

Appletree Children's Centre

Milking Stile Lane, Lancaster, Lancashire, LA1 5QB

Inspection date 18–19 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
		Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Outstanding	1
The quality of practice and services		Outstanding	1
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is an outstanding centre.

- Inspiring, committed and highly effective leaders and managers are very ably supported by the local authority and governing body and together they have driven impressive improvements over time. Systems and processes, including those for setting targets and monitoring performance, are excellent.
- Highly qualified, experienced and effective centre staff and partners consistently deliver a wide range of excellent quality universal and targeted services which are all very well attended. Almost all families would recommend the centre to others.
- As a result of excellent information sharing with partners, most families with young children living in the reach area are registered with the centre and a large majority of these regularly access activities and services. Almost all families living in the three most deprived areas regularly use the centre's services. Families who are more vulnerable benefit tremendously from highly effective support services.
- The centre has correctly identified that leaders and managers should develop their skills of observation further, so that they can offer more specific advice to staff to improve the quality of services.
- Centre staff know the families that live in the reach area very well and hold an accurate view of the centre's performance. They know what they need to do next to ensure the centre continues to deliver exemplary services, and they are committed to making a discernible difference to children and families.
- Highly effective partnerships with schools have made a tremendous difference to the achievement of children, and in particular those who are more disadvantaged or vulnerable. The Best Start initiative has enabled most children to achieve a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Data show that attainment levels are well above the Lancashire and national average and the gap has narrowed to well below that seen nationally.
- Safeguarding arrangements ensure that almost all vulnerable children are very well supported. Outreach workers work closely with a wide range of partners to support children subject to child protection plans and children in need. Staff also intervene early to provide information, advice, guidance and support to families which they overwhelmingly appreciate.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with leaders and managers, representatives of the local authority, governing body and advisory board. They also met with health visitors, an adult learning tutor, a learning mentor, headteacher of a local school and those responsible for childminding provision in the reach area. Inspectors observed an outreach visit, family support activities onsite, two crèche sessions and a number of other activities including a portage session. They met parents formally at the parents' forum and spoke to over 20 parents on a one-to-one basis. Inspectors also analysed results from parent surveys undertaken by the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Michael Blakey	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Philip Ellwand	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Appletree Children's Centre is federated with Stoneygate Children's Centre (URN: 22950) and Stoneygate Nursery School (URN: 119083) and shares a Centre Manager / Headteacher. Appletree offers the full level of services to achieve the core purpose. The centre is co-located with Appletree Nursery School (URN: 134991) which was subject to a separate inspection and judged to be outstanding in November 2012. The governing body of Appletree Nursery School is responsible to Lancashire County Council for the day-to-day management of the centre. The centre also shares the site with Apple Blossom (URN: EY450604) which is also subject to a separate inspection and was judged to be good in March 2013. The reports for these inspections can be found on our website at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

There are 765 children aged from birth to five years living in the reach area. The centre serves nine Super Output Areas (SOAs). One of the SOAs is in the top 30% most deprived in England, and two more fall within the top 40%. The centre also serves two of the top 10% least deprived areas. Most families living in the reach area are of White British heritage. However, registration data show that the proportion of families from a wider range of Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds is rising. Approximately 26% of families are in receipt of benefits. Children's skill levels on entry to early years provision are broadly in line with those expected for their age.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Provide opportunities for all leaders and managers to develop their observation skills so that their monitoring of activities and sessions informs highly targeted feedback to all staff and partners to further improve the excellent quality of services.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Outstanding

- Centre staff know their community very well and have successfully encouraged most families with young children living in the reach area to register. Almost all children living in the most deprived areas are registered and attend regularly. Similarly, children of Black or Minority Ethnic backgrounds are very well represented as are all other target groups.
- Live birth data, which local health services now share with the centre, have helped leaders and managers to identify any gaps and register more families. There are a few families who are not yet registered, mainly in the more affluent rural parts of the reach area, and leaders have plans to promote the centre to these families.
- Every new registration is screened by the deputy manager to identify any potential risk factors and to ensure that timely and appropriate support is offered. Access to family support is very well targeted. Half of the current families currently accessing these services live in workless households and 35% of families have children with additional needs.
- Attendance rates are high. Children and parents attend a wide range of activities and services on a regular basis. Access to and attendance at universal pre-birth health services is very good, with midwives providing drop in sessions on a weekly basis.
- Access to training for adults is very good. The centre delivers a wide range of structured parenting programmes which have all been very well attended. In addition, the centre provides the 'Whoops Home Safety' programme which helps parents to keep their children safe.

The quality of practice and services

Outstanding

- Targeted services, including outreach work, are of the very best quality and make a significant impact on the well-being of families whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable. Every targeted service has clear attendance criteria. Targeted 'Stay and Play', for example, is very well

attended by families who have been referred via outreach workers or partners. Case files demonstrate significant improvements for many families, including for example, preventing children from being taken into local authority care.

- Training makes a discernible difference to families and helps to keep children safe for example, through the safeguarding for parents course. Almost all parents take up the offer of high quality parenting courses.
- The quality and range of universal services delivered for children and adults is exceptional. Activities, including 'Stay and Play' and 'Clapping Song' are over subscribed. At one of the sessions observed by inspectors a parent said: 'We come here every week. My child's language and sentence structure are developing because of the song phrases she is learning. We love it.'
- The centre is proactive and determined to promote the necessary skills required to ensure all children are prepared for school. In October 2012, the centre commissioned new onsite provision for two-year-old children whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and has provided 49, 15 hour places. The centre also works closely with childminders who regularly attend the weekly drop in sessions. Inspection findings show that the quality of childminding services has improved significantly in the local area, with many now judged to be outstanding.
- Services have made a tremendous difference to reducing inequality as seen in the achievement of children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. In 2012, the proportion of children in the reach area achieving a good level of development was 79.5%, well above levels seen locally and nationally. The attainment gap between all children and those who were eligible for free school meals, at 4% is considerably narrower than that seen nationally.
- The excellent quality of health services and health promotion strategies makes a positive impact on the health of families. Obesity rates are well below levels seen nationally and breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks are very good.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Outstanding

- The federated model of leadership between the two nursery schools and two children's centres demonstrates an excellent use of resources and enables a wide range of universal and targeted services to be delivered to a very large majority of families.
- Leaders and managers are highly qualified, experienced and have been very effective at driving improvements over a sustained period of time. As a result, the proportion of families registered has increased significantly so that all target groups are very well represented, and inequality is reducing strongly. Outcomes for families are constantly improving and are much better than the levels seen locally and nationally.
- The local authority provides excellent systems and processes to set targets, monitor and manage performance. The centre's processes for evaluating the effectiveness of their work are acutely accurate and help to identify further areas for improvement. Development planning is focused on a small number of priorities. The centre is aware that it could help its middle managers to fine tune their observation and feedback skills to drive further improvements in the quality of services and activities.
- Supervision and performance management processes are robust. The outreach team receive one-to-one supervision and meet weekly as a group to discuss case work and next steps.
- The governing body know the children's centre and the families it serves very well. The vice chair is a parent and the Chair of the Governing Body has a wide range of experience in leading and managing children's centres. Together with the other members of the governing body, they are very supportive, yet highly challenging of the centre's leaders. This highly effective governance contributes strongly to driving improvements.
- Safeguarding arrangements are highly effective. The deputy centre manager, a qualified social worker, has developed excellent partnerships with children's social care and health visitors. As a result, the children and families whose circumstances make them most vulnerable are very effectively safeguarded and supported. Children who are subject to child protection plans, children in need and looked after children, are all known to the centre. Almost all of these children receive

dedicated outreach support from the centre. The centre contributes fully to the use of the Common Assessment Framework process and regularly holds Team Around the Child meetings to provide effective early help.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Children's centre details

Unique reference number	20101
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	411019
Managed by	Appletree Nursery School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	765
Centre leader	Julie Morrow
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	01524 64132
Email address	head@appletree.lancs.sch.uk

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