

Inspection report for Stanlaw Abbey Children's Centre

Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	361101
Inspection dates	23-24 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Gill Jones HMI

Centre governance	Management Advisory Board
Centre leader	Ann Clay
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	The Oaks Primary School St Bernard's RC Primary School Wolverham Primary School Witby Heath Primary School Ellesmere Port Christ Church CofE Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Stanlaw Abbey Community Nursery (Little Acorns Group Ltd) St Bernard's Pre-School The Oaks Day Nursery Wolverham and Stanney Pre-School Christ Church Pre-School

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, health professionals, voluntary and statutory partner organisations, a local headteacher, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

Stanlaw Abbey Children's Centre serves a residential district of Ellesmere Port, close to Cheshire Oaks outlet village. It was established five years ago as a phase 1 children's centre, providing the full core offer. It is the largest of four centres in the Ellesmere Port Children's Centres Cluster and provides some activities and services on behalf of the other centres.

Statistical data for Ellesmere Port indicates that the area is one of high social and economical disadvantage. The area was originally served by a Sure Start Local Programme. The population is mainly White British and includes some Traveller families. There are an increasing number of families from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The centre works with five pre-school settings. Stanlaw Abbey Community Nursery, which is run by the private company Little Acorns Group Ltd, provides a nursery and crèche service from the centre. This was inspected at the same time as the centre. A separate report for this provision is available on the Ofsted website.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

This highly effective children's centre serves the needs of its community very well. It provides the full core offer for children and families within its footprint and extends its services to those living outside its designated area. The centre is exceptionally well led and managed. The centre leader, well supported by a highly effective team, sets ambitious targets to improve the health, safety and well-being of the local community. Leaders target and adapt the provision well to meet local needs. Consequently, the centre is making a positive difference to the lives of children and families, particularly for those most disadvantaged by economic and social circumstances. It is raising the aspirations and increasing the confidence of adults in the community by providing practical help and support for parents, children and families towards achieving better futures.

The outcomes for children and adults within the centre's footprint are good. They are learning to lead healthy lifestyles and attendance at ante-natal and post-natal clinics is high. Parents are keen to participate in courses aimed at strengthening emotional resilience and family well-being. They participate enthusiastically in activities and courses which develop their academic skills, contributing well to their future economic security. Parents say they feel exceptionally safe at the centre and many say it is their 'first port of call' if they face difficulties. Adult users are active in the leadership and management of the centre. For example, a father chairs the advisory board, which has a good representation of parents and professionals. Users evaluate activities routinely. They say they feel listened to and respected. Where parents make requests for services, the centre strives to provide them. For example, the centre leader has recently secured a drop-in session for sexual health.

Adults are participating regularly in a wide range of courses effectively designed to build their skills and confidence. They are gaining qualifications in basic literacy, mathematics, hygiene and childcare, preparing them well for future employment. The provision of a crèche supports this well. Polish parents are encouraged to meet at the centre and to attend courses to improve their English. Travellers use the centre to improve their skills in literacy. Award ceremonies, features in national

magazines, newsletters and displays in all the public areas celebrate users' and staff's achievements effectively.

Children who live in the centre's footprint attain lower than nationally expected standards for 5 year olds, particularly in language communication and literacy. The outcomes for children who attend the centre's day care are satisfactory. However, data held by the centre show the gap between children from very poor backgrounds and the rest is narrowing.

Excellent inter-agency working by highly skilled professionals means that they identify the needs of potentially vulnerable families at an early stage and intervene appropriately. The centre makes excellent use of the Common Assessment Framework to target resources effectively. Group activities, such as 'Messy Rascals' are popular and contribute well in helping parents to understand how their children learn. Lone parents appreciate additional support. One reported to inspectors how the centre had 'turned her life around'.

The leadership and management of the centre are outstanding. Safeguarding the users' health, safety and well-being is top priority. The centre has identified areas for improvement effectively and sets itself high standards for achievement. It is demonstrating an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Implement the centre's plans to improve outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - continuing to work with day care nurseries, pre-schools and schools in the children's centre footprint to raise the levels of children's attainment, particularly in communication, language and literacy
 - developing clear assessment pathways from birth to five-year-olds across the children's centre footprint
- Improve the use of e-start data by ensuring:
 - measurable targets are set against local and national priorities

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for children and for parents and carers are good. Those for helping families keep safe and for making a positive contribution to the community are outstanding.

Evidence is building that, where families and children have benefitted from contact with the centre, children have a better start to school life. A local headteacher reported improvements in children's personal, social and emotional development and in their speech and language skills. The day care and pre-school provision situated in the centre's footprint range from satisfactory to good. Children are learning to lead healthy lifestyles; however their levels of development in communication, language

and literacy are frequently below age related expectations. Children on the child protection register are making excellent progress and are reaching levels of skills and abilities commensurate with their age in their personal and social development. Parental expectations are generally low. However, through attending courses and gaining qualifications, one parent explained that she wants to go to university. Others are aiming for careers in childcare. A staff member reported to inspectors how her connection with the centre started when she was a 'Sure Start local mum'. The centre is successfully raising the aspirations of those living within its' footprint.

Users of the centre say they feel valued. Many described how they have gained in confidence. For example, parents who started attending the centre at difficult times in their lives are now prepared to join group activities and even to chair groups such as the parents' forum. Parents make their views heard on the advisory board and are influential in determining how the centre operates. The community allotment is enabling male youths and dads in particular to increase their self-esteem. One father facing very difficult circumstances said he 'now has a purpose' and 'enjoys being outside, digging in the fresh air'. Another young mum led a fund raising trip to Snowdonia to raise money for play equipment for use during the weekends when the centre is closed. This demonstrates the increasing confidence of the local community. The centre is highly sensitive to safeguarding issues and users are confident that the advice and support they receive from the centre is enabling them to lead a better quality of life.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

1

The centre is extremely good at assessing the needs of children and families. It has developed excellent relationships with the statutory, private and voluntary services for children and families. Many of these professionals work from the centre and this contributes to their highly effective networking. All professionals are clear where

their service sits in relation to the local authority continuum of need. They work together very effectively to intervene and support children and families where necessary. Support and advice given to individuals includes: budgeting and debt management; employment, housing; keeping safe; healthy eating; smoking cessation; breastfeeding; weaning; exercise and fitness. Users are appreciative of the professionals who work with them and talk about the resulting transformation to their lives.

The centre provides a wide range of group activities and courses aimed at improving the parenting skills and life chances of the community, families and children. These are popular and well attended and include a dad's group which meets regularly on Saturdays. Local childminders appreciate well targeted activities, such as the toddler group. Sensitive assessment by staff ensure that users attend activities appropriate to their personal needs. Midwives, health visitors and family workers liaise effectively to support young parents exceptionally well. They work well in partnership with other agencies working with teenage mothers to dovetail support. The centre is now supporting nurseries and pre-schools in the footprint well. However, the consultant is relatively new in post, so the impact of her work is not yet evident in the outcomes achieved by children. There have been some changes to staffing both in the centre's day care nursery and in the management of children's learning within the footprint and in the local authority. This has also slowed progress in this area.

The centre is responsive to the needs of the community. For example, although there are no Polish families living within the footprint, the centre became aware of the difficulties facing this community locally. The centre encouraged them to meet as a group regularly to support each other in learning English, providing crèche places and tutoring. The adult learning coordinator based at the centre is a key to the high level of adult participation in gaining qualifications.

The centre is inclusive. The staff are highly skilled and experienced and have an excellent knowledge of the community and their families. They provide well for children who have special educational needs and or disabilities, including for adult volunteers. The centre is a hub of activity and reception staff are calm and welcoming to visitors, though the volume of users places a strain on admin resources, meaning that some data collection tasks are by necessity a low priority.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The centre leader is highly skilled and experienced. She leads a team of exceptionally well motivated professionals who work together effectively to safeguard the health, safety and well-being of children and adults within the centre's footprint. The past year has been difficult for the centre, mainly because of structural changes in the local authority and the subsequent re-organisation of local services. The centre is accountable to a different department and the local authority now shares resources across a cluster of centres, rather than managing them individually at centre level. However, despite this fundamental change and other resulting staffing issues, the core purpose of the centre remains strong. Staff morale is high and both staff and users of the centre remain extremely positive about the leadership.

Development planning is aligned clearly to local and national indicators for children and families. Clear policies support the centre's work in promoting diversity and ensuring safeguarding and child protection. The centre makes an excellent contribution to promoting community cohesion and tackling unlawful discrimination. However, the lower than nationally expected outcomes for five year olds mean children in the centre's footprint are still experiencing disadvantage in terms of equality of opportunity and their potential to achieve economic well-being. The centre sets itself high targets to reach those who are 'hardest to reach' and the most potentially vulnerable families. However, the centre has identified that their management of e-start data does not support this aspect of their work well enough and is working with a local authority task group to improve the system.

Relationships at the centre are positive. Parents and carers spoken to by inspectors place a high level of trust in the centre. They participate fully in the decision making process and the views of all users contribute to self-evaluation. Governance and supervision of the centre is undergoing change because of local authority reorganisation. The centre promotes the use of joint supervision, which feeds into annual appraisals well. Staff who work from the centre are involved in regular meetings which are clearly documented. These inform the local authority decision making process for the Ellesmere Port Children's Centre Cluster.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1

The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	1

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Recent Ofsted inspection reports of the day care and pre-school providers in the centre's footprint provided information on outcomes for children. Inspectors also took into account local authority Early Years Foundation Stage data.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Stanlaw Abbey Children's Centre on 23 and 24 June 2010. We judged the centre as outstanding.

This large centre is the main hub of services for children, families and carers who live in the centre's footprint. Many of the agencies who support children and families are based here. They work extremely well together and are very committed to making sure that children get the best possible start in life, by supporting their families and carers outstandingly well.

The centre is making a positive difference to the lives of parents and children in the local community. The outcomes achieved by the centre are good. At the moment, they are better for adults than for children. This is because children's early communication, language and literacy skills are below those expected nationally for their age. This means they are at a disadvantage when they start the National Curriculum in school. However, their health and well-being are good and they are learning how to keep safe from harm. The centre is promoting adult learning exceptionally well. Parents who spoke to inspectors explained how the centre has

transformed their lives and had an enormous impact on the well-being of their families.

The staff at the centre are extremely well qualified and experienced professionals. Parents and carers explained how well staff support them, both in raising their self-esteem and confidence, but also in providing practical help and advice. Parents said, 'nothing is too much trouble for the centre'. Inspectors agree. All the while, the activities provided by the centre are helping to improve parenting skills. Several parents believe their contact with the centre has been life-changing. They commented on community activities, such as the allotment and the learning zone, as well as the support they have though the breastfeeding group, young mums and one-to-one visits from family support workers and health visitors.

The centre leader is passionate about improving the outcomes for children and families in the locality. She is constantly looking for ways to improve the service the centre provides. For example, she recently arranged for a sexual health clinic at the centre in response to a user's request. Activities are run at times to suit parents, including at weekends and in the holidays. Parents who access courses at the centre are able to use the crèche facilities.

Recently, the changes from Cheshire County Council to Cheshire West and Chester Council have led to different arrangements for governance of the centre. Some resources managed at centre level have now moved to the local authority. However, despite these changes, the centre has continued with its work and adapted well to the new working practices. The leaders and managers know what needs to improve and have the capacity to carry out their plans effectively. The advisory board, which has good parent representation, supports and challenges the leadership well. The centre supports groups who are potentially vulnerable well, such as Polish immigrants and Travellers. It clearly fulfils its core purpose in serving those who are suffering from disadvantage and is highly successful in reaching those who are most in need.

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