

# St James' Children's Centre

High Street, Isle of Grain, Rochester, ME3 0BS

**Inspection dates** 6–7 May 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a good centre.

- Almost all of the young children in the local area are registered with the centre. Strong effective links with health services ensure families with newborn babies are contacted swiftly and encouraged to make use of the centre and early health services.
- Staff have an in-depth knowledge of the needs of families living in the local community. This means that priority families, such as those living in more isolated villages or where two-year-olds are eligible for free education, are identified quickly and services adapted to meet their needs. Consequently, the large majority of all priority groups make regular use of the centre.
- Two-year-olds who access free early education make excellent progress. Very effective links with other schools and early years settings have developed due to the support and expertise of the centre's strategic manager.
- The centre's well-structured volunteer programme has provided good opportunities for participants to extend their confidence and improve their employment prospects. Volunteers also provide a valuable additional resource to the small team of centre staff.
- The strategic centre manager is very effective in balancing her roles as assistant headteacher of the school as well as early years lead. She provides strong leadership, benefiting from regular and effective support and monitoring by the local authority. There is a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement, especially in relation to meeting the needs of priority children and families. This gives the centre a good capacity to continue to move forward.

### It is not outstanding because:

- The proportion of mothers who continue to breastfeed their babies at around two months is relatively low. The centre is hampered in measuring the impact of the support it provides due to a lack of accurate and timely information about how many mothers start to breastfeed.
- Case files do not always reflect the good levels of one-to-one care, guidance and support families receive. This is because they are not consistent in showing how parents' and carers' views are taken into account or what steps will be taken to reach the ultimate goal to get their lives back on track. Tools to measure the difference the centre has made from start to finish are not yet being used.
- The newly reconstituted advisory board does not currently have a wide enough membership nor enough parent representation to enable it to hold the centre to account effectively enough.

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

- Increase the percentage of mothers who continue to breastfeed their babies by:
  - working with the local authority and health services to obtain more accurate and timely information relating to the percentage of mothers who start breastfeeding
  - gathering more local information through the recently trained breastfeeding advocate and the infant feeding project officer to establish why some mothers do not wish to start or sustain breastfeeding
  - reviewing local antenatal and postnatal feeding advice and guidance and tailoring services to meet any gaps in the provision.
- Improve the quality of case file recording to include parents' and carers' views of what support they need, setting goals to meet those needs and developing a consistent and effective method to measure the impact.
- Broaden the membership of the advisory board to include more partners and parents and carers. Ensure members are trained and knowledgeable enough to enable them to challenge the centre effectively.

## 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 the centre's strategic manager, chair of the advisory board and the link governor. They met representatives of the local authority and spoke to a range of partners, including those from health, social care and local schools. The inspectors spoke to several parents, carers and volunteers and took their views into account.

The inspectors observed two sessions taking place in Allhallows village, one undertaken jointly with the centre's strategic manager. They visited several sessions including the 'Top Tips Healthy Lifestyle Choices' and 'Get Physical' groups and spent time at the baby clinic, all of which took place at the St James' Centre.

A range of relevant documentation was looked at by the inspectors. This included safeguarding policies, procedures and practice, self-evaluation processes and development plans. The strategic manager and representatives from the local authority attended all the inspection team meetings.

## Inspection team

Joan Lindsay, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Barbara Saltmarsh

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

St James' Children's Centre is a standalone centre that opened in April 2008. It is located within St James' Church of England (C of E) Academy Primary School in the village of Grain. Some services are delivered in the other rural villages of Lower Stoke, Allhallows and High Halstow. The centre provides early years experiences, family support, adult learning and health services through partnership work.

The governing body of St James' C of E Academy manages the centre on behalf of the local authority. The children's centre strategic manager is also the assistant headteacher and the early years lead at the school. There is an advisory board in place to assist with governance. The school is subject to a separate inspection. The report can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

There are 343 children aged under five in the area served by the centre which covers four separate rural villages on the Hoo peninsula. In June 2014, the local authority undertook a review of the centre's area and it was significantly reduced in size from six to four specific regions. The main 'hub' centre is at St James' C of E Academy site in Grain, the furthest point on the peninsula. A quarter of children under five live in households where no one is in employment, which is above the national average. Approximately 8% of families are claiming Working Tax Credit in the local area which is well below the national figure of 17%. Most children come from a White British background. Children generally enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge in line with those typical for their age.

The centre has identified priority groups needing most support as: families living in rural isolation especially in the Stoke area; families with low aspirations living in the village of Grain; and families where two-year-olds are eligible for free early education.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

**Good**

- Almost all young children in the local area are registered with the centre.
- An increasing number of families attend regularly because staff are very aware of local needs, such as rural isolation and transport problems, and so design services accordingly. Consequently, services are delivered in all four of the main villages of Stoke, Allhallows, High Halstow and Grain. The numbers who attend village sessions are growing year on year. However the rate of growth is slower in High Halstow because only two sessions a week currently take place there.
- To support the identified priority families living in Stoke, a variety of sessions such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Sensory Play' are held throughout the week in two village venues. This has led to the large majority of those children and families using the centre's services regularly.
- A wide range of services is delivered from the main St James' site in Grain. The centre has well-embedded partnerships with adult education and charities such as the Strood Community Project; this means that most of the priority families who need support to extend their education and employment skills access services on a regular basis.
- Families of two-year-olds who can claim free early education are supported very effectively by the centre through excellent links with local schools and settings. Consequently most of those children take up their place, and all in good or outstanding provision. Nearly all three- and four-year-olds are accessing early education.
- Monthly child health clinics are held at the St James' Centre and the Allhallows venue. This provides families with regular opportunities to access early health services and attendance levels are good. There are currently no antenatal clinics delivered from the centre's venues however, and so expectant mothers access those services at the neighbouring Temple Mill Children's Centre or have home visits from midwives. On occasion, this can lead to transport difficulties for mothers travelling from the more outlying villages.

**The quality of practice and services****Good**

- The centre delivers services that are of a good quality. The range and relevance are effective at meeting the needs of the identified priority children and families. For example, 'Ready 2 Go' groups help prepare children and parents and carers to make best use of funded early education. The weekly Strood Community Project drop-in sessions held in three villages supports families who want to return to work, improve their qualifications or get benefits advice.
- Children are very effectively prepared to be ready to go to school. A parent or carer typically commented that her child was 'helped massively with transition to nursery' by coming to the centre. Parents and carers are given good guidance about how to support children during centre sessions. For example in the 'Get Physical' session, parents and carers understand that rolling a ball to a target helps with hand-eye coordination.
- Well-established links with all four local schools mean that there is a consistent approach to early learning. In addition the centre can track the impact of its work wherever the children may move to. A significantly higher percentage of children who regularly use centre services achieve expected levels compared to those who do not. This is especially the case for two-year-olds who have benefited from free early education.
- Encouraging healthy lifestyles is a strong focus of the centre's work; there are frequent opportunities to encourage parents and carers to do so through 'Top Tips Healthy Lifestyle Choices' and several 'Get Physical' sessions held throughout the area. As a result, the percentage of young children who are very overweight is reducing and is very close to national levels. Most children receive childhood immunisations.
- The centre does not currently have any up-to-date, accurate information about the percentage of local mothers who start and sustain breastfeeding. Its own research estimates that about half are still breastfeeding at around two months. However comparisons with the number who start, where to target support and measuring the impact of the recently trained breastfeeding advocate as well as local initiatives are hampered by this lack of accurate information.
- The seven active volunteers play a significant role supporting the centre. A well-structured programme of training and developing their role builds confidence so that there have been notable success stories, such as ex-volunteers now employed by the centre.
- Families who may have low aspirations based on their education or training needs are supported well through partnerships with Medway Adult and Community Learning. Courses are tailored to meet families' needs and delivered in the community to overcome transport problems. Consequently a large majority of priority families complete accredited courses such as 'Adult Maths' and the Child and Young People's Workforce qualification as well as those focused on developing their parenting skills and keeping children safe.
- Families have positive views of the centre, including the individual care, guidance and support they receive to get their lives back on track. However, this good work is not always clearly evident in case files which lack a consistent method to gauge what the family hopes to achieve and then measure the impact.

**The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management****Good**

- The day-to-day management of the centre is highly effective despite the strategic manager having two other key responsibilities. She is ably supported by the small staff team, all of whom are very aware of the specific local needs. Despite the upheaval of staff changes and significant alterations to the size of the area served by the centre, increasing numbers of priority children and families are using the centre regularly.
- The local authority has provided effective support and regular monitoring, especially through a period of transition for the centre and staff. The majority of targets set at the annual review and in the centre's development plan are appropriate and challenging. However some are not yet clearly enough focused on the impact of the centre on its three defined priority groups of families and children.

- The governing body is knowledgeable about the centre with the link governor providing an effective bridge between governors and the advisory board. However, the advisory board, which was newly reconstituted following changes to the area served by the centre, does not have a wide enough membership. This limits its effectiveness in holding the centre to account. In addition, there are not enough parent representatives attending meetings.
- Staff performance management is well organised and routinely carried out; staff are well trained and have personal targets that are linked to the centre's main priorities. Although staff numbers are small, they are a very effectively used resource. They provide good quality services at all four venues, thereby encouraging families to maintain their use of the centre.
- Safeguarding policies are comprehensive and all appropriate recruitment checks are carried out. Any safeguarding concerns are swiftly acted on to ensure risk is reduced, especially where children may be especially vulnerable. There are close links with social care and good exchange of information with partner services. This means that children who are subject to child protection plans or other forms of more intensive support are known to the centre and staff are fully involved in multi-agency meetings.
- Parents and carers have consistently highly positive views of the centre; for example, they rightly feel that it is a warm, welcoming place that has encouraged the different village communities to come together, so reducing isolation and inequalities. Through events such as the parents' forum week where views are sought at all the community venues, they can put across ideas and suggestions for changes to services, for example providing healthy snacks. Although parents and carers are content that they are listened to, being able to put forward their views in a more formal way at advisory board meetings is limited by a lack of parent representation.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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 well-being 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**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	22895
<b>Local authority</b>	Medway
<b>Inspection number</b>	455063
<b>Managed by</b>	The governing body of St James' Church of England Primary Academy on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	343
<b>Strategic centre manager</b>	Clare King
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01634 270341
<b>Email address</b>	childrenscentre@stjames.medway.sch.uk

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