

Inspection report for Riverside Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	366351
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Kubiak HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Hema Birdi
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Dickens Road Gravesend Kent DA12 2JY
Telephone number	01474 535301
Fax number	01474 538196
Email address	Hema.Birdi@kent.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Bright Beginnings 126993

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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 100024

© Crown copyright 2010



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 centre staff, its leadership team, centre users, preventative services manager, members of the advisory board and members of partner agencies. They also held meetings with a health visitor and a representative from the Traveller community. They had formal and informal discussions with parents and children and observed a 'HomeStart' group, a 'Baby Talk' session, 'Baby Clinic' and a 'Speaking with Confidence' group. They also visited a neighbouring children's centre.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including key policies and procedures, the centre's self-evaluation, action plan, case studies, evaluation of services and data about users of the centre. They also looked at photographic evidence of the work of the centre.

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

Riverside Children's Centre was designated in 2004 and is governed by Kent County Council. Centre staff are employed directly by the county council or the primary care trust. Various partner organisations use the centre's building but are not based there. Children's centres in Gravesend are based on a locality model and there are four centre managers who manage the seven children's centres in the area. Parents are encouraged to attend the centre most accessible to them. Some services are only offered at one centre but these centres are usually easily accessible and have good transport links.

The centre’s catchment area is one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The local population is mostly White British, with smaller percentages of other minority ethnic groups including Asian and African. There is also a large settled Traveller community. The centre’s catchment area is varied in terms of deprivation but overall around 17% of children under five in the area are living in workless households, which is about the national average. Children’s levels on entry to nursery are below average. At the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, around 45% of children achieve at least 78 points across the Foundation Stage Profile which is below average.

The centre is open on weekdays from 8.30am to 5.00pm. It is open for 52 weeks of the year. The centre will open later if required to do so and this is negotiated on an individual basis. A qualified teacher is based at the site, supporting the centre and linked day care setting, Bright Beginnings. Bright Beginnings was not inspected as part of this inspection but will be inspected separately. The centre commissions crèche services from Bright Beginnings.

Overall effectiveness

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of the centre is good. The care, guidance and support and the effectiveness of the assessments of the needs offered by the centre are outstanding. The contribution users make to the centre’s development is also outstanding.

Parents and users value the support offered to them in the safe and welcoming environment of the centre. Recruitment procedures are rigorous and robust and follow county council procedures. Safeguarding policies and procedures are clearly understood by all staff and very effective communication and sharing of information ensure that users are effectively safeguarded.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the centre’s strengths and areas where further improvement is needed. Effective data systems have been developed and data are used meaningfully at the centre; however, data are not used widely across the whole centre and do not always show the impact of the services provided. The local advisory board has responsibility for all seven children’s centres within the area. It has recently established steering groups specific to each centre, but targets are not set which are challenging to bring about improved outcomes for centre users.

Outcomes for users of the centre are good overall. Parents report that they enjoy attending the centre and feel confident asking for advice and guidance. They value the positive relationships that staff build with them. Parents are able to contribute to the work of the centre through evaluations of services and surveys and results show high satisfaction rates. Assessment of individual families' needs and the services put in place are excellent. Centre-wide evaluations of sessions are regularly completed but are not always systematic and do not demonstrate changes made as a result of the analysis of the evaluations. The 'graffiti' board where users are able to put comments anonymously and receive a response is well used. Informal feedback is not always captured. Parents have the opportunity to sit on the advisory board and the parents' focus group. The centre has a very successful volunteer scheme.

The centre staff know the community well and are effective in signposting users to the range of services and support available. Users are treated with respect and are reflective of the diversity of the community. The centre has worked hard at encouraging more involvement of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and has recently created a sensory room at the centre. The centre has had some success in engaging the Traveller community.

Those in charge demonstrate a clear vision and this is shared by the staff, and all have high aspirations for users of the centre. Regular reviews of the various activities are undertaken to ensure that the centre continues to meet the needs of the community. All staff demonstrate a commitment to the work of the centre, and, as a team, use available resources and data to recognise strengths, identify gaps in services and plan services to increase its effectiveness. Individual outcomes for users of the centre are good and improving. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve further is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop the effective use of data by:
 - implementing a robust system of collection and monitoring
 - ensuring that it is able to show the impact of services on improving outcomes for children and families
 - improving the skills of staff in understanding and using data.
- Strengthen the governance arrangements to ensure that the centre is held to account and that challenging targets are set for the centre, linked to improving outcomes for children and families.
- Improve the systems for evaluating the centre's services, ensuring the changes are linked to developing them and matching the changing needs of the community.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The outcomes for users of the centre are good and improving. The extent to which children engage in the centre and users contribute to decision making is outstanding. Parental satisfaction surveys and discussions with users show that satisfaction rates are high. Attendance rates are good and users are encouraged to visit the centre at any time and use the parents' room where information and resources are available.

The centre is seen as an integral part of the community. Welcome signs in the reception area have been written by users of the centre and are specific to the languages spoken within the community it serves. The centre brings together people from different areas of the community and all are treated with respect. The centre offers activities within the community, for example holiday sessions at the local park. These are planned within the community to demonstrate to users the accessibility and enjoyment that their children can get from these free local resources. Some users have the opportunity to develop their organisational skills through planning and organising the summer activity programme. Users of the centre are frequently asked for their views and this feeds into future planning. Staff are excellent role models and support parents in managing their children's behaviour. Users speak very highly about the centre and the excellent range of services that it offers. The centre sees every family as individuals and support is tailored to their specific needs. Parents contribute effectively through the advisory board and parents' focus group. Celebrations of festivals through the year promote tolerance and community cohesion.

Displays at the centre and information about smoking cessation and drug and alcohol abuse encourage users to adopt healthy lifestyles. The fruit and vegetable scheme encourages parents and children to eat more healthily and practical cooking sessions introduce parents to making healthy snacks such as fruit smoothies. Users of the centre are encouraged to use the outside play area with their children. Feedback from parents is that their children are now healthier. The percentage of mothers initiating breastfeeding is high.

Regular risk assessments of the centre ensure that it provides a safe environment for children to learn and play. Home visits when children are aged eight months and becoming mobile focus on home safety, and parents and centre staff work together to reduce risks in the home and therefore minimise the potential for accidents.

'Stay and Play' sessions are well attended. The centre teacher works with the children's workers to ensure that the activities are linked to the Early Years Foundation Stage. The sessions include structured snack time and story time preparing children for future nursery or school. A more structured pre-school group runs twice a week to support children in the transition to nursery or school. Children's levels on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision are improving and pre-schools are reporting that children settle down quicker. Sessions such as 'Baby Talk' are well attended. The babies benefit from the excellent range of resources and show great delight during the singing sessions, especially in the

interaction and physical contact with their parents through the action rhymes. Staff model good practice at all the groups and encourage parents to acquire the skills to continue to support and develop their children at home.

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, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
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 and employment.	2

How good is the provision?

1

The centre provides outstanding needs assessments and care, guidance and support. As one parent commented, 'We feel that we can ask them for help, with anything at all, and they will do their best to help us.' Services are well integrated and activities are of a high standard. Stimulating resources at the children's level are available throughout the centre. A footprint path in the car park ensures that children are stimulated and engaging in play before entering the reception area where they can access low level 'feely' bags and tactile wall equipment.

Parents are seen as individuals and treated with respect. Assessment procedures are excellent and the multi-agency approach ensures that services are tailored to the specific needs of the individual family. Case studies demonstrate the positive effect of the outreach service on improving the outcomes for families. Centre staff are trained to offer support and advice on issues such as effective parenting, managing children's behaviour and preventing domestic violence. The centre is successful in engaging areas of the community who do not access the centre and uses data to identify areas where it needs to target its resources.

The centre has a high turnover of volunteers, due to the success of the scheme. Volunteers receive a clear induction procedure and are well supported in developing their knowledge and skills. Volunteers are particularly successful in accessing further education and training and paid employment.

Courses such as English for speakers of other languages are popular and well attended and, due to the changing local population, are run regularly. The centre has high aspirations for parents and they are encouraged to learn new skills and widen their knowledge through courses such as baby signing. The centre offers some

accredited courses. There is a high emphasis on supporting young mothers back into education and employment. The emphasis on other users of the centre is not as high and the centre’s educational plans do not provide clear routes of progression for users to develop their skills in working towards accredited courses and/or access to employment.

The range of services available to users is well publicised and includes information about other local children’s centres. As one parent commented, ‘If you don’t fancy something at this children’s centre, they will tell you what is going on at another one.’ Parents report that they find the staff very friendly and value the support they receive. As one parent commented, ‘The staff are all really friendly and happy. You come in and it lifts your day.’

The space is well used by centre staff and partner organisations, such as the community midwife for antenatal checks. Resources are of a high quality and well maintained. There is a large outside area for the children and the centre is planning to further develop this area.

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	2
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?

2

The centre’s leaders work effectively as a team and have built purposeful links. Quality services are matched to individual user’s needs. The impact of work with individual families is rigorously evaluated through individual supervision, multi-agency team meetings and case studies. The centre’s self-evaluation and action plans ensure that its leaders are aware of the priorities for the centre, although specific measurable targets are not always set.

The centre is beginning to use centre-wide data more effectively as a way of monitoring and evaluating its effectiveness. Regular data reports are provided and discussed by centre staff who evaluate and review the services offered based on the data and a number of other sources. Staff have varying skill levels in analysing the data and this impacts on the overall ability of the centre to monitor the data rigorously. The centre is aware of the limitations of the data, for example in being able to report in detail on individual families, and is working with the local authority on these issues. Systems for evaluating the work undertaken with individual families are rigorous and robust. These clearly show the impact on improving outcomes for

individual families.

The advisory board has recently established a number of steering groups and sub-groups. Parental representation on the advisory board and associated groups is good. The advisory group and associated groups are supportive of the centre's work but do not set targets which are challenging for the centre and neither do they hold the centre to account.

The centre is systematic in reviewing the services it offers and redirects resources where they will have most impact, for example the recent increase in its outreach work. This ensures that the centre continues to provide services which are value for money.

Effective multi-agency working and the sharing of information about families ensures that the most appropriate services are offered. Additionally, close working with the community midwife ensures that users' needs are identified early and support put in place. The qualified teacher works with the centre staff and the linked setting, and offers training and support where necessary.

The centre's leaders and staff work well together and management arrangements are secure. Supervision and performance management arrangements are clear and well understood. Outreach workers do not currently have the opportunity for professional supervision which is focused specifically on their work in order to best support the families they are working with. Centre staff have good opportunities for professional development and are encouraged by the centre to develop any specialist skills linked to their abilities and interests. Opportunities for training with colleagues from other organisations are good and this builds staff's knowledge of other services and provides good networking opportunities.

All required policies and procedures are in place and meet requirements in relation to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. Safeguarding employment practices for staff employed directly through the centre are rigorous and follow the local authority procedures. The centre has worked with its commissioned services on aligning its policies. Commissioned services workers are aware of the need to report any safeguarding concerns to centre staff; however, this is not included in the written policy.

Equality and diversity are promoted well at the centre. The building is fully wheelchair accessible and the centre has worked hard at improving the facilities for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. All parents are respected, and their contribution to the centre, and their views and ideas, are valued. Displays and information within the centre are representative of the community. The welcome signs in reception, completed by the users, shows that the centre values their language and background. Information is available within the centre in a range of community languages but the quality of the publications is variable.

The centre welcomes feedback from parents, users and partners, and this feeds into their evaluation of the services that it offers. Structured feedback such as questionnaires and surveys is robust but feedback given at other times is not always captured. The use of the 'graffiti' board is successful and the centre's responses are displayed clearly. The evaluation of feedback is not always clear.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
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	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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	2

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. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Riverside Children's Centre on 26 and 27 January 2011. We judged the centre as good overall, with some outstanding aspects.

The centre is based in a modern building that is fully wheelchair accessible. It provides you with a safe, attractive environment where you feel able to freely visit at any time. The groups run at the centre are well attended and you and your children

enjoy the activities on offer. You feel that the centre supports you very well and that they have a genuine interest in helping you and your families.

The centre is seen as part of the community and you feel that you are able to contribute to what is happening there and influence the services that it offers. The outreach service is effective in offering you additional support at the times when you most need it. This support can be available to you when a new baby is due in your family.

The centre listens to your views and you have the opportunity to ask questions indirectly by writing a question on the 'graffiti' board. The centre will write a reply to your question on the board. You are regularly asked to contribute to satisfaction surveys and asked about how well the centre is doing. We have asked the centre to consider how it can more accurately record the feedback you may give at other times. Also, when it evaluates the services, the systems are not always clear and it is not easy to see what changes have been made and why.

Some of you sit on the advisory board for the centre and the other groups that work alongside the advisory board. The board does not provide sufficient challenges for the centre. We have asked it to set targets for the centre so that it is able to offer a more effective service.

The centre's self-evaluation and action plans cover all the areas of its work. The centre is using data more now to identify what is working well and where it needs to develop. The data do not always give the centre staff the information that they find most helpful and sometimes are not accurate. We have asked the centre to ensure that the data are accurate and meaningful to staff, and that the data show more clearly what they are doing. Not all staff can fully understand the data and how to interpret it.

The centre staff work well as a team and respect each other's knowledge and skills. They work closely together to ensure that you receive the services that you need. When you find it difficult to access the centre, staff will come and visit you at home.

Mutual respect exists between the staff and yourselves. The staff want you to achieve the best for yourselves and your family, and they are skilled in offering you guidance and support. They also want to equip you with the skills so that you help your children to grow and develop.

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