

# Inspection report for St Anne's and Castle Children's Centre

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| <b>Local authority</b>     | Essex               |
| <b>Inspection number</b>   | 383901              |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>    | 27–28 November 2012 |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b> | Daniel Grant        |

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Centre leader</b>               | Jacque Russell   |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b> | Not applicable   |
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| <b>Linked school if applicable</b>                     | Willow Brook Primary School and Nursery URN 134451 |
| <b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b> | Not applicable                                     |

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.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, members of staff and partner professionals from other agencies. Discussions were held with parents and representatives from the local authority.

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

## Information about the centre

St Anne's and Castle Children's Centre is a phase one centre which opened in November 2007. Services are delivered from the main centre and at five other locations within the reach area in order to fulfil its core purpose. It is managed by Barnardo's on behalf of the local authority and based in the same building as Oak Tree Community Centre. The majority of children live in areas within the 40% most socially and economically deprived in the country with pockets of even greater deprivation.

A total of 1,231 children under five years live within the area. Approximately 24% of children live in households where no-one is working. The large majority of families are of White British heritage. Most children typically enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities at the level expected for their age.

Governance of the centre is overseen by an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community and partner agencies. The centre manager has responsibility for one other children's centre, which is subject to a separate inspection, and a team of staff including four family support workers and an administrative officer.

## Inspection judgements

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

### Overall effectiveness

**The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families**

**2**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**2**

## Main findings

A large majority of families use the services provided by St Anne's and Castle Children's Centre. The centre has a strong reputation for meeting needs and providing very effective support. Due to good leadership, the outcomes for families in the area have improved year-on-year as the centre has become increasingly well established. Families who use the centre's services receive good quality and well-organised care and support from the highly motivated and experienced staff. The centre has established effective partnerships with other organisations to provide well-integrated services. Its capacity for further improvement is good.

Staff and advisory board members have a good understanding of the needs of the local communities and make sure the centre offers a range of services which is matched well to those needs, such as support for families experiencing domestic violence. Outreach work and the bespoke support provided for families from different target groups are good. An increasing number of fathers are involved with the centre's activities, but the centre does not routinely receive details from health partners about any children with disabilities who might benefit from its services. In contrast, support for new and young parents is particularly effective because of the good partnership working with the midwife and health visiting staff team.

Staff identify families' needs precisely and at the earliest opportunity. They have high ambition that all families should be empowered to improve their lives. The centre has worked very effectively with partners and volunteers in the areas of greatest need to deliver well-targeted services. For example, the centre runs the 'All Aboard Toy Library' where families use and borrow high-quality toys, equipment and learning resources to improve their personal achievements. Children make good gains in their learning from their starting points. The centre is making a significant contribution to preparing children well for school. Staff promote inclusion well and any barriers to participation in activities are quickly identified and removed. Support for childminders and childcare settings is good.

Safeguarding arrangements are very effective, and users and staff feel safe at the centre. Staff and volunteers are well trained in keeping children safe and have a

good understanding of how to respond to concerns about safety and welfare. Activities to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles are highly effective and have contributed to the decreasing obesity rates.

Obesity rates are reducing and breastfeeding rates are in line with the national average and improving. Health staff provide good support and have introduced a variety of initiatives to promote breastfeeding and these are popular with mothers. Listening to users' views is given very high priority, and the centre has a thorough approach to collecting and acting upon evaluation evidence to help shape services. Information and data about the families who use the centre are collated diligently and are used increasingly effectively by managers to plan delivery and review the effectiveness of the centre's work.

The centre and its outreach locations are attractive and have good resources. One parent told inspectors, 'I use the centre as often as I can because it helps me get organised and gives me a sense of drive and purpose.' Parents receive active encouragement to attend education and training courses, but staff do not always monitor their attendance or support their progress well enough.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve outcomes for families through increased support for parents engaged in adult learning and training, including the introduction of effective arrangements to monitor their attendance and progress.
- Work with the local authority and health partners to identify, engage and assess the needs of local families with children with disabilities.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

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The centre has a strong commitment to helping individuals develop their skills and become successful learners. An increasing number of parents are improving outcomes for their families by successfully completing parenting courses and learning about the importance of encouraging children's play which promotes physical development and language skills. Children make good gains in their learning from broadly average starting points, and this ensures they get off to a positive start at school. The percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest is slightly lower than the national average. Learning and development is the central feature of almost all of the activities and services available. Families benefit from the very strong links that exist between the centre and the linked school.

Good attention is given to providing high-quality support and information which families use to help them choose healthier lifestyles. This includes: smoking cessation, sexual health, dental care, dealing with domestic violence, parenting and

general health, child development and weaning. This has contributed to the area's reducing rate of obesity. Health staff promote breastfeeding very successfully which has increased the number of mothers attending the centre for support with breastfeeding. The centre places a strong emphasis on promoting the emotional health and mental well-being of all users including those most vulnerable. One parent told inspectors, 'The staff understand my needs and provide advice and support in a way that makes me feel much better about myself and my future.'

The centre is a safe place for families and staff work effectively to ensure that parents and children keep themselves and each other safe. Staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures and make a significant contribution to making sure children are safe through their partnership work and in using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) rigorously. The needs of the most vulnerable children, such those subject to child protection plans, are quickly assessed and effective packages of support are put in place for the whole family which lead to improved outcomes. Families experiencing domestic violence are supported well because the centre works particularly effectively with key partners to deliver the 'Freedom' programme to address domestic abuse.

Parents say they feel valued by staff and enjoy attending the centre and having fun as they get involved with the activities available. Parents are encouraged to make a positive contribution to the centre and the wider community by becoming members of the parents' forum and through their involvement on the advisory board. They feel that their views are listened to and acted upon by staff through evaluations of activities and satisfaction surveys. The numbers of fathers and young parents engaging with services or receiving support is increasing, which improves outcomes for many families.

The centre provides increasingly effective support to promote parents' economic well-being, for example, as volunteers or, by accessing further education or training courses. Some gain qualifications and return to work. However, the centre's monitoring of individual progress is not thorough enough. There is a strong partnership with Jobcentre staff who visit the centre to meet with adults seeking work. One parent told inspectors 'I started coming to the centre when my son was a baby and soon I became a volunteer helping out in the Toy Library. This gave me useful experiences and increased my confidence. It helped me to get a job which I really enjoy.'

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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| <b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b> | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>                  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal</b>                 | <b>2</b> |

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| <b>and social development</b>  |          |
| <b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>          | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b> | <b>2</b> |

## **How good is the provision?**

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| <b>2</b> |
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The centre is located centrally for the area it serves and is easily accessible to all local communities. It has a very strong reputation for providing highly effective services and is very popular. The staff have good experience and understand the needs of local families well. There are clear programmes in place that effectively promote the health and social well-being of users, including a strong emphasis on providing emotional support to increase their self-confidence. One parent commented, 'Staff listen and understand what you are going through.'

The centre provides a wide range of high-quality information, for example, about domestic violence, smoking cessation, sexual health, benefits advice and adult training which is presented well and targeted to meeting the various needs of families. The CAF process is well-embedded and strong partnerships with other agencies ensure that assessments are detailed and effective. These features make a positive difference to improving the lives of families, particularly those whose circumstances make them most vulnerable.

Staff provide and promote opportunities for purposeful learning well, and activities are well located and of good quality. Staff and partnership organisations have high ambitions for users, which they reinforce by encouraging families to build on their achievements and by regularly celebrating their success with praise. However, the progress made by adults accessing further education and training is not monitored rigorously enough. The centre team works hard to provide accurate assessments, which result in services being well matched to meeting needs but does not always receive sufficient information about families with children with disabilities to enable a full evaluation of their needs.

Outreach work is given high priority and is increasingly effective because staff receive well-structured professional supervision and use detailed case records to ensure outcomes for the most vulnerable families improve. The centre's good support for childminders and childcare providers also helps improve outcomes for more families. Parents value the way staff are discreet and sensitive to their unique and changing circumstances. The quality of care and personal support for children and parents has good impact because support and advice are precisely targeted to meet individual needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| <b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>      | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b> | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>   | <b>2</b> |

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

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| <b>2</b> |
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Leadership, management and governance of the centre are good. The leadership team has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement for the centre. It receives good support from the local authority and has made significant investment to develop staff expertise and improve outcomes for families. The centre has a recently constituted advisory board with good representation from partners and a clear remit for providing both challenge and support. There are effective strategic links between key organisations which ensures services are well-integrated and effective in meeting local needs.

The centre provides good value for money. The whole staff team and key partners are highly committed and, through their energy and determination, they motivate parents and model good parenting skills. Families who use the centre are safe because staff pay close attention to the clear policies and procedures for safeguarding, which are regularly reviewed. Local authority and lead agency procedures and guidance for safe recruitment are followed closely. Managers make sure that all staff and volunteers have been subject to an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check and are trained appropriately in child-protection procedures. Well-integrated services ensure the centre works effectively in partnership to protect children and vulnerable adults through early intervention, inclusive practice, close cooperation between all agencies and through the CAF procedures.

Partnerships with key agencies are very well established and result in integrated support for local families, especially those most in need. The centre has a positive and strong reputation for delivering high quality services. Equality of opportunity and the inclusion of all children and their families are central to the centre's work. Staff are very careful to identify and then remove barriers that might prevent users from benefitting from the centre's activities and services. The centre effectively meets the needs of different cultures and faiths and everyone using the centre's services is made to feel welcome. The centre has a positive approach to supporting families with disabilities and there are good examples where this is working effectively. However, protocols for sharing information about these families are not yet fully developed with key partners.

Leaders and managers have a thorough approach to improvement and this has resulted in the centre becoming more effective and successful at helping and

supporting families. The self-evaluation process uses parents' evaluations and feedback very well which highlighted some of the strengths and areas for development identified by inspectors.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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| <b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>                         | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>  | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>                   | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>     | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>                | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>     | <b>2</b> |
| <b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b> | <b>2</b> |

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

The judgements from the most recent inspection of Willow Brook Primary School and Nursery were taken into account in this report.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected St Anne's and Castle Children's Centre on 27 and 28 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We enjoyed our visit to your centre and meeting so many of you and your children and hearing your views.

We found the centre to be safe and welcoming to all families with lots of interesting and enjoyable things happening. The centre is well led and the manager makes sure the centre is well organised and that staff provide good opportunities for you and your children to enjoy. Many of you told us how much you value the activities provided by the centre. You told us that staff are friendly and hardworking and they give you good support, especially in times of crisis.

We saw how well the centre works with other professionals such as health staff and teachers to make sure you develop healthy lifestyles and become successful learners. We saw how children confidently explore their learning environment and feel safe and secure. We were very impressed by the positive and supportive relationships you have with one another and with your children. We saw at first-hand how well your children are prepared for their move to school.

We found the staff to have a great deal of useful experience which they use well to offer good practical advice and emotional support to families who need it most. The centre does some things especially well, such as providing support to young parents and making sure families experiencing domestic violence receive help.

Staff make sure your children are safe at the centre. There are many examples of professionals from different agencies working very well together to make sure you receive the right advice and support. However, the centre does not always receive enough information about the needs of families with children with disabilities so we have asked the local authority and health staff to improve this by giving the centre more detailed information.

Staff have a good understanding of your needs and are constantly striving to improve what they do. The centre provides an increasing number of opportunities for you to undertake education and training courses, but it does not monitor your progress well enough. We have asked for this to be done so that more of you receive better support and encouragement to achieve as much as possible.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We enjoyed meeting you and wish you every success in the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)