

Inspection report for Rainbow Children's Centre

Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	366403
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Marian Harker HMI

Centre governance	Action for Children
Centre leader	Angela Wilkinson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	St Mary's Church of England Primary School URN 135057
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Church House @ St Mary's EY 378086

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.

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, representatives from the local authority and Action for Children, staff, a range of agencies and parents and other users of the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation.

Information about the centre

Rainbow Children's Centre is situated near to Kidderminster town centre. The centre is in an area designated among the 30% most deprived in the country. The very large majority of families surrounding the centre are White British. The remainder are from Bangladeshi and Eastern European heritage. The area is characterised by high levels of unemployment and social deprivation. Most children enter childcare and early education with skills that are below those expected for their age. The centre provides the full core offer and works closely with Church House @ St Mary's nursery which is located on the same site and provides priority places for the children's centre. The centre is in the process of appointing a new manager. In the interim, the centre is being led and managed by the service manager, who also has responsibility for Treetops Children's Centre nearby. The advisory board is composed of staff from the centre, parents and representatives from the local community, the Primary Care Trust, Action for Children, the local authority and a number of local agencies. The centre opened as a purpose-built children's centre in 2008. It provides a number of services at Radford Avenue and St Oswald's, Sion Avenue in Kidderminster. The large majority of staff who work at the centre are employed by Action for Children who are commissioned by Worcestershire County Council to govern the work of the centre.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The centre provides a warm, welcoming and safe environment for all its users who appreciate the work it does and recognise the positive impact it has on their lives. A typical view expressed by a user is, ‘Rainbow is a really friendly and welcoming place.’ The centre offers satisfactory support to children and families.

Staff have a secure understanding of child protection procedures and are well trained to ensure that any concerns are promptly shared with relevant agencies. Case study evidence indicates that families regularly turn to the centre for help in times of crisis. The centre’s satisfactory quality of care, guidance and support, however, benefits only a small proportion of targeted groups of users. For example, participation rates are low for those users who are lone parents or children in workless households.

The centre manager and all staff ensure the building is a safe and secure environment for all users. Being healthy outcomes for centre users and their families are improving. Individual feedback, case studies and data provided by the centre indicate that an increasing proportion of families are enjoying a range of healthy activities. The centre has recently achieved the Healthy Early Years Standard at the bronze level. Children who attend ‘Stay and Play’ sessions make satisfactory gains in their learning and some make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. However, the centre’s systems for tracking children’s progress over time are at an early stage of development.

The centre seeks the views of users through surveys, questionnaires and informal discussions. As a result of feedback from users, the centre is increasingly adapting aspects of its provision. For instance, the number of swimming sessions has been increased so that a greater number of users can attend.

The centre meets its statutory responsibilities for the promotion of equality and

diversity. It has been successful in engaging a small group of Bangladeshi parents to attend a faith-based parenting course. The centre is beginning to track the number of users attending the centre from different groups in the reach area.

The centre's self-evaluation is sound but generous. This is because procedures for monitoring, evaluation and the collection of data, particularly relating to national indicators, are not sufficiently rigorous or well known by all staff with leadership and management responsibilities. Action for Children and the local authority meet regularly to review the quality of the centre's work and provide support. However, the level of challenge does not routinely result in effective action being taken by the centre to improve outcomes. Senior leaders and the advisory board have a broadly accurate view of the strengths and areas for development across the centre, but this is not reflected in the centre's improvement plan. For example, the plan is not helpful in enabling senior leaders to prioritise the most important areas for development or measure progress over time. Satisfactory provision and steadily improving outcomes, coupled with generally sound self-evaluation demonstrate the centre's satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure Action for Children and the local authority work together to quality assure the centre's work, providing a balance of support and challenge.
- Ensure that leaders and managers, at all levels, have a clear understanding of their strategic responsibilities in moving the centre forward.
- Ensure the centre's action plan has clear measurable priorities, with regular milestones and specific success criteria, which can be used to check progress.
- Increase the proportion of users who access the centre's services from targeted groups.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Users are beginning to respond more positively to the centre's promotion of healthy lifestyles. Recent outcomes regarding breastfeeding and the introduction of 'Dance Squad' sessions have been positive. Breastfeeding rates beyond six weeks have improved by 3% in the last year. This is partly as a result of the individualised breastfeeding support women receive. Other outcomes relating to healthy lifestyles are less well tracked, such as rates of obesity and smoking cessation.

Through partnership working with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and Home Start, the centre has obtained free home safety equipment such as fire alarms. One young parent reported, 'Now I know that my baby is safe at home.'

Children attending the centre make satisfactory progress in their learning and development. The latest evidence indicates that children are reaching the expected

levels for this age in their personal, social and emotional development. However, children’s attainment in key skills such as reading, writing and calculation remain below expectations. As a result, the centre has worked closely with Church House @ St Mary’s nursery to ensure that a wider range of early writing activities are provided to meet children’s needs. In sessions such as ‘Tremendous Toddlers’, staff use modelling well to support parents in behaviour management and make helpful suggestions on how to move forward.

The volunteering programme has been successful in helping some parents access training and employment. Other users have found routes into employment through attending sessions at the centre. Jobcentre Plus staff regularly visit the centre, and local vacancies are advertised in the reception area. The centre does not currently offer adult education courses and opportunities are sometimes missed by senior leaders to take advantage of courses at the centre organised by other providers.

Staff from a range of services who work at the centre report that they value the close partnership working with the centre’s staff and their commitment to protecting the most vulnerable children. Centre staff know the families they work with well. Consequently, early identification and prevention play a key role in the work of the centre to reduce harm to children. Case study evidence indicates that outcomes for children with child protection plans, those who are looked after or subject to the Common Assessment Framework are sound and improving.

Secure procedures are in place to help children and adults form positive relationships and contribute towards the work of the centre. The centre can demonstrate examples where adults are developing their skills to support others through volunteering and psychology student placement programmes.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The range of services provided in the centre and at the outreach sites meet the needs of the wider community satisfactorily. Senior leaders recognise that more needs to be done to increase the proportion of users from target groups. Some success has been achieved with fathers. The number of fathers attending the centre is steadily increasing. Fathers report that they particularly enjoy attending trips out organised by the centre to places of interest such as Hatton Animal Farm and Weston-super-Mare. As a result, fathers' attendance is higher on these occasions.

The centre staff know families well and work closely with partner agencies to assess users' needs. However, systems to track and record outcomes are less well developed. The centre is using a number of different electronic tracking systems which do not always present information in a clear format that can be easily interpreted. Children's needs are accurately assessed, and the activities planned are enjoyable and relevant to their age and interests.

Parents and adults make satisfactory gains in their learning and development. Parents who met with inspectors explained how their involvement with the centre had built their confidence. 'I am ready to look for work again after the birth of my child,' said one parent. The centre regularly informs parents about adult education courses available in the local area but does not routinely track outcomes. Regular local fun days such as 'Spring into Summer' are supported by the centre and serve to celebrate achievement and raise aspirations across the community. The centre is particularly proud of winning first prize in the Kidderminster carnival float competition.

Care, guidance and support are improving. Although satisfactory overall, teenage parents receive good quality care, guidance and support from the designated family support worker. Case studies and feedback questionnaires indicate that young parents are very appreciative of the support and guidance they receive at a vulnerable time in their lives. Although some other users report similar positive experiences, the centre is only just beginning to systematically monitor and evaluate the impact of this work.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community

3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre manager promotes positive teamwork and has a clear understanding of the centre’s strengths and areas for improvement. The senior leadership team are dedicated professionals, clearly focused on improving the quality of services and meeting users’ needs. However, the impact of some leadership roles is underdeveloped. For example, the use of relevant information about the centre’s performance to drive and secure improvement is at an early stage of development. Evaluation is sometimes supported by evidence of what impact the centre is having on users’ outcomes but this is not a consistent feature. Leaders recognise that as the improvement plan does not contain measurable targets it is difficult for them to accurately assess the impact of their work.

Members of the advisory board represent a wide range of services and local users, including parents. The board members meet regularly and, through their discussions, are beginning to make a greater contribution to the strategic work of the centre.

Safeguarding arrangements are sound. The single central record detailing Criminal Records Bureau checks is well organised and meets the latest requirements. Multi-agency working is well established. Protocols and practices for referrals are well known and a high priority across the work of all services. There are very few children in the reach area identified with disabilities and those who attend are given opportunities to participate in a suitable range of activities. The centre works closely with the portage worker to ensure services are adapted to suit individual needs. Case study evidence indicates that timely intervention by centre staff has improved outcomes for children and their parents. For example, family support workers provided emotional support for a parent and child where domestic violence had occurred. Outcomes for this family were positive in that adults were eventually successful in gaining employment, with the help of the centre staff.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. Services at the centre are designed to engage users from the range of backgrounds in the local area, but take-up rates are variable. Staff are beginning to identify how services at the centre and at the outreach sites can be tailored to further improve outcomes. As a consequence, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

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

3

The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users

3

and the wider community	
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
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	3
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	3

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

None

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 Rainbow Children's Centre on 26-27 January 2010. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for making us so welcome when we inspected your children's centre recently. The centre provides a satisfactory range of services that are helping children and families in the Kidderminster area. During the inspection, parents and carers told us how much they appreciated the warm and friendly welcome they received when using the centre.

The centre works in partnership with a range of services such as health visitors, midwives, local schools and Church House @ St Mary's nursery. The centre is improving the range of opportunities for children and adults to learn about how to lead a healthy life.

The centre provides satisfactory support for children who attend sessions. As a result, children make satisfactory progress, although some good progress is made in their personal development and social skills. The centre makes sure that adults receive appropriate guidance and support so they can realise their potential.

The centre works closely with a range of agencies to ensure the safety of children and all those who use the facilities. They have undertaken all the necessary checks when employing new staff.

The centre is well managed on a day-to-day basis and all the staff are committed to improving the outcomes for young children and adults who live in the local area. The centre's advisory board meets regularly and checks how well the centre is doing. The inspectors have recommended that Action for Children and the local authority work closely together to improve the work of the centre, that everyone who is a leader or manager fully understands how they can help to improve the centre. Inspectors have also recommended that the centre's action plan has clear priorities for improvement and the number of children and adults who use the centre from specific groups such as lone parents are increased.

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