

Inspection report for St Peters Children's Centre

Local authority	Tameside
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Reporting inspector	Kathryn Gethin HMI

Centre leader	Kellyann Mercer
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Trafalgar Sq Trafalgar St Ashton U Lyne Tameside OL7 0LL
Telephone number	0161 330 6666
Fax number	0161 342 8352
Email address	Kellyann.mercer@tameside.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY383788 Children 4 Most at St Peter's

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, representatives from the local authority, the chair of the advisory board, representatives from a wide range of partner agencies, and parents. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

St Peters Children's Centre is a phase one centre that was designated in 2007. It is located in the St Peters ward of Tameside. St Peters is one of three children's centres which serve the families of Ashton. There are currently 865 children aged under five years in the reach area. The majority of the catchment is within the 70% most deprived in the country. Life expectancy for both men and women across this area is lower than the average. The area has seen a rise in unemployment and 27% of children under four years live in households dependent on workless benefits. The large majority of children are of White British heritage, with an increasing number of Eastern European families. Children's skills on entry to early years provision are generally below age-related expectations. A restructure of services across Tameside is currently taking place.

The strategic management of the centre is undertaken by the local authority alongside an advisory board. The centre manager has responsibility for three children's centres and one satellite centre. The centre provides an appropriate range of services to meet the core purpose. These include family support, health services, and parent and young child-focused activities. Partner agencies include Homestart, health professionals, the speech and language team, and the Jobcentre. The Homestart service is based within the centre.

Childcare is privately provided and is subject to separate inspection arrangements. The childcare was last inspected in 2009. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

St Peters Children's Centre is a satisfactory centre that offers good levels of care and support to all families that access its services. Families hold the centre in high regard and greatly value the guidance and support on offer. Parents describe the centre as being like 'an extended family' and say the centre is the first place they would turn to if they needed support.

The centre is a safe environment and there is good attention to keeping families safe through regular advice and signposting to other agencies. Information on services is well presented throughout the centre. All staff and partners give the highest priority to safeguarding children and families. The centre works very effectively with other agencies to reduce the risk of harm to families. All required procedures are in place and training is up to date. Effective links with schools in the locality vary. As a result, some children are more prepared for learning than others.

The centre uses resources well to avoid any duplication of services. However, the business plan is not sufficiently well focused on local need or set against measurable criteria. This is due to a lack of detailed information of potential users in the community. In addition, the centre does not have an effective system in place to evaluate the impact of services they provide over time. As a result, the centre cannot securely judge whether services are targeting the right users and are effective as they could be.

Some parents engage well with the work of the centre. In particular, fathers make a good contribution in their support of breastfeeding. However, the centre recognises that more could be done to encourage parents to contribute to decision making and help to shape

services. The advisory board is very well placed to both challenge the centre and drive improvement.

Despite a reduction in resources the senior leadership team and centre staff remain passionate about the work of the centre and strive to improve the well-being of all users that are known to them. An ongoing local authority restructure has delayed the progress of the centre. However, there is an absolute confidence that the new, streamlined working model will have a positive impact on families. Senior leaders are fully aware of where further improvement is required and, along with the commitment of staff, the centre has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen evaluation by:
 - developing targets for improvement that are specific, measurable and focused on improving outcomes for users
 - developing systems to evaluate and demonstrate impact over time
 - clarifying information which demonstrates the percentage of target groups accessing services.

- Increase user involvement further by:
 - strengthening the contribution of families to the management of the centre
 - increasing the extent to which the views of families are used to shape services.

- Further develop links with schools to promote children's learning.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Most families attending the centre have a satisfactory understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and take advantage of the courses on offer. The centre has a well-established breastfeeding support group and has been awarded stage 2 of the Baby Friendly Initiative. The percentage of children being breastfed at six to eight weeks reached 38% at its highest but remains below the national average. Volunteer parents provide support to mothers and centre staff are currently undertaking training on how to implement basic breastfeeding management. Healthy eating is promoted throughout the centre. 'Leap4life', a preventative lifestyle programme incorporating healthy eating, oral health and physical exercise, is delivered in partnership with the children's nutrition team. The percentage of children in Reception Year who are obese has fallen from 12% to 10%. This is marginally above the national average. The high conception rate for teenage pregnancies has also fallen, from 60% to 53%.

Families feel extremely safe at the centre and learn to keep themselves safe as they develop an understanding of dangers within the home. Safeguarding is well promoted throughout

the centre and collaborative working with a range of partners by centre staff has helped families remain safe during difficult times. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process effectively, referrals are assessed speedily and the appropriate service identified. A rolling programme of training on child mental health issues, attachment and different forms of autism has enabled staff to better support those families with more complex needs.

The number of children achieving at least 78+ points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scales with six points in all areas of personal, social and emotional development, and communication, language and literacy rose from 40% to 57% over a three-year period. However, the skills and abilities of children as they begin Reception Year are below age-related expectations, and building links with schools to improve the learning and development of young children is a priority for the centre. Twenty of the most vulnerable two-year-old children are currently accessing the free nursery education funding. Parents develop good parenting skills as a result of improved parenting techniques. Since attending a parenting course one mother said how she was now 'a better mother' as she understood how to establish routines and manage her children's behaviour in a calm way.

A number of parents use their skills on a voluntary basis and act as peer support in groups. However, senior leaders are aware of the need to strengthen the role of parents in the decision making of the centre and to increase their involvement in shaping services. Families using the centre are improving their economic stability, for example, by learning how to manage a budget. Limited data are available on parent participation in adult learning and training.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
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 children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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	3
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.	3

How good is the provision?

Registration levels are high but do not accurately identify the target groups in the community. However, local knowledge of the community and information from partner agencies enable the centre to satisfactorily assess the needs of families and signpost to a range of specialist provision. Staff have a good understanding of the barriers and challenges faced by families. A reasonable number of disabled children, fathers and children from minority ethnic groups participate in the centre activities. Early intervention is fundamental to the success of the centre and staff recognise the importance of outreach work to build on the self-esteem of families who lack the confidence to access activities at the centre.

A range of activities support families' learning and development. These include sensory play, physical play, speech and language, and the more informal coffee morning drop-in. The importance of books and reading together is widely promoted throughout the centre through a book loan scheme and book start programme. A well-resourced crèche is available and staff model good-quality play activities. English, mathematics and computer skills are provided up to level 2 through family learning, but the long-term outcome of these courses in regard to employment is not currently monitored. Personal achievement is celebrated by providing certificates at the end of courses.

The centre provides good care, guidance and support for families as staff recognise the need within the local community. Families frequently face a raft of complex and at times overwhelming issues including housing problems, debt, domestic violence and isolation. Staff are highly effective in supporting families through these difficult periods, through outreach work, family support and signposting to the most appropriate agency. Front-line reception staff are welcoming and have a good knowledge of services. Information and advice are prominently displayed throughout the centre. Staff work very effectively with a range of services to provide an integrated package of support. Case studies demonstrate the successful outcomes for families through the personalised support given.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

Governance and accountability arrangements are increasingly clear and understood. The advisory board is a strength of the centre and is actively involved in governance. The manager and local authority hold a realistic view of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement and this is shown in the accuracy of their self-evaluation. At present the

centre's plans are not set against measurable targets or used to demonstrate the impact of the centre's work.

The decommissioning of some services and a reduction in staff have presented many challenges for the centre. By managing resources stringently, signposting to services and using resources flexibly across other centres the centre has shown its commitment to sustainability and provides satisfactory value for money.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. The centre operates within a very diverse area and the range of families accessing services is representative of the community. Conversation courses offered at the centre help parents develop their language skills. They are then better equipped to progress onto other activities. Fathers play a key role in centre activities and have been successful in providing support for each other. This has led to improved outcomes for their families. The centre promotes the inclusion of disabled children and those with special educational needs well.

Safeguarding arrangements are a priority at the centre. Safer recruitment procedures are stringently followed and all relevant checks made to ensure staff are suitable to work with children. Early intervention and referrals to the most appropriate agencies are timely and effective, particularly in relation to domestic violence. Parents feel confident to share concerns with staff and the use of picture cards offers an alternative means for those who find difficulty in communicating. Comprehensive risk assessments are in place across the centre.

The centre makes good use of the skills and expertise of its own staff and that of staff from partner organisations. However, outdated service level agreements and the data required to evaluate activities over time have hindered the centre's ability to ensure the right users are coming to the centre and to determine whether the activities are exactly what is required. Despite the opportunities for families to become more involved in decision making and shaping services, relatively few take up this option.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3

<p>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.</p>	<p>3</p>
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Inspectors considered the previous childcare report for Children 4 Most at St Peters, which is located on the same site as the centre. The reports for three local primary schools were also considered.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the St Peters Children's Centre on 31 October and 1 November 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank those of you who helped with our work. You expressed your views clearly and they were very helpful to us.

We visited some activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with a number of you. Like you, we found your centre to be welcoming and friendly. The care, guidance and support offered by staff and other organisations they work with are a real strength of the centre. Staff are enthusiastic and committed to improving outcomes for you and your families.

Your community is very diverse and the centre is good at encouraging people from different backgrounds to use the centre. The centre provides you with a wide range of activities which you told us you enjoy. You are developing your parenting skills and, as a result, are enabling your children to feel secure and make the best progress they can. We have asked the centre to improve the links with local schools to ensure that when children begin school they are confident and eager to learn. Some of you told us that coming to the centre has made you feel less isolated and given you more confidence. It was good to hear that a regular group of fathers are also involved. We hope this continues to grow. Your centre does a great deal to ensure you are housed appropriately and supports you to successfully manage your budget and avoid getting into debt.

Staff regularly share information and make sure they work well together to provide you with all the support you need as quickly as possible. We have asked the centre to consider how they can access information after you have completed training courses and activities in

order to ensure it has been a worthwhile experience for you and has continued to make a difference in improving your lives. You may be able to help with this. We were pleased to see how the centre encourages you to become involved in volunteering.

The staff work hard to make the centre as good as it can be. To help we have asked if they can be clear about the priorities for the centre and look closely at how they plan activities so they can be sure they are making a difference to your lives. We have also asked them to encourage you to become more involved in the work of the centre - perhaps by becoming a member of the advisory board?

Thank you once again for your time. We wish you all the very best for the future.

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