 2009. The centre moved to a modern new building with a co-located school, private day nursery, health service provision, library and other key public service organisations in September 2011. The centre is managed by the local authority.

The centre provides services from a single main site and a number of satellite locations within the community to a population made up from a broad range of economic and social circumstances. A large majority of families live in areas within the top 1% most deprived in the country. The number of families attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is high, as is the proportion of children aged under four years who are living in households where no-one is working. The vast majority of families within the area served by the centre are White British.

The centre provides a wide range of supporting services, incorporating a crèche, outreach and home visiting, drop-in health support, adult courses, volunteering opportunities and workshops. The centre has an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and parents.

The centre's full day care provision is provided by a private contractor and is subject to a separate inspection by Ofsted. Most children enter early education with a range of literacy, numeracy and communication skills well below those expected for their age.

## 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**

**2**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**2**

## Main findings

Overall effectiveness of the centre is good with some aspects that are outstanding. The centre and its partners provide effective and increasingly well-integrated services for a community where a large majority have very high levels of need. Those in charge have established a clear vision and understand the needs of the community particularly well. The centre's leaders clearly understand its strengths and areas for improvement and consequently, the centre demonstrates a good capacity to further improve.

Outcomes have improved for families who use the centre and are now good. Staff work effectively with parents to provide good activities and high standards of care and support. The majority of families who live in the area use the centre and value its services and the total number of those registered continues to grow. However, more needs to be done to ensure all those with the greatest needs register with the centre and benefit from its services. The centre has very effective outreach workers who promote the centre well. The centre is building a strong and increasingly positive reputation within the community and this has established trust and confidence in the staff, partners and the services it delivers.

Families attending the centre develop a very good understanding of dangers and how to keep themselves and each other safe. Staff have exceptionally well-developed skills and understanding of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults and use these very effectively to provide a safe and secure environment within the centre. Risks are identified quickly and effectively managed. This ensures that families who are experiencing change and challenging circumstances in their lives share their concerns with staff because they trust them and know they will receive effective support.

Many of the families who met the inspectors described feeling proud of their new centre and their many achievements. There are good opportunities to encourage families attending the

centre to contribute positively to their community and the life of the centre. Children behave well at the centre and develop positive relationships with each other and adults. Families are listened to and feel they are included in making decisions about how the centre is run. Attendance at sessions, such as baby massage, has helped many parents to strengthen bonds with their child and increase their self-confidence.

Families attending the centre enjoy the activities on offer and children make very good progress preparing for school. However, although there is an increasing range of opportunities for adults seeking help to find work, undertake training or gain accredited qualifications, more needs to be done to promote these services and engage a greater number of learners.

Leadership and management of the centre are good. An acting centre manager has been in place for two months and during this time has sustained strong and effective leadership. Partnership working with a broad range of private, public and third sector organisations is effective and joint working is becoming increasingly well-integrated. However, arrangements to support families facing challenges relating to substance misuse and mental ill-health are not fully developed.

The centre ensures that equality of opportunity and the promotion of diversity are good. Barriers to attending services are effectively overcome and there is a positive trend in the reduction of the achievement gap in the Early Years Foundation Stage profiles.

The local authority provides the centre with a good range of data about the population of the area it serves and this is used effectively to help the centre improve. The targets set by the local authority are clear and good support is available to help the centre understand exactly what it needs to do to improve.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Increase registration and participation through more effective promotion of the centre's work and by more effective identification and targeting of those most in need.
- Provide more effective support and encouragement to engage a greater number of adults in services and opportunities to help them seek paid work, training and education.
- Develop integrated and effective strategies to identify and support families facing challenges relating to substance misuse and mental ill-health.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes for the children and families who use the centre are good. The centre is very well positioned in the centre of the community and is easily accessible. The new building is bright, attractive and welcoming, which helps families respond well to the wide range of activities relating to learning, improving diet, development, exercise and lifestyle. Health outcomes are improving, such as in breastfeeding and obesity, and dental care is promoted very thoroughly. The centre leadership team is aware that more families could be using the centre and are determined to increase the number of those registered so that more people benefit from its services.

The centre and its partners have recognised that many families in the area are facing increased challenges because of problems related to the misuse of drugs and alcohol. They have also established that mental health needs to be better promoted and that support for those facing difficulties could be better integrated. However, arrangements to provide coordinated support to meet these needs are at an early stage and too few families currently receive sufficient support.

Children and families feel very safe when accessing services at the centre because arrangements to help keep them safe are outstanding. Staff have excellent knowledge and high levels of expertise in assessing and managing risk and the building is secure. Children settle quickly in the crèche and day care because they have positive relationships with the adults and respond very well to the established routines. Children's behaviour in the centre is good. Staff establish trusting relationships with parents and carers who confidently discuss and share their issues.

Courses provided are of a high quality and are valued and used very well by parents. They increase their confidence, promote children's learning, reinforce good parenting skills, and for a very few; increase educational attainment and prepare them for the world of work. Opportunities for those seeking to improve their educational qualifications, undertake training or find paid work are under-developed and not used by the vast majority of adults living in the community. However, those who do use these services make very good progress.

The staff team have become very well established with partners and with families. They have built strong, trusting relationships with users so families feel more able to engage in services and receive support. This promotes the good work that is undertaken through the Common Assessment Framework, those subject to child protection plans and with children looked after by the local authority. This support is highly valued by users, for example, one parent told us 'I think the staff at the centre are great. They help you do things better without making you feel like you've failed in some way'.

The centre works very well with partners to improve parents' understanding of how children develop speech. This strong focus on language and communication has resulted in positive

benefits in helping children prepare well for school. Parents are effectively encouraged to practice learning exercises at home to increase benefits and outcomes.

The centre has a very effective early years teacher who works with colleagues and partners to promote children’s learning and development. Contact with the centre has enabled children to have a better start to school life. Attendance at almost all sessions offered by the centre is good.

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>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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</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>2</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?**

<b>2</b>
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The quality of provision at the centre is good. Effective relationships with families are established quickly because staff and partners are experienced and understand the community and the challenges it faces. Assessments cover the whole range of needs, including the needs of those from target groups. Assessment is detailed and used well to plan individual support for users.

Good partnerships have been established with a range of key organisations including health, the co-located school, speech and language therapy, social care, Early Years Foundation Stage providers and voluntary and private sector organisations. The centre has well-developed procedures to work collaboratively with these partners in targeting services for individual children and families.

Analysis of data indicates that the number of families registered with the centre is increasing. Outreach workers hold well-organised events in the local community to attract new members and the targeting of families who are thought to have the greatest needs is progressing well. For those families new to the centre’s services and for those not yet contemplating change, the outreach workers provide home visits to do what they can to motivate and encourage them to attend the full range of services on offer.

Current arrangements to promote opportunities for adult education, training and support to find employment are underdeveloped. The centre recognises the need to do more to widen the range of opportunities and increase access to these services for more adults.

Staff work hard to make sure that families enjoy their time at the centre. They provide good care, guidance and support, which is valued because parents and carers recognise that it leads to improved outcomes for their family. Parents engage in exciting activities, whilst building their confidence, relationships and parenting skills. One parent told us 'I had very low self-esteem before I started attending the centre, but now I'm much more confident and enjoy coming here to meet people'.

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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</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?**

<b>2</b>
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Leadership and management of the centre are good. The centre's leadership team has a positive and increasingly effective impact on improving outcomes for centre users. The good range of challenging and interesting activities is recognised and valued by the local community, which is increasing the number of families registering to use the centre's services. The acting centre manager is very determined and provides a clear focus for the well-motivated staff to recognise the strengths of the centre and to continue to improve the services it offers. The centre has an established and effective advisory board with strong representation from parents. The advisory board reviews progress and negotiates targets and priorities for the centre. The parents' forum provides an effective link between centre users and the centre's leadership team, who listen to and take account of users' views.

The local authority provides strong strategic leadership for the centre and has set clear priorities, which the centre has used to set key performance targets. The centre's leadership team have good arrangements to involve staff, partners and centre users in the process of self-evaluation. Staff have a clear understanding of the centre's vision and priorities and they appreciate and recognise the importance of the impact of their work on improving outcomes for children and their families. The development plan sets out the centre's ambition and identifies clearly where improvements are needed, making useful links with national and regional priorities. The centre provides good value for money.

Staff are very well trained and experienced. They value the challenge and support they receive from their individual line-managers and are improving outcomes for families through their high level of skills and knowledge. The centre is committed to inclusion and removing



barriers, including those faced by children with disabilities. It promotes equality well in its activities, some of which involve the celebration of different cultures and beliefs. The centre has contributed well to narrowing the gap between the lowest 20% and the rest in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Discrimination, where it occurs, is dealt with promptly and effectively.

The acting manager of the centre uses highly effective arrangements to ensure safeguarding regulations are met. All centre users are protected and their welfare and development are promoted very effectively. Staff receive high quality training and have a very good awareness of and know what to do if action needs to be taken. There are very effective supervision arrangements and quality systems to ensure staff continue to be effective and to develop and share aspects of good practice, such as the attention that is given to the protection of vulnerable adults. Staff vetting and recruitment procedures are robust and rigorously observed. The centre and its partners have a clear focus on early intervention and work very effectively with other key agencies in reducing the incidence and impact of the high level of domestic violence in the area.

Partnership working is effective in improving outcomes. Services are very well integrated and partners are clear about what is expected of them.

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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</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>2</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>2</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>1</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>2</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>2</b>

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

None.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected Stockbridge Village (Acorn) Children's Centre on 3 - 4 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We were very impressed by the welcoming feel of your bright, attractive new centre. We enjoyed our visit and meeting so many of you. We would like to thank those of you who helped us with our work. We found that under the effective guidance of the centre leadership team, the staff work well to provide good levels of care, guidance and support for all users.

We found the staff to be committed and keen to support your children's development and to develop adults' confidence. Many of you told us how this makes being a parent more enjoyable and rewarding. However, we think the centre needs to do more to encourage adults who want help to find work, undertake training or increase their education to attend courses.

The staff have established good partnerships with other professionals and organisations to ensure you have access to useful support and guidance. They are providing good support to help families keep healthy and safe, and are very focused and successful at increasing children's development through many of the interesting and exciting activities.

We found the staff to be good at providing individual personal support and that they are determined to become even better at supporting families with the greatest needs. Some of you told us that the support of the centre is very important when you are having problems.

We found the centre to be a very safe place for you and your children because the staff are highly skilled and know what to do to get you the right help at the earliest opportunity. We found that the reception staff are very welcoming and helpful. The rooms and play equipment are of a very good standard and the staff have lots of experience and skills to make sure your time there is well spent. The children we saw were making good progress and enjoyed what they were doing.

Some of you told us that the centre is a very useful place for you to meet other parents and people who can help families, and we agree. Some of you said that sessions, such as breastfeeding support and baby massage are very valuable and we have seen the benefits of this. We also think that your centre is good at involving fathers and other male relatives and carers.

The centre is good at collecting your views on activities and courses and some of you are involved in helping to manage the centre. The outreach worker meets the parents' forum regularly to ensure that the services the centre is providing meet your needs and interests. The centre staff listen to your views and uses this information to make improvements.

They are aware that more could be done to involve more families in the life of the centre, and to focus efforts to provide more support for families facing difficult circumstances.

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