

Inspection report for Rainbow Children's Centre

Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	362545
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Joyce Cox

Centre governance	Milton Keynes Local Authority
Centre leader	Kristianne Gray
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	Pepper Hill Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not 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 parents, staff, partners and members of the parents' forum and advisory board. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including case studies and the centre's and partners' evaluations of the impact of their work.

Information about the centre

Rainbow Children's Centre was designated in 2007 and opened in 2008. It is a Phase Two purpose built and government funded Sure Start centre attached to Pepper Hill Primary School in Bradville. It serves 735 children under five years of age in its reach area. The centre has a reach area which includes the six estates of Pennyland, Blue Bridge, Bancroft, Bancroft Park, Downhead Park and Neath Hill. These estates have differing levels of need and challenges and the centre focuses its support and delivers 'Stay and Play' sessions in Bradville and Neath Hill, both of which have features of significant deprivation. Half of the children who attend the drop in sessions have significant delay in their social and communication skills. Just under a quarter of the children come from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The Rainbow Centre consists of a large main room and outside play area, a medium sized activity room for adult education and a small consultation room for one-to-one family support, counselling and health services. Rainbow has recently taken on the Wylie Drop In, an adjacent building, previously left vacant by the parish council, in order to deliver UKOnline and Adult Education Sessions. The centre also operates out of a community annexe at Brooksward Primary School in Neath Hill. This provides an outreach location easily accessed by families living in Neath Hill, Pennyland and Downhead Park. The centre has achieved full core offer status by working with Together for Children. It offers a full range of family support services including, early

education and child development sessions; health services; outreach sessions; home visiting; employment and support service; and a programme of adult education and training. Arrangements for the governance of the centre include the local authority, the advisory board and the parents' forum.

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

Rainbow is a good children's centre which serves the families who live in its target area well. It has several noteworthy features. The strong leadership and direction provided by the manager and the senior family worker inspires all staff so that together they successfully improve the life chances for young children and their families. Users benefit from an extensive range of good services that have been carefully personalised to meet the needs of individuals and families. The one exception to this is the lack of breastfeeding support. Nevertheless, parents feel extremely fortunate to have this high quality provision on their doorstep. They are all extremely happy with the centre, saying, 'Staff are so friendly that they don't actually feel like staff!' and 'I don't know what I'd do without this centre.'

Safeguarding is given an exceptionally high priority; recruitment and vetting procedures are extremely robust. The centre has been instrumental in removing the barriers for many children so that they are well prepared for learning when they enter the Early Years Foundation Stage settings in the community. For example, activities such as language and play designed to help parents and carers to interact more with their children have been very successful and many children with previous limited early language skills have made considerable gains in acquiring vocabulary. Staff excel at encouraging babies and young children to interact through exciting and inviting play activities such as the popular 'messy play' sessions. However, there is currently no easy way to capture children's achievement in the six areas of learning.

The centre is at the heart of the community. Users really appreciate the many opportunities they have to influence and shape the services so that they meet their needs. For example, 'Mellow Dads' activities has resulted in a much greater engagement of fathers in the centre's work and also in being better able to

support their families at home. The centre does not yet provide information in languages other than English, which makes it hard for families from minority ethnic backgrounds to complete questionnaires or access documents. However, users who want to embark on adult training are well supported by the centre. One parent attending the UK Online computer training felt that she had moved from being an 'absolute beginner to training other users' and stated how much this had raised her own self-esteem and confidence. The provision is good and improving rapidly because a hardworking team of very well-trained workers match their thorough understanding of the community and its families very well to the services they offer and the partners they work with. One highly innovative feature of their work is the effective procedure they apply to evaluate and monitor routinely the impact of all services and activities so that they are constantly being improved. For example volunteers have clear personal development plans that enable them to develop skills and gain employment with the assistance of Jobcentre Plus. Parenting courses and a range of provision to enhance family relationships and children's play and communication skills from birth have high levels of attendance. Users are empowered to improve their individual and family circumstances and make a real difference to their lives. Information from case studies shows that families, especially in times of difficulty, have received very good support from a wide range of services within, or coordinated by, the centre. The number of users accessing this high-quality support has increased rapidly in the past two years as more families attend the centre. Consequently, the centre demonstrates a good capacity to sustain improvement. The advisory board holds the centre to account well by championing the needs of the community and ensuring services are effective.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with local midwives to train experienced mothers to support others with breastfeeding.
- Provide information and questionnaires in different languages so that users with limited English can access services more easily.
- Increase ways to capture how well children are developing in all the six areas of learning.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The effective promotion of healthy eating in sessions such as 'Big Cook, Little Cook' is resulting in a reduction in obesity rates amongst users. Children enjoy healthy snacks and fruit at play and development sessions, which sets a good example to parents and carers. Users were shocked to discover that fruit juice contained as much acid as Coca Cola when they had a presentation from oral health practitioners. They now fully understand why milk and water are the only drinks offered to babies and young children at the centre. Improving trends in smoking cessation and in emotional well-being amongst children and users are a direct result of stronger links

between centre staff and health professionals such as Relate, inter-agency working and carefully targeted individual support. Strong partnerships with Very Young Carers has resulted in children having greatly increased knowledge about how to raise the alarm in the event of the emergency services being needed. However, there is currently no support provided for mothers who are breastfeeding and staff are actively seeking ways to remedy this.

Children are helped to learn about behaving safely and sensibly in a way they understand. Good numbers of parents attend safety training, resulting in much improved levels of safety awareness. A parent who had attended pediatric first aid training vividly described how she had to put theory into practice when her own child choked. She said the training had given her the confidence to remain calm and she successfully removed the obstruction. Children at risk and those who are looked after are well cared for. Their needs are carefully monitored through highly effective multi-professional working and detailed record keeping. Children enjoy using the centre facilities and during the inspection were observed having a great time using the high quality resources indoors and outdoors. Children are exceptionally well behaved and all users and centre staff treat each other with respect and consideration at all times. Users make an outstanding contribution to decision making as the parents' forum has regular sessions where they are told the centre's budget and then have to plan a week's activities, taking account of finances and staff and room availability.

'Getting ready for school' sessions ensure older children are well prepared for the next stage of their learning. Children settle well into their nursery classes and make much better progress than they would if they had not benefitted from the centre's services. This is because they have good support from skilled adult play partners who encourage them to communicate and mix with others. High quality resources both indoors and outdoors enable children to happily select their own activities and they learn to concentrate for increasingly longer periods of time.

Children attending 'Stay and Play' and other services such as the 'Babies, books and rhymes' and messy play sessions are very settled and comfortable. This is because adults working with them are smiley and very approachable and provide excellent levels of care. Babies and young toddlers at the drop in sessions make considerable gains in all the areas of learning and especially in their communication skills as they quickly learn more new words and songs.

Personal and social outcomes are good, and many children and parents grow in confidence as a result of attending activities at the centre. Caring staff effectively build trust with families and parents of the youngest children. They are especially receptive to those who may be struggling emotionally and activities like 'Stay and Play' provide parents with valuable opportunities to make friends and feel less isolated. The contribution of users towards the centre and the local community is good. Parents' views are valued and used well to develop services further. There are good opportunities for adult users to follow pathways to work, for example support in claiming benefits, job applications and attendance at numeracy and literacy training courses. Increasing numbers of users are attending the courses provided. Regular courses effectively support parents in developing their skills in a range of

areas such as parenting, baby massage and computing. One parent was so successfully mentored and sponsored through baby massage training that she went on to set up her own baby massage business in partnership with Enterprise Gateway.

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	2
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	1
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

Assessment is used effectively to identify adult users' needs and promote purposeful learning. However, most of the information and questionnaires about the centre are in English; consequently it is difficult to assess the needs of families from British minority ethnic groups. The centre has effective strategies for overcoming this such as bi-lingual support but it would clearly be an advantage to all for written material to be available in different languages. Staff make good use of local knowledge and data of good quality to identify specific needs and inform the development and extension of services for users. For example parental surveys indicated that users would like to have opportunities to use computers. Centre staff wasted no time in acquiring a nearby centre to provide computer classes. Through its own evaluation, the centre has been targeting, successfully, families who are harder to reach within the White British community, so the number using the centre is increasing. Few fathers were taking the opportunity to use the centre. Determined action has changed this picture and many more are using the centre. For example, 'Mellow Dads' gives them the opportunity to meet together to play sport. The centre provides a full range of services to meet the core offer and adapts them to meet the changing needs of the community. The centre is successful in engaging families, lone parents and young carers, and pregnant teenagers across the community. Effective interagency working linked to local knowledge and other data is having an excellent impact on safeguarding children and supporting vulnerable families. Staff use a variety of media to promote purposeful learning. They recognise children's and families' achievements in different ways such as the Celebration Tree, thereby boosting confidence and promoting greater participation. Attractive scrapbooks made by staff and parents provide a valuable picture of children's enjoyment but do not give a detailed view of how well children are developing in the six areas of learning.

Common Assessment Framework procedures are followed carefully and fully engage a wide range of professionals through frequent and effectively organised multiprofessional meetings. The range of services has continued to increase and participation rates are improving steadily in many activities. Furthermore, outreach work is becoming increasingly cohesive due to effective integration between professionals such as health visitors and community workers.

Relationships between staff and users are very positive and these build a real sense of trust between all parties. Staff are exceptionally caring and work hard to provide a very secure and nurturing environment within the centre. The outstanding support makes a considerable difference to all parents, carers and children. In times of crisis, families feel totally confident in turning to the centre and are very well supported by the whole team.

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

The arrangements for governance and accountability are understood well by the local authority, staff and parents. Strong links between the local authority, the advisory body, parents' forum and staff mean that ambitions for the development of the centre are high. These strong links enhance long-term strategic planning, especially in relation to sustainability, development plans and service provision. Day-to-day management is good. Responsibilities are effectively delegated to centre staff. The centre manager and the senior family support worker demonstrate high expectations of staff, who display a strong sense of teamwork, and are highly self-motivated and resourceful. A very good start has been made in using data to inform improvement planning, set targets and develop the range of services further. Key priorities for improvement have been carefully identified and shared with a wide range of partners and users. The monitoring of users' outcomes is developing well.

Self-evaluation effectively engages a wide range of staff, other agencies and users. This is used well to identify areas for further improvement within a comprehensive development plan. The effectiveness of this is clearly evident in improving outcomes and the many positive comments from users. Strong partnerships exist between the centre and a range of other services such as Milton Keynes Council of Voluntary Organisations and the local Community Development Network. The centre has run

joint projects with community health workers and provided healthy lifestyle guides, smoking cessation workers, community nutritionists, oral health workers and a variety of other NHS-based staff. These partnerships enable centre staff to keep up to date with both local and national projects and initiatives whilst also sharing good practice and learning new skills. Resources are effectively matched to the needs of users to provide good value for money.

Equality and disability legislation is fully implemented and all necessary policies are in place. Accessibility to the centre's facilities is good and effective levels of support are provided for individual users with disability and/or short-term mental illness. Staff tailor support services to the needs of individuals well. For example, good levels of support are provided for those parents with poor literacy skills. Safeguarding has the highest priority; for example, children on the child protection register have experienced great improvements to their well-being because of the high quality of the outreach partnership work.

Centre staff encourage the wider community to engage with services and use their views to develop the range of provision in a range of highly skilful ways. For example, they devised a programme of advisory board training style workshops to increase parents' and carers' knowledge and understanding of how the centre works and how staff have to prioritise services. Sessions included looking at what a children's centre is; what it does and why it is important; what the Early Years Foundation Stage is and what the constraints are when planning services. This was all delivered through games, bingo, a quiz, charades and a 'prizes for programmes' project. Parents told inspectors that they now understand the commissioning process and budgeting and say they would find it very frustrating planning for the community's needs on a limited budget. They now clearly realise how services are prioritised and why staff cannot run each and every course they request. Many of their ideas have been incorporated into the centre's calendar, for which they now feel a real 'ownership'. The manager has shared this high quality work with staff in other centres in Milton Keynes.

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	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	2

adults	
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

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 the Rainbow Children's Centre on 20–21 October 2010. We judged the centre as good overall, with some outstanding features. This centre is at the heart of the community and is relied upon for the well-being of large numbers of people. The very strong centre leadership of the manager and her dedicated team has provided families with a wide range of good services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs.

People who use the centre are now very much better at staying safe and healthy and providing for their families. You told us that you think that the centre is a very safe and welcoming place for you and your children. Inspectors agree with this view and think that staff work extremely well to ensure the safety of all who use the centre. The centre is also good at helping children in need to be safe by working very closely with other agencies such as the health service and social services.

Many of you are working very hard to improve their skills. The children are also well catered for. This means that they settle well into the local nurseries and make much better progress than they would if they had not benefitted from the centre's services. Inspectors think that with the centre's encouragement, many people now make a good contribution to its services and the life of the community. It was really good to

speak to so many confident parents who took a pride in their achievements. These ranged from being more able to deal with their own and their children's problems to running their own businesses and training other parents.

The care, guidance and support that families and children receive are excellent. This is because staff are very successful at helping all parents to decide how to improve their lives and then making sure that they access the right services to do this. Parents also appreciated that there is always someone to help when they need advice. Many who have felt isolated and alone with their problems have made friends as a result of the centre's work. The centre staff and their partner agencies have provided families with a very wide range of varied services that cater for all needs.

We have asked the centre to make three improvements. We would like it to work with local midwives to train experienced mothers to support other mothers with breastfeeding. We feel parents and carers who do not speak English would benefit from documents and questionnaires in their home languages and we have suggested that centre staff and parents could develop those attractive scrapbooks you make to show how your children are progressing.

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