

Inspection report for Sure Start Riverbank Children's Centre

Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	362593
Inspection dates	3-4 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Janet Stacey HMI

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Sally Nightingale
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Small Wonders Too EY272134

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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Early Years Inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, members of the senior leadership team, members of the federated advisory board, users and a local authority officer linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at sessions in operation in the children's centre and in nearby locations. They also looked at a range of documentation, including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Riverbank Children's Centre is situated on a small industrial estate based close to the city centre. The centre evolved from a Sure Start Local Programme and became a Phase 1 children's centre in 2006. The centre serves a community that experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage, being located in an area which includes some of the top 10% most deprived wards in the country. Unemployment rates and the number of families on benefits are higher than the national average. A range of integrated services that include health, family support, and early years advice and guidance are offered on site. The centre manager is the locality manager for five children's centres. The centre works in cooperation with all five centres to provide services that complement each other and to share resources and staff. The local authority is responsible for the performance management of staff in the centre. Governance is through a federated advisory board which is made up of representatives from parents, neighbourhood partners, and health and centre staff.

The centre serves a population that is culturally diverse; this includes families who are of White British heritage and South Asian and Traveller communities. There has been an increase of Eastern European communities recently moving into the area. Evidence indicates that the skills and knowledge children have when they enter the local Early Years Foundation Stage settings are well below those expected nationally for their age.

Childcare is provided through Small Wonders Too private day nursery. The nursery is within walking distance of the centre. Onsite crèche facilities linked to training courses are provided by the outreach support staff. The centre operates a variety of groups and activities at six community venues situated within the reach area.

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

Overall effectiveness of the centre is good with some aspects that are outstanding. This is because those in charge are demonstrating a clear vision and have an accurate understanding of the centre’s strengths and areas for improvement. The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users is a very strong feature of the centre’s work. High-quality outreach work and effective one-to-one support, often in families’ homes, are making a positive contribution to breaking down barriers, particularly for families who are feeling isolated or who are new to the area. Parkinson House, a satellite site used by the centre, is a prime example of how staff are supporting homeless families to move into accommodation, and in some cases into work and further education.

Excellent partnership working with a wide variety of providers, particularly health professionals, is making a significant contribution to ensuring the needs of individual users and families are met effectively. This is reflected in the increasing numbers of children and families who are accessing the centre’s services from a variety of venues in the locality, for example, new mothers, teenage mothers and members of the Traveller community. The centre is totally committed to safeguarding users of the service and its staff. Robust systems are in place to protect everyone that comes into contact with the centre. Case study evidence indicates that families have received well-integrated and sensitive support in times of crisis.

The children and families who regularly use the centre and its satellite sites are developing an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles. The Incredible Years course in particular is helping families to develop emotional resilience. User evaluation reports that families enjoy the activities offered by the

centre; they learn new skills and by volunteering in the centre are making a positive contribution to the community. Parents and other users spoken to appreciate the warm and friendly welcome they receive when they visit the centre. They value the wide range of information made available to them; when asked about the environment, one parent commented, 'It's like walking into a mum's encyclopaedia.' Users feel the centre is extremely responsive to their needs and cite many examples of how it has impacted positively on their own lives and that of their children. A parent forum has recently been established, but at present membership does not include a range of representatives from all the groups in the reach area and the forum is yet to have an influence on shaping services. Ofsted reports from local primary schools show that children are starting school with levels of skills and abilities which are well below national expectations. Local authority data show the percentage of five-year-olds achieving the early learning goals in the reach area is starting to improve but is still well below the national average. This aspect has rightly been identified by the centre leaders as an area where they can be instrumental in helping to raise standards and they have already put strategies in place to start to address this.

The centre meets its statutory responsibilities for the promotion of equality and diversity. Staff are aware that fathers need to be more engaged in the centre and have provided a range of activities, such as Dig It With Dad to encourage them to get more involved, not only within the work of the centre but also to develop and build bonds with their children. The centre has established strong and effective links with the local Traveller community and has worked tirelessly to win their trust. This is evident in the number of parents in this community who have been supported to gain formal qualifications in basic food hygiene as a result of attending a Cook and Stay session in the centre.

Senior leaders and the federated advisory board have a clear view of the strengths and areas for development across the centre and this is reflected in the development plan. Although the centre evaluates its work in relation to national and local indicators, systems to monitor the longer term impact on improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged are not yet fully secure.

Good provision and outcomes, coupled with sound understanding of the centre's areas for development demonstrate the centres good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further analyse data to demonstrate how the work of the centre is improving outcomes and narrowing the gap for the most disadvantaged groups in the reach area.
- Ensure that more users from the reach area effectively contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Because of the effective work of the children's centre, the health outcomes for children from all groups, including those who are most vulnerable, are outstanding. One of the key issues affecting health in the area is infant mortality. Parents demonstrate improving knowledge of the risks associated with sleeping with their babies and learn how, by breastfeeding and stopping smoking, they can help to improve their baby's life chances. Initiatives such as the Give Me Room to Breathe leaflet, given to every new parent in the reach area, and the well attended From Bumps Birth and Beyond course have helped to reduce infant mortality rates in the district by half. Teenage pregnancy rates in the area are one of the highest in the country. Support for teenage mothers is exceptionally well implemented. The centre empowers these women to improve their individual and family circumstances and make a real difference to their lives. The centre is currently offering advice and support to 12 young mothers, of which five have already returned to education. Support does not stop there. Alive 'n' Kickin', a weekly group, helps to educate them in child development in a supportive environment they feel comfortable to attend. Clear advice, help and support are given to educate them about sexual health, including contraception advice, which is helping to reduce the potential of a second pregnancy while they are still at a young age. Parents and carers develop a good understanding of how to provide a healthy diet, through a wide range of cookery and healthy eating courses offered at the centre and the satellite sites.

The centre is effective in ensuring that parents and children keep themselves safe and free from harm. This is demonstrated by a wide-range of preventative measures and advice including the distribution of fire safety items such as smoke alarms. Observations of activities and discussions with users indicate that they feel safe when attending the many activities and services provided by the centre. As one parent commented, 'I feel safer here than I do at home.'

The centre provides a good range of activities which are developed extremely well in partnership with other agencies and professionals. Uptake of all courses is high and attendance is sustained. 'The session on child development allows you to understand parenting skills, share knowledge, learn from each other and the staff.' said a parent about the Stay and Play session. Baby Club is extremely popular: new mothers have the opportunity to socialise and gain an understating of how they can help to stimulate their baby's development. This was demonstrated when a large group of mums and their babies were observed enjoying a music session with My Mini Maestro, dancing and moving in time with music. As a consequence, mums are learning wonderful ways for children to express their emotions and at the same time bonding with their baby.

Users are making a positive contribution to the community in a variety of ways because of the encouragement from centre staff. For instance, increasing numbers are volunteering regularly to help with centre activities. There are opportunities for

parents to express their views but this is mainly through evaluating the courses they attend. A new parent forum has started to engage some users to influence the work of the centre by offering ideas and suggestions, but the limited representation means the views of the whole community are not fully reflected. As a consequence, the voice of all users is not being heard. Parents are encouraged to understand children's behaviour with increasing numbers of families accessing behaviour management training. Children develop strong relationships within the centre and nursery and show respect, care and concern for others.

The Mind Body Future course is designed to help users build confidence and learn new skills in order for them to return back to work, or in some cases start work for the first time. Users attending the courses report feeling empowered, having increased confidence, increased self-esteem and improved communication skills. Whilst limited data is available to show how much of an impact this course is having on achieving its aims, early indications show that the number of volunteers working in the centre and in the community is increasing. This programme, in partnership with HomeStart, is helping parents build better lives for their children as several of these individuals have moved into paid employment and some are attending further education courses.

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	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 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	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 provides good quality services which are helping to improve outcomes for families who attend the centre and for those who receive more targeted support in their homes. The care, guidance and support for users are outstanding. This is because of the extremely safe and nurturing environment created in the centre and due to the first-rate outreach work that is successfully fostering considerable improvements in the well-being of users. The strong outreach team is very well respected in the community. 'You can talk to the staff about anything, they are always visible and we get to develop good relationships.' is a typical comment by

users of the centre. The free counselling service on offer at the centre enables parents, who are in times of crisis, to talk to a trained person about issues that are affecting their mental health or well-being. As a parent who was particularly appreciative of this service put it, 'There is always a hand to reach out to if you need it. I am so glad it was there for me.' This service is particularly valuable for helping those who feel they have nowhere else to turn.

The centre has forged strong and effective links with the early years setting. Children make good progress in their learning as activities in the nursery and crèche are well chosen and stimulating. There are increasing opportunities for parents and children to play and learn together and a range of good information and advice is given to parents on all aspects of child development. Staff in both the nursery and crèche are very aware of the next steps in learning for every child and record these well in individual learning journals. However, senior leaders are not complacent and recognise that the next challenge is to look more closely at the Early Years Foundation Stage profile outcomes and gaps in attainment for all children aged five who live in the reach area. The centre has been instrumental in forming the Early Years Cluster meetings which include local providers from the private, voluntary and maintained sectors. The group's aim is to share practice and expertise with a clear focus on narrowing the gap for all children regardless of circumstance and background.

There is exceptional cross-referral between the centre and health workers to meet users' needs. Early notification forms in the midwifery booking packs and 12 week ante-natal appointments taking place in the centre enable centre staff to identify need very early in a family's pregnancy. All key partners are fully involved with the centre. An internet link is situated in the centre that gives users a direct link to weekly job vacancies. However, the analysis of how effectively this link is impacting on moving users off benefits and into work is not yet fully secure.

The centre is committed to ensuring that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive specialist support on site and are fully included in the centre. The centre's disability champion and centre manager are dedicated in looking for courses and activities that can significantly transform the lives and opportunities for these children. An example of this is the Lego Club which engages the interests of children with autism whilst encouraging them to build on their skills. One of the aims of the club is also to support the parents and siblings of children with autism.

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
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How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management are consistently good at all levels and excellent in some aspects. There is clear, inspirational leadership from the centre manager: her commitment, energy and focus on improving life chances for all families in the reach area are clear for all to see. 'She is really forward thinking, a real team player, fully committed to partnership working.' is one of the positive comments that was expressed about her. The centre offers outstanding value for money. The centre manager acknowledges that her staff are the centre's most valuable resource. She has developed an enthusiastic and talented team that has benefited from a thoughtful investment in staff training and opportunities for sharing expertise. All staff, including administrators, are trained in all aspects of care and early education. This is a real strength, not only within the centre but also for the wider community. All staff work closely with local schools, other children's centres and key partners, with a clear aim of narrowing the gap in outcomes between families who do well and those who do not.

Partnerships are of a high quality because a strong belief in collaborative working is at the heart of the centre's ethos. Expectations are high and, as a result, everyone at the centre works hard to ensure that what is provided meets the needs of the local and wider community. All agencies speak highly of the centre and demonstrate a commitment to working together. They confirm that the centre successfully promotes integrated support for families and that outcomes are generally good, and sometimes outstanding. As one partner commented, 'It's a very easy centre to work with.' The priority that leaders give to working in partnership with social care and health to provide support when there are concerns about the well-being and safety of children and adults is a true strength of the centre.

The centre knows its users well and can demonstrate its success on an activity basis because of regular evaluations by users and centre staff. However, it does not use all the available information from within the centre and key partners sufficiently to demonstrate fully the impact it is having on improving outcomes for individuals and those families who are vulnerable and whose life chances may be at risk.

Safeguarding is given high priority by all staff. Excellent recording ensures children and families who give cause for concerns are exceptionally well monitored. Very detailed policies and procedures are in place to safeguard users; these are reviewed by all staff and key partners on a regular basis. The centre provides a very safe environment that is fully appreciated by all users and partner agencies.

The centre successfully promotes equality and diversity. The inclusion of all children and families is at the heart of its vision. The centre ensures that the Common Assessment Framework is used effectively so that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive the services that they are entitled to. Positive

images and resources, reflecting all members of the community, highlight the centre's determination to reach out to groups who may be subject to discrimination.

The centre's leadership team share plans, progress and financial information with the federated advisory board at quarterly meetings. These meetings provide helpful updates on centre activity and opportunities for key partners to discuss current issues and plan future developments. Users do have some impact on individual activities; however, few are board members and they are insufficiently engaged at a strategic level to influence the centre's work.

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	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
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	1
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	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	2

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

Childcare is provided through Small Wonders Too private day nursery. The Ofsted report for the nursery from June 2010 judged the childcare provision as good and was taken into account for this inspection. This report can be viewed at www.ofsted.gov.uk

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 Riverbank Children's Centre on 3-4 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall with some outstanding features. We were pleased to see that many of you recognise this and are prepared to travel to use the services that the centre provides.

Those of you we spoke to told us that you enjoy using Riverbank and that it has made a positive difference to your lives. We were also impressed by case studies that show how many lives have been transformed through links with the centre. You told us that you find staff at the centre very friendly and welcoming. We agree with this and find the centre to be a very caring place that meets the needs of all of its users well.

The centre is successful for many reasons. Those who lead and manage the centre know what they are doing. They have high expectations of themselves and what the centre should be doing to help you. This also applies to all staff, including those who come from outside to lead sessions in the main centre and elsewhere. The centre is working exceptionally well with a wide-range of partners. There is a real sense that everyone wants you to succeed and do well. The centre has been particularly successful in ensuring that children and adults have every opportunity to learn about how to lead a healthy life. The centre provides good support for children who attend the private nursery linked with the centre and at the crèche, which you use regularly to help you attend courses in the centre. The centre offers a wide range of activities and support groups. It is clear the centre is doing a great deal to help you. In order to develop Riverbank further we have asked the centre to further analyse the data it collects so that it is able to demonstrate this more clearly.

The advisory board are involved in the management of the centre, but we feel that it could do better and make sure that more parents' and carers' views are included in centre decisions. We know the centre is keen for you to get more involved and we hope some of you take up this opportunity.

Thank you again for your help

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