

# Inspection report for The Arc Children's Centre

---

<b>Local authority</b>	Luton
<b>Inspection number</b>	367539
<b>Inspection dates</b>	28 – 29 March 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Priscilla McGuire

<b>Centre leader</b>	Ann McMaster
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
<b>Centre address</b>	7/9 Yeovil Road, Luton LU2 9EE
<b>Telephone number</b>	01582 484110
<b>Fax number</b>	01582 484110
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:arcnursery@hotmail.co.uk">arcnursery@hotmail.co.uk</a>

<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Ramridge Primary
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Ashcroft and Ramridge Community Nursery (EY278843)

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.

---

**Report published:** April 2012



Corporate member of  
Plain English Campaign  
Committed to clearer communication

**361**



## 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 staff and managers from the centre. They also met parents, met representatives from the Pre-School Learning Alliance, from the local authority as well as a number of partners representing health, education and social care. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The Arc is a phase one centre in Luton that was first designated in 2004. It achieved full core offer status in 2010. The centre operates from two buildings that were previously used as shops. Other venues within the community are also used to provide services. The centre is being re-structured and from April 2012 will become the hub for three additional centres.

The centre meets its core purpose and provision offered includes a nursery, adult learning provision, health services, employment and benefits advice, guidance services and family support.

The Ashcroft and Ramridge Tenants and Residents Association hold a service level agreement to manage the centre on behalf of the local authority. It has the support of a management board which acts as an advisory board.

Most families in the area are of White British heritage but there is a small representation of families from minority ethnic groups. There is also a community of Traveller families within the reach area. The centre is located in an area of relatively high levels of deprivation. Unemployment rates are high. The most recent data indicates that around 27% of children live in poverty. The percentage of children who live in households dependent on workless benefits is 15.9%.

A significant number of houses are local authority owned. Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills, knowledge and abilities that are below those expected for their age.

## 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

The Arc Children's Centre is an effective centre that serves its community well. The centre is managed by an enthusiastic and highly committed manager who is supported by a competent and motivated team of staff. Most of them live in the community and have a personal interest in the centre. They work effectively to ensure the centre succeeds in its mission to improve the life chances of families. The process of change from a single centre to a 'hub and spoke' model is being managed well. Staff do not view the change as a threat but rather as an opportunity to build on their success.

Data demonstrate the success of the centre in raising the participation rates of families from key target groups such as lone parents, young parents, Traveller families and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The number of children who access services exceeds the number in the centre's area because families from outside the reach area choose to use the centre.

The quality of provision for adults and children is good and the balance between universal and targeted services is carefully managed. The centre works well with a range of partner organisations to ensure families receive good quality services and effective support. Data show that children who attend the centre perform well across the Early Years Foundation Stage. Adults also make good progress and a significant number achieve qualifications and/or make good progress in relation to their personal and social skills.

Equality of opportunity is actively promoted. The sensitive yet effective way staff have responded to the needs of families from the Traveller community demonstrates

their strong commitment to equality. An increasing number of disabled children also now use the centre. They benefit from good support and also from being able to access the 'toy library' and the sensory room which provide specialist resources that promote enjoyment and development.

Support and care for families is good. Staff often have to deal with complex problems faced by families but respond in a timely and effective way to their needs. Case studies and personal testimonies from families illustrate how well support from the centre has increased their confidence, raised their aspirations and removed barriers that have previously inhibited their progress. However, although families support needs and progress are recorded, this is not always done in a consistent way and tracking of the impact of support is not always complete.

Data along with local intelligence and information from parents are used well to assess community needs. Centre staff use data to monitor impact in relation to some aspects of health provision but systematic monitoring of the impact of all health activities is an area for further development.

Self-evaluation is a rigorous process and the self-evaluation report is externally moderated by the local authority to ensure accuracy. Responsibilities for performance management are well defined and leaders and managers have a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre. As a result of this and the good quality leadership and management, the centre has good capacity to improve.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Further develop systems to ensure consistent recording and monitoring of support and its impact on the lives of families
- Implement more effective ways of collecting data and information about the impact of health services in relation to outcomes

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

<b>2</b>
----------

Data shows that obesity rates across the borough in the Reception Year have reduced from 14.1% in 2009-10 to 11.2% in 2010-11. However, specific data on obesity rates for the reach area are not available. Nevertheless, the centre actively promotes healthy eating and healthy lifestyles. Breastfeeding rates for the reach area are higher than the average for Luton. As a result of the effective promotion of oral health, families have developed a better understanding of the importance of dental care. This has led to a significant increase in the number of families who now register with dentists. However, systems to ensure collection and analysis of data to demonstrate more fully the impact of families' participation rates in all health activities are still being developed.

The centre offers a safe and secure environment for families. It also works well with

a range of partners to promote safety beyond the centre. For example, many families have benefited from home safety assessments. They have developed a good understanding about fire hazards in the home by visiting the Fire Service's 'hazards house' which provides practical examples of everyday hazards in the home. Case studies demonstrate the good progress made by the centre in reducing the number of children subject to child protection plans. This is a direct consequence of the highly effective support parents receive to improve their parenting skills and their understanding about safeguarding. Although assessment of safeguarding needs is very effective, use of the Common Assessment Framework to identify needs is limited. The local authority is implementing strategies to increase the use of the Common Assessment Framework across the borough.

Data show a significant increase in the percentage of children who achieve the national average by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Since 2007, this percentage has increased by 24% to 54% in 2010. This is higher than the Luton average of 49%. Additionally, the attainment gap between the children in the lowest 20% and the rest is narrowing. Children enjoy their learning at the centre and develop good skills for the future. Parents also make good progress in both their personal and educational achievement. They enjoy attending courses such as 'Happy Families'. In addition, parents' retention and achievement rates on accredited family learning courses such as 'Parents Early Years Partnerships' are good.

The Arc is at the heart of the local community. It actively promotes respect for all families and community cohesion. As one centre volunteer said: 'It helps everyone to live together'. Through volunteering to support activities, parents make a positive contribution to the centre. Through their roles on the management board, which acts as an advisory board, parents contribute well and in a meaningful way to key decisions about the centre and its activities.

Most parents who attend the centre participate in some form of learning or training. Through participating in activities such as the centre's job club and attending monthly sessions held at the centre by Jobcentre Plus, parents improve their economic circumstances. Others are improving their employability skills by attending basic skills or vocational courses such as those on childcare. Parents from the Traveller community particularly those with limited literacy skills, value greatly the guidance that has helped them with form filling and to navigate their way through the benefits system. As a result, some parents have been able to access the correct benefits and in some cases this has also entitled them to free training which they use to improve their skills.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</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 and social development</b>	<b>2</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?**

**2**

Staff use data well to identify key characteristics of the area, identify priorities and monitor the centre's engagement with different target groups. As a result services are well matched to needs and interests of the community. Good assessment of participation levels by different target groups helps staff to identify where more intensive work is required to increase engagement with these groups. As a result of such assessment, the centre has used effective strategies that have resulted in increased participation from key target groups such as young parents, lone parents and families from the Traveller community. The centre now engages with 100% of the young parents in the reach area. Data also show that the number of families from the Traveller community who now access centre services has quadrupled since 2010. Outreach work has also been effective in encouraging more families to use the centre. Individual assessment of family's needs is good.

The centre works well with adult learning services to promote and provide good quality and well planned family learning courses. Take up rates on these courses are good. Individual learning plans are used effectively to identify learning needs and to monitor parents' progress. Other activities offer a wide range of opportunities for parents to improve their personal skills and to support their children's learning and development. Provision to help children learn and develop their skills is also good. Activities are well planned and clearly linked to Early Years Foundation Stage outcomes.

Case studies and personal testimonies from parents demonstrate the effectiveness of the good quality care, support and guidance families receive. Staff are skilful and sensitive in helping families overcome multiple barriers. As a result, families are empowered and gain confidence to progress from needing targeted individual support to being able to independently access universal services. Effective support and guidance has also enabled families from the Traveller community to access some statutory services for the first time. Although evidence of the impact of support is recorded, this is not always done in a consistent manner.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities</b>	<b>2</b>
--	----------

<b>meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</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?**

**2**

The quality of leadership and management is good. Lines of accountability are clear. At all levels, leaders and managers are highly competent and fulfil their responsibilities well. The management board is effective in holding the centre to account and overall performance management is good. The annual conversation process and regular monitoring are used well to ensure the centre responds positively to community priorities. Services are regularly evaluated and as a result of an effective self-evaluation process, the centre knows its strengths well and understands what actions need to be taken to improve outcomes. There is a clear link between the self-evaluation process and development planning which includes measureable targets. Parents are regularly consulted through informal networking by staff, through the parents' forum and also through surveys. Outreach work through door knocking is effective in targeting non-users. Satisfaction rates are high and user engagement is good.

Outcomes for families are mostly good and the centre makes good use of its own accommodation and other community venues to offer its services. Value for money is therefore good. Partnerships with organisations representing health, education, social care, the community and other agencies are used well to provide services and support. Through attendance at events such as the 'Integrated Partnership Working Day' and other events that bring partners and centre staff together, the relationship that staff have with partners is strengthened. It is used effectively to enhance services.

The centre promotes equality and inclusion well. Staff have a good understanding of the impact of discrimination and are well trained in equality practice. They successfully reduce the inequalities and the emotional damage experienced by families from the Traveller community. The centre is strongly committed to promoting inclusion for families with disabled children or those with special educational needs. Through effective work with early years inclusion staff and promotion of its sensory room, the needs of disabled children are prioritised and met well.

The centre's strong commitment to safeguarding is visible from the moment visitors enter the building. Attached to the front of the visitors signing-in book are a series of prompts about safeguarding procedures. Safety notices and posters to promote safeguarding, fire safety and health and safety are well displayed. The centre's safeguarding team ensures that there is an effective and early response to issues



affecting the safety of children and families. Support for families affected by domestic violence is good. Multi-agency work is effective and quality assurance of safeguarding practice is a rigorous process. Requirements in relation to vetting and recruitment checks are met fully and staff are well trained in a wide range of safeguarding topics.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<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

Findings from the inspection of Ashcroft and Ramridge Community Nursery were used to help make judgements in this inspection.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

We inspected the The Arc Children's Centre on 28–29 March 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Many thanks to those of you who took time out of your busy lives to talk to us. We appreciated your honesty in sharing your experiences with us. Like you, we found the centre to be a welcoming place.

We felt privileged to be able to talk to you about your experiences of using the centre and also appreciated your honesty in sharing with us some of the difficulties that staff have helped you to overcome. When crises arise in families, centre staff are there for you. You told us how much they really care about you. This is why the quality of support and care is not only good but actually makes a positive difference to the quality of your lives.

Like you, we believe that the centre offers a safe environment for families. One of the key strengths of the centre is the way safeguarding is promoted. From the moment we walked in, we could see that safeguarding and safety is a priority. We like the notices in the visitors signing in book about safeguarding and the many safety notices and posters around the building.

Although we couldn't observe all the activities that you and your children enjoy, we know from the sessions we did see and from the evaluations that you have completed, that you enjoy sessions such as 'Zumba' and 'Stay and Play'. Some of you have also done really well and gained qualifications from courses offered at the centre. Your children also making good progress with their learning and statistics prove this.

We were pleased to meet some of you who are involved in volunteering, either by supporting groups or through your involvement with the management board. The centre promotes volunteering well and recognises how this can help you develop skills, as well as give you an opportunity to support your community.

We know that many of you are involved in various health activities. We also know that staff record outcomes from some of these activities. However, we have asked staff to improve the way they record the information about impact of these services. We have also asked them to improve the way they record and monitor the support they give to families more effectively.

Once again, many thanks for your contribution to the inspection process and we wish you and your families all the best for the future.

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