

Inspection report for Rendlesham Children's Centre

Local authority	Suffolk County Council
Inspection number	362549
Inspection dates	21-22 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Sue Aldridge AI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Linda Mitchell
Date of previous inspection	NA
Centre address	Sycamore Drive Rendlesham IP12 2GF
Telephone number	01394 462191
Fax number	None
Email address	Linda.mitchell@suffolk.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Rendlesham Community Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if 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.

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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's manager, staff, members of the advisory board, health professionals, and representatives of the local authority. They spoke informally to several parents.

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

Information about the centre

Rendlesham Children's Centre is accommodated in a single room within Rendlesham Community Primary School. The school's building was designed to enable the integrated provision of a full service from birth to 11 years, incorporating the school and the children's centre. Although the centre and the school were jointly managed when it opened in 2005, management of the centre transferred to the local authority in April 2009. The current leader also manages two other children's centres in the region. The local authority has worked with representatives of both the centre and the school to draw up a 'Memorandum of Understanding'; this sets out what is managed by each of the centre and the school. Currently, the centre has the use of the nursery room and the associated outdoor area on five afternoons each week. Its sensory room, located within the school, is used by the school one morning each week. The centre rents a room in a community centre that is close by. Following the move of a family support worker to another centre, it has not been possible to appoint a replacement because of a recruitment freeze, although a request for this to be lifted is being processed. In the meantime, staff from the other two children's centres in the cluster have been deployed part-time to help deliver family services in Rendlesham's area. Currently, the centre closes for two half-days each week to allow staff to conduct confidential meetings, administration and planning activities. An advisory board acts as a link between the centre's users and the local authority, which is responsible for governance.

The centre makes the full core offer. Services for children from birth to one year are emphasised, in line with the local authority's priorities. The great majority of the population within its area is of White British heritage. There are relatively low levels of disadvantage in the centre's reach area. Levels of worklessness and proportions on benefits are comparatively low. Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills similar to those expected nationally.

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

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. Despite having limited resources, it achieves good outcomes for its users, who are highly satisfied with the services it provides. Parents describe the centre as 'a really friendly and inviting place' and a 'great welcome in the community'. They would simply like more services and greater access to the facilities in the school. Users are very effectively engaged; their views are continuously sought and acted upon.

The centre is highly successful in promoting healthy lifestyles amongst its users. This is because staff work most constructively in partnership with health professionals, giving an exceptionally caring and supportive service to families. Together, staff and professionals go beyond the call of duty, and parents are most appreciative of this. This is clearly indicated by their successes in families where other services have been unable to establish a working relationship with parents in order to improve health outcomes for parents, carers and children. Good outcomes generally are underpinned by effective assessment of users' needs, the provision of a good range of services, particularly home visits, and strong support for parents and carers. This enables them to grow in confidence and competence in caring for their children, which increases their enjoyment of parenthood.

Outstanding leadership by the manager has secured significant improvements since she took up her post. These include establishing secure systems of recording, strengthening arrangements for safeguarding users, stating staff supervisions, and establishing an advisory board. A strong commitment to equality has resulted in suitable steps being taken to ensure that there is equal access for all to the services

provided. Staff morale is high and teamwork well developed. Self-evaluation is good; the manager and advisory board make effective use of the data and indicators provided by the local authority to identify what the centre does well and what needs to be improved. Every activity is evaluated and feedback carefully considered. The centre sets itself ambitious targets given its limited staffing and accommodation, and it is very responsive to changing priorities. Developments are effectively resourced and evaluated in practice, but as a written development plan is no longer used it is not always clear how improvements are to be brought about or how they are linked to local priorities. However, the centre has considered a suitable model, which addresses these shortfalls.

Through partnerships with other agencies and professionals the centre ensures that the users' needs are met well. Partnership with the school is developing satisfactorily, although the 'Memorandum of Understanding' does not give the children's centre the level of access to the school's accommodation that was originally intended. In addition, the centre currently relies partly on staff from two other centres in the cluster and, although this is working well, it is not sustainable in the longer term. As a result of these shortfalls, the centre's capacity to improve is good rather than outstanding.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- To strengthen the centre's capacity to improve and extend its services the local authority should
 - ensure that the centre has a full complement of permanent staff
 - provide further support to build a more effective partnership between the centre and the school so that the centre has greater access to accommodation.
- Show clearly how improvements are linked to local priorities and how they are to be achieved by re-instating the use of a suitable development planning document.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre's data shows that one of its greatest successes lies in encouraging healthier lifestyles. For instance, it has one of the highest rates of breastfeeding, and all families who have been offered immunisation have taken advantage of this. Testimony from users indicates that a day dedicated to informing them about the dangers of smoking and how to break the habit has had the desired impact in encouraging cessation. Children who come to the popular weekly 'Catch-up' sessions have all been encouraged to eat healthy porridge for breakfast. The fathers' group takes advantage of enjoyable opportunities for outdoor activities such as crabbing, and the centre's users grow and harvest vegetables. During home visits, parents are

given individual advice about such matters as weaning or babies' sleeping patterns.

Home visits also give tailored advice to parents about safety in the home, and the centre provides economical stair gates where these are needed. Children clearly feel safe at the centre, and parents feel valued. While at the centre, users are kept safe by the good arrangements that are in place, including a clear understanding that parents are responsible for their children. Risks have been carefully assessed, and suitable arrangements are in place to reduce these to a minimum. When welfare concerns are identified, prompt action is taken to address these. Highly individualised support, identified as necessary through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), is provided for those families who are most vulnerable. This makes a significant difference to outcomes for them.

During their visits to the centre, children become familiar with routines, they get to know the school's nursery environment and this helps them to move confidently to the nursery when they are three years old. Parents recognise the value of courses to help them manage children's behaviour and increase their parenting skills. In the words of one, 'It has made parenthood more enjoyable'. Courses that last several weeks always end in a celebration, adding to everyone's sense of achievement.

During sessions observed, such as 'Monkey Music', children were very responsive and made good progress. They behave well during their visits to the centre. Parents are listened to and consulted. Some users have moved on from needing the support of staff at the centre to becoming volunteers. Centre staff know the children well and they accommodate their preferences during sessions. They also encourage tolerance of a wide range of different experiences, such as engagement in 'messy play'. The fathers' group learn new skills with their children too, such as pumpkin carving. Parents are encouraged effectively to record key points in children's development, adding to their own sense of being successful parents.

Data shows that the centre is successful in developing children's communication skills as well as their personal and social development. This prepares them well for nursery education. The Jobcentre Plus adviser effectively signposts adults to services, including benefits, further education and training. Children use a variety of electronic devices, such as switches to activate toys, lights, music or voice recordings. In conjunction with the school, the centre has plans to provide a course for parents to extend their skills in the use of information and communication technology.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, 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	2

their personal and social development	
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre makes effective use of all the information that it has from a variety of sources, to ensure that it meets the needs of users well. Staff take good account of Suffolk's priorities, data about their reach area, information that comes from other professionals and parental feedback. The care, guidance and support offered by the centre are excellent. The centre makes good use of the Common Assessment Framework for identifying needs and, where action is subsequently taken, this is very closely monitored, reviewed and recorded. Parents are treated with sensitivity and respect and, because the centre has a good reputation for being a welcoming environment, users increasingly refer themselves. There is a wealth of information about all aspects of health. For instance, a dental nurse visited during National Smile Week to raise awareness of the importance of dental hygiene for children and adults, particularly expectant mothers.

There is a wide range of other written information for parents, including childminders, available in the centre. Information covers subjects such as domestic violence, contraception and preventing cot deaths. Sessions such as 'Baby Yoga' and 'Infant Massage' are run by suitably trained staff, and centre staff have up-to-date training in child protection, first aid and food hygiene, all of which help to assure the safety of users. There is a good range of activities to support learning and development. Sessions such as 'Baby Rhyme Time' are well planned to show clear learning objectives and plans cover all areas of learning. In response to individual difficulties, such as dealing with the jealousy of a sibling when a baby is born, the centre provides what one parent described as 'fantastic advice' that helped to transform her son's behaviour.

There are good arrangements for outreach. For instance, a link to the army welfare service has helped to identify the needs of families with young children in a local barracks. A member of staff joins a voluntarily run playgroup there to lead craft sessions with mothers and toddlers. Children's centre staff also attended an open day at the barracks to raise awareness of its role and services. The staff are constantly striving to reach out to the most isolated members of the community and they publicise their services widely. This results in very high levels of engagement, with some parents coming to every session that they can.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
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

Leadership and management of the centre fall mainly on the manager, but this has started to be shared, and there is now a business manager who provides good support, in managing day-to-day financial matters, for instance. The manager's success in securing a wide range of improvements since she was appointed is grounded firmly in a knowledge of what constitutes good provision and a strong commitment to improving services to families. This commitment is shared by staff and many partners.

Strong partnerships are at the heart of the centre's success. These provide a highly integrated service that is responsive and inclusive. For instance, the centre has extended its work beyond its own reach to serve a very high proportion of users from Black minority ethnic groups. Staff have a thorough knowledge of the services available, so they quickly secure support, such as interpreters for users who do not speak English. The sensory room has been used to good effect to enable parents with children who have life-limiting conditions to enjoy some private time with their children and create a book of memories.

The local authority provides good governance, support and challenge to the centre to hold it accountable, as does the advisory board. The latter draws its members from an appropriate range of professions so members have a good understanding of the centre's role and responsibilities. Parental feedback is considered at all advisory board meetings and parents occasionally attend these. The local authority has been supportive in securing the partnership between the centre and the school, but this is not well developed enough to give the centre access to all the facilities that were originally intended to be shared.

Safeguarding arrangements and child protection procedures are robust and include regular training for staff. The centre exceeds requirements by recording in detail all the recruitment checks carried out on staff. Good use is made of data on births within the area to ensure early home visits, and these are successful in identifying where further support and intervention is needed. Seamless cooperation with other agencies is instrumental in giving families timely support.

The centre make good use of its limited resources and finances are well managed by the business manager, who also supports the manager in carrying out staff supervisions and ensuring good value for money.

Staff vigorously pursue all opportunities for extending services in ways that are not dependent on additional accommodation. By reaching out to the community, the centre is most successful in drawing in those who have not previously used its services. For instance, childminders find it an invaluable means of enabling children in their care to access group activities and make friends.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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	2
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	1

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

Inspection report for Early Years Foundation Stage provision at Rendlesham Community Primary School (URN 134882)

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Rendlesham Children's Centre on 21–22 October 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

We are grateful to those of you who took time to talk to us and share your experiences of the centre. One of you summed up the views of several others by remarking that being a parent is, 'one of the hardest jobs in the world' and that the centre, 'makes that job so much easier and more enjoyable'.

There are some outstanding features of the centre. The manager has done an excellent job in securing improvements since she was appointed. The staff share her commitment to doing their best for all of you. They work exceptionally well with health professionals, and so the centre is particularly successful in encouraging healthy lifestyles. The way that staff and other professionals work together to provide integrated care, support and guidance is also outstanding.

There are good arrangements to keep everyone safe when they are at the centre, and visits to homes help to make them safer environments too. We found that the centre enables all of you to contribute well. Those we spoke to said that the centre is a welcoming place, and we heard that several parents found it invaluable in helping them to manage their children and develop their own skills, knowledge and confidence as parents. The staff and other professionals assess the needs of families well. Considering the small size of the centre, there is a good range of services, especially for children from birth to one year. We saw how much parents and children enjoyed 'Monkey Music', and children were clearly learning new things, like the names of instruments and words of songs.

The centre also supports childminders well and reaches out to playgroups in the community, such as the one at the local barracks. Centre staff make sure that all have the same opportunities to take part in centre activities and access services. For example, they arrange for interpreters if a family does not speak English. As a result of taking your views seriously and responding so well to what you want, you are very satisfied customers and we consider this to be another outstanding feature of the centre's work.

The local authority does a good job in governing the centre and is well supported by the advisory board. We were unable to see the parents' forum or 'Cake club' but we did notice that the views that are collected here are passed on to the advisory board. Some of you occasionally attend meetings of this group to add weight to your collected views.

There are three main areas to improve. Firstly, the centre no longer has a family support worker of its own and, although staff from other centres are doing a good job in making sure that this work still goes on, this situation cannot last indefinitely. As a result, we have asked the local authority to make sure that the centre has a family support worker of its own. Several of you have said that you would like to have more access to the facilities in the school, and this was the intention when the centre and school were first designed and built. The lack of space prevents the centre from providing more services. We have asked the local authority to support both the centre and the school in working out an arrangement whereby centre users have greater access to some of the school's facilities.

Lastly, the centre manager and staff know the things that they do well and what they need to do to improve. The centre plans ambitious developments considering the staffing and resources available to them. However, they have stopped producing a written plan showing how they will carry out these developments. Therefore we have asked them to start doing this again. They already have a suitable model in mind.

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