

# Stanley Children's Centre

Clifford Road, Stanley, Co. Durham, DH9 0AB

|                                 |                     |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Inspection dates</b>         | 13–14 May 2015      |
| <b>Previous inspection date</b> | 29 April–1 May 2014 |

| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                               | <b>This inspection:</b> | <b>Requires improvement</b> | <b>3</b> |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
|  | Previous inspection:    | Inadequate                  | 4        |
| Access to services by young children and families          |                         | <b>Requires improvement</b> | <b>3</b> |
| The quality of practice and services                       |                         | <b>Requires improvement</b> | <b>3</b> |
| The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management |                         | <b>Requires improvement</b> | <b>3</b> |

## Summary of key findings for children and families

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

- The local authority has undergone a further period of significant restructure since the last inspection. This lack of stability has impacted on the centre's ability to fully embed new strategies to assess community need and target services for families most in need of their support, more effectively.
- The number of families who regularly attend children's centre services and activities requires improvement.
- Systems to check children's, adults' and families' progress are now in place. However, it is too soon for the centre to show the difference the centre is making in the longer term.
- Due to a lack of available places in the area, not enough two-year-olds are receiving the free early education place to which they are entitled.
- Whilst partnership working between children's centre staff and health professionals is well coordinated, shared targets on aspects of health such as breastfeeding, obesity and smoking during pregnancy, are not fully established.

### This centre has the following strengths:

- Significant progress has been made in all aspects of the centre's work over the past year. Most notably, the sharing of information between the centre and partners, such as children's social care, has been strengthened. This has secured the engagement of some families who might otherwise have chosen not to participate.
- Information provided by the local authority regarding the needs of families in the area has improved; those most in need of the centre's support are now more clearly identified. Dedicated support is available to ensure managers, staff and the advisory board understand the data and information and are better able to use it effectively.
- Parents highly value the range of services available and the care, guidance and support they receive from the committed, well-qualified and experienced staff team.
- The dedicated team of centre staff and family support workers provide much needed support to some of the most vulnerable families in the community.

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

- Work with the local authority to ensure a period of stability so that the centre can embed its new strategies to assess community need and target services for families in most need of its support more effectively, thereby ensuring the sustained participation of harder to reach families and communities.
- Embed systems to track children's, adults' and families' progress in order to demonstrate the impact of the children's centre work and to plan new services in line with identified need.
- Work with the local authority, health and early years partners to:
  - improve health outcomes for young children and their families
  - increase the number of two-year-old children taking up their free entitlement to early education in the local community.

### 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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the locality manager and children's centre leads. They also held discussions with family workers, representatives from the local authority and members of the local advisory board. Meetings were also held with some of the centre's partners including adult learning, schools, health and children's social care.

Inspectors reviewed written evaluations of the centre's work and spoke to parents at different times during the inspection. The inspectors undertook joint observations of centre activities with children's centre leaders and staff. They visited a range of venues where activities are delivered off site.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including self-evaluation documentation, the action plan, safeguarding policies and procedures and a sample of case files.

### Inspection team

Jayne Utting, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Eileen Grimes

Additional inspector

Anne Mackay

Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Stanley children's centre is situated to the north of County Durham. The reach area stretches from Quaking Houses in the south of Durham to Tanfield in the North. The town of Stanley is situated on a hilltop between Chester-le-Street and Consett. The majority of settlements in this area are former mining communities. Stanley children's centre replaces the former Stanley children's centre cluster, which consisted of four children's centres. Three of these centres have now been de-designated following a period of consultation.

The children's centre offers a range of services such as child health services, parenting courses, adult learning and family support. These are delivered within the children's centre itself as well as through a range of community venues and through outreach visits to families' homes.

The reach area of the centre has around 2,780 children under five years old living within it. Around 1,663 of these live in the top 30% most deprived areas in the country. Within the reach area there are significant issues around unemployment, poor health and educational outcomes and domestic violence. Those that the centre has identified as in most need of their support include teenage parents, two-year-olds entitled to early education, families living in the top 30% most deprived wards and families with disabled children.

A very large majority of families within the area are of White British heritage, with a very small, but growing, black and minority ethnic community. The communities served by the centre include areas of high deprivation and unemployment. The centre's data confirms that 14.8% of children under five live in workless households, 4% higher than the national average. Most children enter early years provision with knowledge and skills below those typical for their age, particularly in relation to their communication and language and their personal, social and emotional development.

Governance of the centre is through Durham County Council and the local advisory board. Services are offered via the One Point service which brings together staff from Durham County Council and the National Health Service. It provides a variety of free advice, support and a range of activities for families, children and young people aged 0 to 19 years.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

### Requires improvement

- Strategies to increase the number of families known to the centre and using its services are effective. Most families are now registered and the large majority, including those that the centre has identified as in most need of its support, have engaged at least once with the centre over the past 12 months.
- There has been a clear change of focus towards providing services for families most in need of the centre's support since the last inspection, including those less likely to use the centre's services. Improved sharing of information, targeted outreach work and the appointment of a community engagement worker have all contributed to ensuring contact has been made with some of the most vulnerable families in the community, including teenage parents, those living in the nearby refuge and families with disabled children.
- However, access to services requires improvement because not enough families are regularly using the children's centre services. Centre data confirms that the number of families engaging at least four times a year reduces significantly, particularly for teenage parents and black and minority ethnic groups.
- The centre's ability to evaluate the impact of their work in this detail is testament to the significant improvements made in the collation, interrogation and analysis of data over the past year. This has enabled the centre team to begin to assess needs more effectively and to target services in harder

to reach communities, with some early success. For example, there has been an increase in the number of families accessing services from the Craghead community.

- Not enough two-year-old children eligible for funded early years education access provision across the locality due to a shortage of available places. Take-up in Stanley is particularly low. The centre is working with early years providers locally to address this. Most three- and four-year-olds in the local area are receiving their entitlement to free early education.

### **The quality of practice and services**

### **Requires improvement**

- Systems to measure the difference that services are making to families' lives have been introduced since the last inspection. However, these are mostly new and time is needed for them to become embedded in practice.
- Sessions and activities offered by the centre are of good quality and now have a clearer focus on children's learning and development. The senior leadership team have accurately identified communication and language as a key area for development. They have worked closely with schools to plan focused activities designed to improve the development of early communication skills, as well as confidence and self-esteem. Parents and headteachers report a clear improvement in the skills of those children attending sessions.
- Good-quality parenting programmes are helping parents to develop positive relationships with their children and improve their skills in keeping them safe. One parent spoke powerfully about how the children's centre had listened to her when others would not, whilst others commented on how much behaviour had improved at home. 'I can enjoy my family again.' said one parent.
- Effective support is provided for parents and children who have experienced domestic violence. Those who are able, attend group programmes that help improve their confidence as they take steps to move forward with their life.
- A range of family learning opportunities ensures that parents are able to participate in programmes that help to build confidence and develop literacy and numeracy skills. The centre has recently introduced systems to measure the difference these services make to families' lives through the tracking of adults' progress. However, the information held by adult learning partners on completion, success and progression is not fully incorporated into this system in order to more accurately track the learning journey of targeted participants and to plan new programmes in line with identified need.
- Health services value their partnership with centre staff. Support is available to help parents understand the importance of healthy eating and how to adopt a healthy lifestyle. None the less, too few health specific targets are set or routinely monitored to measure centre performance. Data indicate that whilst breastfeeding rates have improved at a faster rate than nationally, there is still more work to do to effectively reduce other existing health inequalities, including smoking in pregnancy.
- Significant progress has been made since the last inspection regarding the management of family support work. Case files accurately reflect the work undertaken and provide compelling evidence of the team's positive contribution to the delivery of early help and successful partnership work with wider children's services. Such good practice effectively improves life chances and reduces inequalities. Centre leads provide regular and robust supervision of this work; actions are set and monitored and this ensures staff are supported effectively.

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

### **Requires improvement**

- The local advisory board has a much clearer understanding of its role and responsibilities. Meetings take place more regularly and members are better informed about families most in needs of the centre's support. Parents also take a more active role as members of the board. They gather the views of other local parents through questionnaires and parent forum meetings. Their contributions have helped to shape the way future services might be delivered, particularly in relation to the

provision of baby clinics.

- The locality manager, centre leads and staff are extremely dedicated and committed. They have experienced much rapid change over the past year, which has prevented them achieving an even faster pace of progress. Time and stability is now needed to consolidate their work, embed new systems and ensure these are used consistently across the centre in order to further improve and evidence the quality and impact of this children's centre services.
- The local authority has responded positively to the inspection a year ago and progress against all the recommendations raised is evident. Moving forward, the centre knows its strengths and areas for further development well and self-evaluation is accurate.
- Leaders and managers monitor quality through regular audit and observations of practice. This has improved quality, consistency and practice across all provision, particularly for those services and activities for children in their early years.
- Staff are well qualified and knowledgeable. Systems for supervision and continuous professional development are established and staff say they feel well supported and more valued as a result.
- The complementary work of partners is used well to support the key challenges of the area such as reducing domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse and the number of children at risk of harm. This ensures the efficient use of resources and prevents duplication.
- Safeguarding arrangements across the locality are robust and underpinned by suitable policies, procedures and practices. All staff are properly checked, as are volunteers and advisory board members, to ensure their suitability.
- Parents feel that the centre is open to anyone in the area and that differences are respected and celebrated. Parents who attend the portage group report being effectively supported, feeling 'less isolated' and empowered to access services and the professionals they need to support their children and their wider family.

**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**

|  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>                                     | 22913                           |
| <b>Local authority</b>   | County Durham                   |
| <b>Inspection number</b>   | 464237                          |
| <b>Managed by</b>  | The local authority             |
|  |                                 |
| <b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b> | 2,780                           |
| <b>Centre leader</b>   | Allison Underwood               |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                                 | 29 April–1 May 2014             |
| <b>Telephone number</b>  | 0300 026 1721                   |
| <b>Email address</b>   | Allison.Underwood@durham.gov.uk |

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