

Inspection report for The Brambles Children's Centre

Local authority	Portsmouth
Inspection number	362599
Inspection dates	29–30 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Susan Mann HMI

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Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	The Brambles Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Brambles Nursery School and Children's Centre URN EY307547

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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 additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with parents, staff, and representatives from front-line partners including the health service, Home-Start and the Pre-school Learning Alliance. They also met with staff from the local authority who are linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The Brambles Children's Centre was designated in 2005, and is run by the Governing Body in conjunction with the local authority. It shares the same site as The Brambles Nursery School and is adjacent to Goldsmith Infant School. Also on site is the Brambles maintained nursery and childcare provision which offers 60 day care places for children aged between six months and under five years of age. This is open for 51 weeks each year. Brambles has a linked site at Francis Lodge, Heidelberg Road, Portsmouth and some sessions and activities take place there.

The centre serves a disadvantaged area in Central Southsea, very close to the boundary of Charles Dickens ward which is one of the 20% most deprived wards in England. The local population is mostly White British, with smaller percentages of other minority ethnic groups including Bengali. The centre is close to the most ethnically diverse ward in the city, where there are a high proportion of residents from Indian and Bangladeshi groups. In the area served by the centre 19.2% of children aged from birth to four years live in workless households and 22% of families with dependent children are claiming benefits. The majority of children start at the nursery and day care with skills and levels of development generally below those expected for their age.

The centre offers all elements of the core offer and provides the full range of integrated services for children and their families. There is a range of health, social care, family support and education services operating from the centre with associated professionals and centre staff.

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 Brambles Children’s Centre provides a caring and safe environment for all families and children who use it. Staff relationships with users of the centre are good and there is a cheerful and welcoming atmosphere throughout. Adults attending the centre appreciate the services it provides and state that these have a positive impact on their lives. One said the centre ‘is amazing’ and another expressed the view that ‘the staff are all very friendly’.

The governing body provides sound governance for the centre in conjunction with the local authority. The headteacher and centre coordinator work well together to provide suitable management to ensure the day-to-day running of the centre is smooth and efficient. The centre is targeting its services sufficiently well to meet most users’ needs. The management team and the local authority have identified that there needs to be more accurate targeting of services to families who will gain the most benefit from them. Self-evaluation is fairly accurate, although it is not yet securely based on evidence from data to indicate reliable trends. Some strategic initiatives to develop these areas have just begun. However, these processes are yet to be embedded sufficiently well to be effective. This inhibits the centre’s current capacity for improvement, but these recent initiatives clearly indicate that the centre has made a promising start to addressing areas of development.

A key strength of the centre is its inclusive approach, which permeates all aspects of the provision to promote equality and diversity very well. There are a number of families from minority ethnic groups who speak English as an additional language. They are given very good support through the employment of bilingual workers and the use of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service to enable them to develop good levels of communication to promote successful interaction. The welfare and safety of families and children attending Brambles is given a high priority by staff. Procedures for safeguarding children’s welfare are good and families needing extra help are cared for and supported well through collaborative working between the centre and external agencies. All staff undergo appropriate checks on their suitability to work with children and recruitment procedures are good.

On the whole, partnerships are strong and users benefit from a wide range of services to meet their needs. The centre works effectively with health visitor services and most other areas of health provision to promote improved outcomes for families. Partnerships with some agencies are not yet operating sufficiently well to have an impact on the lives of users of the centre. For example, at present there is limited collaboration with Job Centre Plus. The centre makes some efforts to address this shortfall in services through advertising 'hot jobs' on the centre notice board and providing support for some users to progress into training and employment in childcare. However, there is not enough consistent support given to users by the centre to support their efforts to seek further education and employment.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve systems for collecting and analysing information on how well the centre is used by those most in need of its services in order to target services more accurately.
- Improve the effectiveness of self-evaluation through the regular and rigorous analysis of information and data.
- Develop partnerships and extend opportunities for users to access information and support regarding future employment and training.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The services offered by the centre are popular and groups have high levels of attendance. Families from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures come together at the centre and users appreciate the friendly and inclusive atmosphere. Parents say that coming to the centre helps them to meet others and stops them from feeling isolated. One parent commented that at the centre parents are 'accepted, welcome, regardless of who you are'.

Outcomes are at least satisfactory in all areas. Users complete evaluations of groups that provide a useful guide to determine the success and impact of services provided. However, a lack of focused evaluation of services and who is using them means there is insufficient evidence to establish the strengths of all outcomes. Nevertheless, families are given useful information and opportunities to help improve outcomes for themselves and their families.

There are some effective groups and partnerships that promote healthy outcomes. The centre encourages health lifestyles through a variety of classes on topics such as weaning and healthy eating. Centre staff have produced a booklet called 'Feeding a Hungry Family' that explains simple and cost-effective ways to eat healthily. Parents report that these ideas are helpful. The on-site counsellor and suitable links with health visitor services ensure that emotional and physical health is suitably fostered.

Parents using the services state that they feel that they and their children are safe at

the centre because the management and staff have built trusting relationships with users. Safeguarding procedures are good and the premises are safe and secure. Children and adults have good opportunities to learn how to stay safe, such as through sessions about fire safety at home and parenting advice. Children on child protection plans benefit from well-coordinated partnership working to improve their outcomes. Children and adults with additional needs or who are vulnerable are well cared for at the centre because staff take time to get to know each user and meet their individual needs well, through groups at the centre or through effective outreach work. The Common Assessment Framework process is well embedded and is used very effectively to support families who are vulnerable owing to their circumstances.

Stay and Play sessions at the centre are well attended. Children have fun participating in interesting activities. Parents are encouraged and supported in becoming fully involved in their child’s play-based learning. Many families benefit from the good quality extended childcare and nursery provision that is onsite and children attending make good progress from their starting points. The supported childcare programme ensures that those children in most need can attend the provision. Adults learn about a wide range of parenting skills, including how to help their child with learning.

Children behave well and all at the centre show a high level of respect for one another. Many users say they greatly appreciate the cheerful atmosphere. All users of the centre benefit from the very inclusive environment. Good partnership working and outreach work encourages many to visit the centre and a number of different ethnic groups are represented well among the users of the centre. Some users are governors and are engaged in the governance of the centre, ensuring that user needs inform management decisions. Users are able to communicate their views about the services offered by the centre through evaluations and questionnaires, as well as through discussion with the centre headteacher or coordinator.

Adults receive some assistance in looking for work, although this is limited. Some case studies suggest that users benefit from their engagement at the centre, and a few parents have gone on to train and work in childcare following their involvement in centre activities. Children make encouraging progress in developing skills for the future as a result of the early years nursery provision, and activities such as the Come and Sing group, making good progress in the aspects of communication, language and literacy.

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	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in	3

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	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre management knows its users well through local knowledge and day-to-day contact rather than through information supported by data and analysis. Assessment and evaluation are generally used satisfactorily to ensure services meet the majority of individual user's needs and the centre can demonstrate some improvement in outcomes. Groups within the community are accessing a suitable range of services at the centre. However, systems are not yet sufficiently robust to demonstrate that all potential users are being reached. Therefore, although the quality of outreach and other services offered are good, the centre is unable to identify whether the needs of all potential and actual users are met well.

The centre promotes purposeful learning and development for adults and children who attend the provision. Sessions observed by inspectors were of good quality. For example, the Stay and Play sessions and the First Time Parents groups had many learning opportunities as well as providing a good social forum. Staff are skilled and they work hard to meet individual needs. The activities provided are presented and resourced well so as to be enjoyable and satisfying for all users. For example, a session on dental health was well received by the Stay and Play group. One parent commented that the session was 'very informative and imaginative' in helping her to learn about how to avoid tooth decay for her children. The quality of care, guidance and support offered to young children, parents and other users of the centre is a strong feature of Brambles. Families receive a high level of support and they are well supported in times of personal difficulty. One parent attending a group stated, 'I feel comfortable here. Staff are professional and welcoming.'

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	2
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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Leaders and managers at all levels are working hard to improve the effectiveness of the children's centre and they have regular support from the local authority to do this. The centre management regularly receives advice on strategic improvement, for example, and has recently received useful training on evaluating outcomes for families at the centre.

The present arrangements for governance are satisfactory. Governors are supportive and enthusiastic in their involvement with the centre. The governing body sub-group for the children's centre is in the process of evolving to become the advisory board. Almost all partners are fully engaged in delivering the required range of services and centre evaluation takes appropriate account of these when planning improvements. There is sufficient evaluation of services through questionnaires and user feedback. The leadership of the centre recognises that the current processes of targeting and evaluating services are not sufficiently detailed to determine the full impact these have on improving the Every Child Matters outcomes for all users. Systems have recently been introduced to improve these important areas of the centre's work. Value for money is satisfactory because without a more robust use of data, the centre cannot be certain it is meeting the needs of those groups most in need.

In general, the partnerships with other services deliver a cohesive provision. Links with health are effective to delivery of the expected range of services. There is good provision of universal services by the link nursery nurse, such as help with nutrition and toilet training. Furthermore, there is evidence of good prioritisation of health partnership resources to ensure the most vulnerable receive a good level of support. The centre fosters good working relationships with a wide range of services such as the Pre-school Learning Alliance, childminders, the National Childbirth Trust and Home Start in order to promote better outcomes for users. Partnership with parents is good. Inspectors observed strong mutual relationships between parents and centre staff. Some parents are involved with the Parents' Forum to provide ideas and feedback about the centre.

Equality and diversity are promoted well. The users of the centre represent many groups from the local community and staff address possible barriers to attendance effectively. For those users who speak English as an additional language the support is good. There is good support from the bilingual staff, and from external agencies and women who attend the Multi-Cultural group appreciate this support. In the recent past the centre has offered access to classes in English for speakers of other languages, which users have valued greatly. These classes have ceased temporarily owing to funding difficulties, but the centre is actively seeking a replacement course to meet current users' needs. Children and adults with disabilities can use the centre with ease because the centre is adapted to ensure easy accessibility.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. High regard is given to inter-agency working

to promote and safeguard children's welfare and these processes are effective. Senior staff are experienced in early intervention to protect children. Managers and staff at the centre demonstrate a high level of care for the emotional and physical well-being of each child.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
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	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

The maintained nursery school and early years provision were last inspected in June 2008. It was not inspected fully as part of this children's centre inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected The Brambles Children's Centre on 29–30 September 2010. During this time we talked with parents, governors, staff, partners and members of the local authority linked to the children's centre. We also observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall, with some good features.

Those of you we spoke to told us that you enjoy using Brambles and that it has made a positive difference to your lives. You also told us that you find staff at the centre very friendly and welcoming. We agree with this and find the centre to be a caring place that meets the needs of all its users well. The governing body are involved in the management of the centre, and they make sure that parents' and carers' views are included in centre decisions.

The headteacher and centre coordinator ensure that staff provide good levels of care, guidance and support for all users of the centre. We were particularly impressed at how well families from minority ethnic groups are supported, especially those who speak English as an additional language. Also, the centre works well with its partners to deliver services such as health. The centre is good at making sure that children and families are safe when at the setting, and children are protected well.

In order to develop Brambles further, we have asked the centre and the local authority to improve the way they decide how to target their services, so that those families most in need can be better helped. The centre also needs to evaluate the services it offers more thoroughly so that they can make changes and try new ideas, so as to be of as much benefit to families using them as possible. They have already started doing this. We have also asked the centre to offer more help with those of you who would like to find new employment or further training by providing more help with searching for the right training courses and applying for jobs.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak to us in person or on the telephone to share your thoughts about the centre.

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