

Inspection report for Ryde Children's Centre

Local authority	Isle of Wight
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Reporting inspector	Denise Blackwell HMI

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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Little Squirrels Nursery

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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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Early Years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, parents, health representatives, an Isle of Wight College tutor, the Jobcentre Plus advisor, local authority representatives, front line staff, members of the Core Offer Monitoring Group and a range of children's centre partners. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Ryde Children's Centre is a phase one centre that has developed from a Sure Start Local Programme. It was designated as a children's centre in October 2005. The centre serves a large area covering some of the 30% most disadvantaged areas of the country. Ryde has high levels of deprivation and above average levels of children aged 0 to 4 years old living in workless households. Work in Ryde tends to be seasonal and low paid. Take up of the childcare element of Working Tax Credits is below both island and national averages. The population is predominantly White British with an increasingly diverse range of minority ethnic groups, particularly Polish. Children's levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the most deprived areas are below those expected for their age.

Governance and management of the centre is provided by The Children's Society which was commissioned by the local authority to take over the running of the centre in April 2010. This is one of three centres on the island that are currently managed by The Children's Society with a further two centres due to be included in April 2011. There are approximately 1378 children under five in the centre's reach area. The centre provides the full core offer with services and activities being delivered in the Ryde Children's Centre building and in community venues within the children's centre reach.

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 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

The excellent support provided by this outstanding centre, especially to families that live in disadvantaged areas, helps them to address the stresses and difficulties they face, improving both their lives and outcomes for their children. Centre staff are highly adaptable and offer flexible provision for families to meet their specific needs. This is based on excellent assessment of individual needs resulting in individually tailored services and support. Comments such as ‘this centre is at the heart of the community, it is like one big family’ and ‘I don’t know where I would be if it wasn’t for the centre’ are typical comments from users. However, although the centre is quite visible from the shop car park it can be difficult to find as it is located behind a church and is not visible from the road. The centre is not signposted from the main road, with only a small sign on the front of the church that is easily missed plus there are added difficulties with restricted parking. Feedback from several centre users shows that they have heard about the centre by word of mouth. Although this shows that parents are keen to share their experiences with others and encourage them to access the centre it also shows that the lack of centre signage leads to missed opportunities for parents who may be passing by to become aware of the centre and the services and activities it offers.

There are excellent partnerships both on the ground and at strategic level. However, not all strategic partners appear to fully comprehend the implications of their lack of action on the service provided for users. For example the Jobcentre Plus worker is extremely keen and enthusiastic to start to deliver face-to-face advice and guidance to centre users at the Ryde centre and in the outreach venues. She speaks passionately about her, and the centre’s, plans to improve users’ economic well-being. However this work has been delayed since last July due to the lack of a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. Despite repeated efforts by the Local Authority to address this issue with strategic managers of Jobcentre Plus, CRB checks have not been supplied. Issues involving the processing of this check continue to cause unacceptable delays to the implementation of this service.

Safeguarding is given the highest priority at the centre. Systems, policies and procedures, services and partnerships ensure the well-being and safety of users,

exemplify best practice and have led to impressive improvements to users' well-being. Residents within the children's centre reach area use over 20 different languages, with many of these languages reflected in children's centre users. Users from the Polish community typically comment that the centre has supported them not only to learn English but also to gain an understanding of services and support available to them and their children in England. Children and parents with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and every effort is made to ensure they are included in all the centre's activities. Where this is not possible, due to the nature of the need, effective one-to-one and outreach support is provided until parents gain the confidence to come into the centre to access centre services.

Outcomes are outstanding in most areas. Where they are good it is because the impact of some of the services and support cannot be clearly seen as yet. For example as a result of breastfeeding rates declining, especially in relation to teenage parents, the centre has trained 2 staff and 2 parents as peer supporters. This is intended to help support mothers who may be struggling to continue with breastfeeding. However, this is in the early stages, supporters are still gaining confidence and their impact is not yet evident. Users have plenty of opportunities to engage with the centre, challenge them and make decisions. There are parents on the Core Offer Monitoring Group, including the chair, and on the focus groups that look at particular aspects of the centre's work such as outreach and parenting support. All parents spoken to say that they can talk to staff about any concerns or with any ideas for activities and improvements. There is a comments book for users and partners to use. There is also a parents' forum that feeds into the Core Offer Monitoring Group. Although parents are aware of the parents' forum it is not always clear to them how this links with the monitoring group and how they can use the meeting to put forward ideas and challenge.

Centre users who want to embark on adult training are extremely well supported by the centre. An excellent partnership with the Isle of Wight College has resulted in large numbers of users accessing English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL), literacy and numeracy courses. Many users go on to access further training and courses resulting in some users gaining qualifications and employment. Parents typically comment about the wonderful opportunities to engage in work experience provided by the centre. This helps parents gain a better understanding of the kind of work they are interested in and what training they need to undertake it.

The centre carefully evaluates the impact of each activity and individual service provided. With this information and the wide range of evaluations from users, the centre and The Children's Society have an accurate understanding of the progress the centre is making towards achieving the challenging targets that have been set. They have a very detailed understanding of the impact of their services on users. Consequently, the centre demonstrates an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that centre users are aware of the role of the parents' forum in giving them an opportunity to have their say. Clarify how the parents' forum links with the Core Offer Monitoring Group to provide challenge to the centre, making the centre accountable to the community it serves.
- The local authority should identify ways to more clearly signpost the centre from the main road:
 - to enable the local community to be aware of the location of the centre
 - so that parents passing the centre can clearly see how to get access to the centre
 - so that those who are new to the area are aware that there is a children's centre and can find out about the services it offers.
- Jobcentre Plus must ensure that advisers identified to work with children's centres have the appropriate checks in place:
 - to prevent unnecessary delays to the start of much needed services
 - to comply with safeguarding requirements for children's centres.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

The health of users in the Ryde reach area is improving in many ways. For example, the rate of childhood obesity is declining and is below island and national averages, and the take-up rate for immunisations is improving. Users talk enthusiastically about the support they have had to improve children's diets and the excellent baby massage classes that improve and support attachment and emotional well-being. Although the Ryde centre building only has a small outdoor space it makes excellent use of the space to encourage all areas of children's development through the crèche provision. There are also good outdoor play spaces at some of the outreach venues such as the Ryde High Bungalow. Here sessions such as 'Whatever the Weather' promote the need for children to be able to play outdoors to enhance their physical and emotional well-being. As a result, parents and carers understand the value of outdoor play, and are gaining the confidence to play with their children. This is especially appreciated in areas where housing for families with young children is in high rise flats where there is no access to a garden.

The ability of parents and carers to ensure that their children grow up in a safe environment is well developed because of the extremely high priority that the centre workers place on the safety of children and families. The centre operates the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) Safe at Home initiative; checking homes for safety and providing home safety equipment. Although the funding for safety equipment will end in March 2011, the centre staff will continue to check and advise families on home safety. This ensures that parents are aware of safety issues in the home and as a result emergency hospital admissions for children and young people are declining.

Users say they feel very safe in the centre. Parenting sessions such as 'the Incredible Years' and one-to-one counselling sessions clearly show significant and sustained improvement to families' lives. The centre can evidence where its work with the hardest to reach has resulted in engagement with the centre. In a number of cases, without the intervention and support of the centre, children and their parents would require the help of statutory services. In some of these cases the work carried out by the centre has prevented children from being taken into care. The strong partnership with social services ensures that children with a child protection plan are extremely well supported, and services coordinated. The Common Assessment Framework is used very well for the early identification of children's additional needs and to ensure coordinated service provision to meet them.

The percentage of children achieving 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage profile is improving and is higher than the national average. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is declining and at 27.35% is below the national average. Excellent liaison between the centre crèche, local pre-school providers and schools ensures that children are very well prepared for their transitions. The variety of courses and activities such as 'Family Play' are designed to support parents in their engagement with children's learning and are having a real impact. Parents are rightly proud of the confidence they now have to influence their child's development. 'When it was time to look at pre-schools for my child the centre not only gave me information about where to look, but also helped me know what to look for' was a typical comment from parents. Although many parents start the literacy and numeracy courses to enable them to support their child's learning, they often get the 'learning bug' and are eager to continue their own learning. 'This centre is a beacon centre for others to follow' commented the adult training provider. Between 2009 and 2010, 18 literacy and 26 numeracy qualifications were gained. Research carried out by the children's centre shows that children's language development is enhanced where they access 10 or more activities at the centre. This is regardless of the activities attended.

Children's behaviour in all venues is exceptional resulting in positive relationships with staff and with each other. The volunteer programme provides a first step for many parents to further engage in the life and work of the centre. Parents who volunteer commented that they have gained so much from the centre they want to give something back. The diversity of the community is celebrated. Those who speak English as an additional language are as keen to support others in the centre that may be experiencing the same difficulties they had when they first arrived in England. This has resulted in one mother translating a leaflet into Polish for other parents in the local community.

Even though the Jobcentre Plus adviser is not yet able to get into the centre for face-to-face meetings creative approaches have been implemented to ensure users have access to the information and advice they need. Both the centre and the Jobcentre have written information about each other's services clearly displayed. Where there is a clear need the centre will refer the user for a meeting at the Jobcentre with the

adviser. However, the Jobcentre Plus advisor rightly points out that it is then up to the parents to make the journey between the children’s centre and the Jobcentre. She is aware that she is missing opportunities to engage with all parents about work and benefits. She and the centre are also aware of the need to provide advice to parents and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities on benefits they are entitled to.

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	1
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 and employment.	2
How good is the provision?	1

Outreach and centre staff are extremely successful at using activities such as home visits and stay and play sessions to carefully assess users’ needs. Services are then very successfully personalised to ensure improvements to the health, safety and achievement of users. Consequently, users gain great trust in centre staff that enables them to gain confidence and engage successfully in the services offered. Partners from health and social services comment on how the work of the centre has supported families and made a difference to their lives.

By working in a firm and persistent way the centre ensures that those who are hardest to reach, and need support the most, do in fact receive it. Case studies show the centre has been successful in engaging the hard to reach where statutory agencies have not. However, it is also aware of when it is not engaging families who need support and liaises with statutory services where there are concerns that children may be at risk. Evidence shows that families often turn to the centre in times of crisis as they are confident that they will be well supported and their well-being is of the highest priority.

Although many users who speak English as an additional language start to use the centre to access ESOL courses, they feel so welcomed by the centre that they soon want to access other services and activities from which they and their children will benefit. Crèche provision to support access to courses and activities ensures that those who are isolated or without family support can still attend sessions in the centre to promote their own learning and enjoyment and that of their children. The ‘Dads Group’ meets regularly but fathers also attend sessions such as ‘Stay and Play’

and 'Baby Massage'. Fathers spoken to say that they are made to feel welcome at all the centre's services and activities and enjoy being fully involved in their child's learning and development. The centre teacher provides targeted and effective support to early years providers in the reach area. She works closely with the linked childcare provider to ensure the quality of learning and care provided to some of the most vulnerable children in the area is of a high standard.

Users rightly recognise the centre as a place of great safety. The centre has very successfully established itself as the first place to come to if users need help and advice. As one parent reported, 'I felt for the first time that someone was listening to me and hearing my concerns about my child's development.' When you walk through the door you receive a very warm welcome. Parents feel listened to and valued. The centre knows who to get in touch with and if they are not able to help themselves, they know who to contact. Users report how much they enjoy socialising with the friends they have met at the centre. One user commented that when she moved to the island she knew no one, but by coming into the centre she had made friends and did not feel alone.

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	1
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

Governance is outstanding due to the strong links that exist between strategic planning, management and provision. Regular meetings between The Children's Society senior leadership, the centre manager and the local authority ensure everyone is clear about the centre's aims and enable all those responsible to work in an integrated way. There are clear lines of accountability and all staff are clear about their responsibilities. Staff receive excellent day-to-day management and guidance from the centre manager but also have access to effective professional supervision related to their specific role. Excellent opportunities for professional development are provided and arise from focused and supportive management arrangements. Centre leaders highlight the value of meeting with other centre leaders on the mainland. This enables the sharing of good practice and wider development opportunities than those only provided on the island. The quarterly meetings with the local authority performance monitoring lead, and the annual conversation, ensures that both the centre and local authority have a joint understanding of the aims of the centre. This results in well-aligned priorities that identify both local and national needs, ensures services have the most impact and resources are targeted effectively.

The advisory board, known in the centre as the Core Offer Monitoring Group, includes partners such as health, schools, parents and community representatives including a local councillor. They provide a high degree of challenge based on their increasing knowledge of children’s centre work. They are increasingly effective at supporting the centre to reach out to engage with members of the community.

Partner agencies hold the centre in very high regard. A very effective relationship has been established so that the centre can ensure that services are of a very high quality for the users. Partner agencies are enabled to be more effective because of the centre’s expertise at breaking down barriers and targeting users. Feedback is regularly sought from partners about the impact of the centre and if there is anything they can do to improve. Consultation events include children. For example, the centre consulted with both parents and children aged three to five years about what makes a good childhood. Children gave insightful comments and the centre was able to show to parents that loving family relationships were most important to their children when describing a good childhood. The centre ensures that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported and have an equal opportunity to communicate their views.

Excellent use is made of both quantitative and qualitative data, responses from users and case studies that are expertly combined to shape services. This guarantees outstanding value for money because services are so accurately targeted to users needs. The centre also uses a range of measures very well to demonstrate clearly its success in improving lives. They constantly evaluate, monitor and reflect on their provision through rigorous, searching analysis and self-challenge. The centre is fully aware of the literacy issues in the area and ensures that all users have the opportunity to put forward their views and receive information through one-to-one support where needed.

Safeguarding practice and protocols for making referrals, sharing relevant information and helping families in time of crisis are exemplary. All staff have attended safeguarding training provided by The Children’s Society with managers undertaking more intensive courses. This ensures that all staff are aware of child protection issues and are well supported by the systems in place. Risk assessments are detailed and consider not only the physical safety of users but risks related to lone working and how to manage crisis events. All required checks have been carried out and the centre is rigorous in its monitoring of access to the centre to ensure users are safe and can feel confident that their children are being well cared for.

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	1

effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Ryde Children's Centre on 1 and 2 February 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

This centre is at the heart of the community and is relied upon for the well-being of large numbers of people. The very strong centre leadership of the manager and her dedicated team have provided you and your children with a wide range of excellent services that are carefully tailored to meet your particular needs.

Many of you went out of your way to tell us how much you enjoy the activities provided through the centre. Those of you who spoke to us said that your children's centre is a friendly and welcoming place and many added that you do not know what you would have done without the support provided by the centre.

Those of you that use the centre are now very much better at staying safe and healthy and providing for your families. Many of you are working very hard to improve your skills, such as improving your English, because of the encouragement of the centre. Your children are also well catered for through the crèche and activities to help you to better understand how to support their learning. This means

that they also settle well into the local nurseries and make much better progress than they would if they had not benefited from the centre's services. It was great to see so many fathers becoming involved in the activities in the centre.

We think that with the centre's encouragement many of you now make an excellent contribution to the centre services and the life of the community. It was very pleasing to speak to so many confident adults who took a pride in their achievements. These ranged from being more able to deal with children's behaviour to gaining employment. Some of you are very rightly proud of becoming volunteers to enable you to give something back to the centre for all the help and support it has given you.

The care, guidance and support that you and your children receive are excellent. This is because the staff are very successful at helping you to decide how to improve your lives and then making sure that you access the right services to do this. Those of you we spoke to said how much they appreciated that there is always someone to help when they need advice. Many of you who have felt isolated and alone with your problems say you have made friends as a result of the centre's work.

The centre manager and all the centre staff understand your needs, and those of your children, extremely well and they carefully check that they continue to do an excellent job. They show that they are determined to improve the lives of users even more. They have an impressive track record so far, so we have no doubt that the excellent work will continue.

Although you told us that you can speak to centre staff at any time we have asked the centre to ensure that you are made more aware of the role of the parents' forum in giving you an opportunity to have your say, by clarifying how the parents' forum links with the Core Offer Monitoring Group. We also felt that there were missed opportunities for parents and children to find out about the centre as it is not visible from the main road and is not well signposted. As a result, we have asked the local authority to identify ways to more clearly signpost the centre from the main road, so that parents who are passing the centre, and those new to the area, can more easily find out about the centre and the excellent services it offers.

Inspectors are aware of the enthusiastic plans for an advisor from Jobcentre Plus to provide face-to-face consultations in the centre, and its outreach venues, to ensure you receive the advice you need about work and benefits. This work has been delayed due to the need for the advisor to have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check completed. This unnecessary delay in completing the CRB check is due to the lack of clarity with senior leaders at Jobcentre Plus about who should carry out the check. We have asked these leaders to ensure checks are put in place to prevent unnecessary delays to the start of much needed services and to comply with safeguarding requirements for children's centres.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your thoughts and feelings about the centre. We wish all of you and your families the very best for the future.

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