

Stanford Children's Centre

c/o Stanford Primary School, Copland Road, Stanford le Hope, SS17 0DF

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| Inspection dates | 26–27 March 2015 |
| Previous inspection date | Not Previously Inspected |

| Overall effectiveness | This inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| | Previous inspection: | Not previously inspected | |
| Access to services by young children and families | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| The quality of practice and services | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management | | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The centre is not doing enough to improve life chances and reduce inequalities for parents who are out of work and children who are living in poverty. The needs of these families are not identified precisely enough, and too few adults attend courses or access services which are designed to improve their employability skills or prepare them for return to work.
- The centre is not rigorous enough in tracking whether all children subject to a child protection plan or children in need are having their needs met, either through support provided by the centre, or through the services of partner organisations.
- Until quite recently, the centre has not been sufficiently thorough in following up why some families are not using its services regularly.
- The proportion of mothers breastfeeding at six to eight weeks is well below the national average.

This centre has the following strengths:

- The proportions of families registered with the centre and of those participating in its activities has grown markedly over the last two years. This is because of improvements in the way the centre is run and the provision of services in community venues for families living in areas of greatest need.
- Collaboration with most partner organisations is excellent; this has broken down barriers to the sharing of information about families and leads to efficient use of resources.
- The centre's good-quality activities, and its efforts to ensure all eligible two-year-olds attend free early education, contribute strongly to above-average outcomes for children by the age of five.
- The centre's effective actions have helped to reduce childhood obesity and ensure most children are immunised.
- The quality, range and impact of services which are open to all are good.
- Parents who receive individual support from the centre value the quality of care provided.
- The good work of the centre leader, effective support from the local authority, and the clear advice and guidance of the advisory board have led to many improvements over the last year.
- Those responsible for overseeing the work of the centre have accurate insight into how well the centre is doing, make sure that it is on track to meet its targets and has good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Reduce inequalities and improve the life chances of adults who are out of work and their families by:
 - identifying the learning, training, qualifications and advice needed for adults to improve their economic stability and chances of employment
 - providing or referring adults to relevant courses to meet these needs and ensuring that the large majority attend.
- Ensure that the needs of all children subject to a child protection plan and children in need are being met effectively by:
 - establishing contact with the families of all such children
 - ascertaining to what extent other organisations, such as health and social care, are meeting their needs
 - improving these children's engagement with the centre and encouraging all of them to attend activities which meet their needs.
- Press ahead with following up the non-attendance of children and families from all priority groups to ensure that at least the large majority sustain engagement in appropriate services.
- Increase the proportion of mothers continuing to breastfeed their babies at six to eight weeks.

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 three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with: representatives from the local authority; members of the advisory board; the children's centre improvement partner; the centre manager and staff of the children's centre; parents and users of the centre; and representatives of organisations who work in partnership with the centre.

The inspectors visited activities and held discussions at the centre and at The Karis May Darling Centre. A joint observation of a stay-and-play activity was undertaken with the centre manager.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

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|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Graham Sims, Lead inspector | Additional inspector |
| Maggie Fobister | Additional inspector |
| Ann Taylor | Additional inspector |

Full report

Information about the centre

Stanford Children's Centre is one of nine children's centres which serve the whole of Thurrock. It opened in 2008. The centre expanded in 2012 to include the areas covered by two other children's centres which have now closed. The centre runs some of its services from the former sites of these two centres at The Karis May Darling Centre and Abbots Hall Primary School. The number of children served by the centre has increased from just under 500 to 1,887 and the number of families to 1,525. The centre is located on the former site of Stanford Primary School whose premises it shares with a private pre-school provider, East Thurrock Kids Club. The club is inspected under separate arrangements.

The centre manager, who has been in post for 18 months, reports directly to the local authority for the running of the centre. Governance is assisted by the local advisory board and the centre is also held to account by an accountability board comprising leaders from within the local authority. The centre has a small team of staff which includes the centre manager, two parental outreach workers and a children's centre facilitator. Some of the staff also work for part of the week at other nearby children's centres. The centre also receives some support from other staff employed by the local authority. An agency supplies two members of staff who carry out administrative duties.

The centre offers a range of services for families, by working with partner organisations and by referring parents and children to other specialist providers. Crèche facilities are provided when needed to enable parents to attend activities, but the centre does not provide full- or part-time childcare services.

The centre serves the North East Locality of Thurrock, a very large area which is divided by two busy dual carriageway roads which impede access to the centre for those who do not have transport. Much of the area is sparsely habited, but the area around and to the north east of the centre is densely populated. The large majority of families are White British. Around 14% come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Around a fifth of adults in the area have no qualifications; there are similar proportions of adults who are out of work, children who are living in poverty and lone parent families. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are broadly typical for their age.

The centre has identified its key priority groups as: vulnerable children who are subject to a child protection plan or are designated as children in need; two-year-old children who are eligible for free nursery education; children with lone parents and from workless and low-income families who have been identified as living in poverty or in the areas of highest deprivation.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Although a large majority of families from the centre's priority groups are registered with the centre and the proportion accessing its services has increased markedly over the last two years, the proportion accessing services which are relevant to their most pressing needs remains low. Only a small minority, for example, of workless adults attend courses or access services which are designed to improve their employability skills or prepare them for return to work.
- Half of the families who have children subject to child protection plans or designated as children in need are not registered with the centre and do not access its services. The centre receives details of these families, but outreach work has not yet ascertained whether their needs are being met or been successful in encouraging them to attend services which are relevant to their needs. Those who do access the centre receive good support and guidance.

- The centre has made great strides in improving the way it monitors who accesses its services and now has a much clearer picture of which families engage with the centre. However, a concerted campaign to contact the small minority of families from its priority groups who do not access services and to identify those who are not yet registered has only just started and has yet to have an impact.
- Other initiatives to encourage more families to attend activities which are open to all and to improve their parenting skills have been successful. For example, the much improved communication with parents through regular newsletters, emails and other means keeps families well informed about what is happening at the centre and other venues. As a result, most families in the area with young children are now registered, and a large majority have accessed a service at least once in the last year. Services are now run in community venues in two of the areas of greatest need, and this is enabling many more families to engage with the centre.
- The centre staff and representatives from the local authority have forged excellent relationships with many partner organisations so that barriers to sharing information and data have been broken down. An agreement has been reached to provide the centre with information about all new births. Collaboration with health and social care workers results in timely referrals to the centre and also enables the centre to make early contact with those who are expecting children.
- A very large majority of eligible two-year-old children take up their entitlement to free high-quality early education. Almost every three- and four-year-old child in the area attends a nursery or pre-school setting.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Although there are good relationships with adult education providers, the services offered are not having sufficient impact on improving life chances and reducing inequalities. Staff have not given high enough priority to identifying the learning, training, qualifications and advice needed to improve economic stability and chances of employment for workless parents in the centre's largest priority group or to encouraging individuals to access such opportunities.
- For those who have attended relevant services to improve their skills, the centre has been instrumental in bringing about dramatic changes which have had profound impact on improving families' circumstances, increasing individuals' confidence and range of skills, and opening doors to employment.
- The centre has yet to make use of volunteers to supplement its services and to provide individuals with valuable experience for returning to work. However, all the necessary groundwork has been undertaken for this to happen. The centre has identified a first group of four volunteers, who have taken part in an authority-wide training course. Planning sessions for them to assist the centre and lead new activities took place during the inspection, with a view to implementation in the summer term.
- The centre has not met targets relating to the proportion of mothers continuing to breastfeed their six- to eight-week old babies. The proportion has been well below the national average for the last year. Other health-related outcomes, such as those for immunisation of young children and the level of childhood obesity, are better than seen nationally.
- The quality, range and impact of services which are open to all are good. Analysis of parents' evaluations of services indicate a very high level of satisfaction. Parents are helped to build their skills, heighten their awareness of children's safety and develop a better understanding of how to

contribute to their children's education at home.

- Parental outreach workers provide effective and much-appreciated help for individual families, including lone parents who are referred to the centre. Parents speak very positively about the quality of care provided and point to improvements to their families' circumstances which occur as a result. Case files and records are maintained to a high standard.
- Outcomes for all children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in Thurrock were above the national average in 2014. There is compelling evidence to show that the achievement of children who regularly attended the centre's stay-and-play activities or child development sessions achieved well above the average for Thurrock, thus demonstrating positive impact of the centre's services to reduce inequalities.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre leader, the advisory board and leaders from the local authority have been instrumental in improving many aspects of the children's centre over the last year. Services are now offered in areas of greatest need. There is a much stronger focus on engaging families from the centre's priority groups which is proving successful. Staff have access to much more reliable information and data about families in the area than before which they are using effectively to make improvements.
- Excellent relationships have been forged with a wide range of partners so that there is a willingness to share information and explore new ways of working efficiently and effectively which will benefit families, particularly those from the centre's priority groups.
- Governance arrangements are effective. The local authority, the accountability board and the advisory board are now pro-active in holding the centre to account by setting targets to help improve the centre's effectiveness. As a result, the proportions of families registering with the centre and accessing its services have risen markedly from a very low baseline. Even though more work is required to identify the needs of families from priority groups more precisely, the large majority are now registered with the centre and staff are maintaining contact with them.
- Arrangements for evaluating and improving services and activities are good. A detailed 'single action plan' is helping to drive improvements and is reviewed regularly by the advisory board and the accountability board to ensure that the centre is on track to meet its targets. The views of parents and partners help to shape improvements. Support from the local authority, collaboration with leaders of other children's centres and termly visits from an improvement partner all contribute strongly to the good quality of services provided by the centre.
- Resources are increasingly being used effectively and efficiently, for example, by taking more services out into the community in order to engage those from the centre's priority groups. The centre has been highly effective in using its resources to help improve the educational outcomes for young children.
- The centre has robust policies, procedures and practices to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of children. Staff have a good understanding of safe practices and work successfully with families to improve safety in the home. The centre cooperates well with other organisations to assess children under the Common Assessment Framework and to provide early help where necessary. The centre has not been proactive enough in finding out how well the children subject to a child protection plan or children in need are having their needs met by other organisations if they are not accessing the centre's services.

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

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| Unique reference number | 22909 |
| Local authority | Thurrock |
| Inspection number | 452806 |
| Managed by | The local authority |

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| Approximate number of children under five in the reach area | 1,887 |
| Centre leader | Joanne Goodall |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Telephone number | 01375 673080 |
| Email address | jgoodall@thurrock.gov.uk |

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