

Inspection report for Rothwell Victoria Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	365837
Inspection dates	15–16 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Sheelagh Barnes AI

Centre governance	The Governing Body of Rothwell Victoria Infant School
Centre leader	Fiona Close
Date of previous inspection	This is the first inspection of the centre
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Linked school if applicable	Rothwell Victoria Infant School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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 head of the centre, representatives of the local authority, parents, outreach workers, Treshum Institute, childminders, health workers, and family support workers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

This is a phase two children's centre that provides the full core offer for children and families who live in the reach area. The centre was designated in March 2008, services started in April 2009 and the centre achieved full core offer status in February 2010. It is funded by local authority monies. The local authority has delegated governance of the centre to the governing body of the school with which it shares a site. The centre opens from 9.00am to 5.00pm, 50 weeks per year. Some services run on site, but there is also outreach provision from sites at Loddington, Mawsley, Broughton and Pytchley. There is no commissioned childcare. The centre has links with Kettering Borough Council, Jobcentre Plus, Community Law Services, local childminders, health visitors, midwives and Treshum Institute. It is fully accessible to disabled parents, carers and children.

The area is within 70% of the most deprived in the country. The centre has no data on the proportion of families where no one is in work in the reach area later than for 2008, when the figure was slightly below the national average. It has no data on the proportion of families with children under five in receipt of benefits other than those in workless households. Children's attainment on entry to early years' provision is broadly in line with that expected for their age. There are currently no children with a child protection plan or looked-after children in the reach area that the centre is aware of. Three children have been assessed under the Common Assessment Framework.

The great majority of families in the area are of White British background, although there are growing numbers of families from minority ethnic groups. A number of families of Traveller background live in residential accommodation in 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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

In the short time since the centre opened, it has developed steadily and provides satisfactorily for the children and families in the reach area. The accommodation is bright, attractive and maintained well. Staff and users share a sense of pride in their centre which is evident throughout the day. Despite having limited space on the main site, a wide range of activities is provided that celebrates diversity. Staff are well organised and change the use of spaces during the day swiftly and efficiently. Maximum use is made of the available space. Leaders have a vision to develop provision further, including developing outreach provision in a number of local village settings in the rural areas to the south of the town.

The organisation of safeguarding and child protection is good. This is given high focus by leaders, and site security is rigorous. Parents, carers and children who attend feel safe and comfortable in the setting. They enjoy coming and praise the hard work of staff who make the centre so welcoming. The centre's leader seeks the views of its users regularly and acts upon them. However, relatively few are involved, as yet, in a formal manner in driving the direction of development of the centre. The centre's leaders are aware of this, and have highlighted involving users further as a target for improvement in the current development plan.

The capacity to improve is satisfactory. There is a strong commitment to continuously refine and develop procedures and policies and a good understanding that, although much has been achieved, there is still considerably more to do. Development plans are satisfactory but not sharp enough to bring rapid improvements. Targets are stated in general terms, which makes measuring success difficult. The governors keep a satisfactory overview of the centre's work, but are not challenging the centre sufficiently regularly and rigorously to meet demanding

targets. The local authority review the centres work regularly, but not always with sufficient rigour. Staff development and training are organised well to meet staff needs and to ensure that they are well equipped to support users.

The centre is provided with some useful data from a range of sources, including the local authority and health department. The range of this data is increasing each year. This enables the centre to start to establish a baseline evaluation of the needs of families in the area and to ensure equality of access. However, some evidence, which whilst not essential, would be helpful to the centre leader when planning sessions to ensure the centre meets the greatest needs in the area, has not yet been forthcoming. For example, the centre has no data on the proportions of new babies born in the area and whether or not their parents have chosen to have them immunised. Thus, it is impossible for the centre to make any sensible evaluation of whether it is worthwhile to develop a programme to emphasise to prospective parents the importance of immunisation. Similarly, a number of agencies who deliver support for families through the centre do not regularly supply the centre with outcomes or success rates. The literacy and numeracy course leaders share pass rates with the centre so that these can be celebrated. This enables the centre to evaluate the effectiveness of the centre's input in terms of providing accommodation and support staffing. However, other agencies do not all pass on on-going information, such as the proportions of parents who go on to gain interviews or work or who access benefits through provision delivered at the centre. Because of this, evaluating effectiveness and establishing priorities is made harder. It is difficult for leaders to measure exactly the impact of the centre's work on the health and welfare of the families they serve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The relevant authority should ensure the centre has as much key data as possible from all partners in order to:
 - establish a more accurate understanding of all vulnerable groups within the reach area
 - evaluate the impact of the actions taken to support these groups.
- Improve the monitoring by the local authority and improve the regularity and rigour of monitoring by the advisory board.
- Increase users' participation in governance.
- Ensure improvement plans contain measurable challenging targets against which the centre's workers, leaders and managers can measure the effectiveness of their work.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Despite limited access to outdoor play areas and the lack of space to provide cookery

sessions about healthy eating, the centre provides satisfactorily to ensure children and users develop healthy lifestyles. It uses innovative ways, such as group buggy walks and short 'parent and child' swimming sessions to encourage healthy lifestyles. Families with children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from integrated services. The midwife chooses to work from the centre because parents and carers perceive staff to be so friendly and approachable, which aids attendance.

The policies, procedures and practice concerning keeping children safe and protected in the centre are given high priority. As a result, children, parents and carers all feel secure and at home in the centre. The leaders are responsive to parental requests, such as providing road safety training. Preparations for group walks are meticulous and include risk assessments of the area to be walked beforehand and outlining the plans carefully to parents and carers before setting out. This ensures less-confident parents successfully build their skills to ensure the safety of their families in the wider environment. A group of childminders recently successfully completed a food safety course.

Children's behaviour in the centre is good, because routines are established effectively and they know what is expected of them. Small children develop confidence in going to and using equipment, such as the train set or the wall-mounted puzzles, with obvious pleasure. Children and families are developing respect for others and, as a result, community cohesion is improving. 'Chatterbox' and sensory sessions provide good opportunities for parents and children to learn and play together. Toddler 'play and learn' sessions give opportunities for staff to develop parents' awareness of what children are learning as they play.

Support for families during children's transition into nursery is good. As a result, progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good, and a large majority of children attain at least the levels expected by the end of Reception and many exceed them. About a quarter of parents who are not currently employed, have improved qualifications over the last year due to the work of the centre. However, the proportion of parents overall who are known to have improved qualifications due to the centre's work is quite low in relation to the number of families in the reach area. Despite the centre leaders' best efforts; there is still not high representation of some hard-to-engage groups. Users make some contribution to decision making, but this is largely at an informal level.

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	2
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	3

positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	
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 makes careful and accurate assessments of the needs of the children who attend, and plans sessions accordingly. It looks to other agencies, such as the midwife, health visitor and local school, to try to assess needs of families in the reach area. It does get some information from the local authority and health services which are helpful in assessing what needs to be provided. However, it is provided with limited information on some issues to evaluate accurately what are the greatest needs in the reach area. It has an adequate understanding, however, of the needs of its users and can demonstrate some improvement in outcomes. Few fathers used to attend sessions at the centre, but this number is now growing. There are baby massage and weekend sessions for fathers. Parenting courses and child behaviour training courses are greatly appreciated. A new 'skills for work' course started in September 2010 for eight parents and concluded during the inspection. Regular accredited first-aid courses are popular and well attended.

The centre promotes purposeful learning for infants through, for example, 'Chatterbox' and sensory sessions. These have a clear focus and aim, and are sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of users and their children. Staff plan crèche sessions according to the needs of the children attending and support the children's learning well. They take the lead from the children and use a good range of questions to encourage them to think and respond. As a result, children are involved, happy and engaged. The bright environment and atmosphere are effective in promoting purposeful learning.

The extent to which the centre enables individual users to progress to further employment, education or training is developing steadily. The achievements of parents are celebrated by placing a leaf on the small 'celebration tree' in the reception area. The feedback given to users following courses is constructive and delivered thoughtfully. However, accurately identifying the learning goals and needs of the users in the community is an area for further development. The quality and range of services offered, including outreach, are adequate and meet the needs of most of the targeted vulnerable groups. The centre has made positive steps to evaluate the needs of some members of the Travelling community who live in the area. Work to support these families is developing well.

The centre leader's job in tailoring services to meet the needs of all of the users in the community, especially the most in need, is made more difficult by the limited data available to it. For example, although the health needs of pregnant teenagers

and young parents are met effectively, the centre has no information of the proportions from this group who are in employment, education or training. Thus, it is difficult to evaluate the need for support in this area.

The quality of advice about universal preventative treatment is satisfactory. A number of centre staff are now fully trained in using the Common Assessment Framework. Some children who attend Nursery or Reception in school have been offered support for special educational needs and/or disabilities through sessions at the centre. The centre is now able to offer some level 2 and, in partnership with other agencies, level 3 support to families. The centre has no means currently of measuring the impact of sessions it has facilitated for users on accessing support, benefits or seeking work. Families known to the centre, who have experienced crisis, are wholehearted in their praise for the support they received at these times. For them, the support from the centre staff has made a discernible difference to their lives.

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

Safeguarding procedures are good. All members of staff, including the site manager and cleaner, are fully trained in paediatric first aid. Information of criminal record checks and qualifications are fully in place and recorded well. The centre has clear and appropriate policies for health and safety, child protection, risk assessment and safer recruitment, which are all up to date and reviewed regularly. There is a service level agreement with the local authority in conjunction with ROSPA to provide home safety equipment for families who are economically disadvantaged. Rigorous risk assessments are undertaken for all activities and visits. Centre staff are alert to and aware of the importance of early intervention. There are regular multi-agency meetings to work to resolve issues swiftly.

The effectiveness of governance is satisfactory. Financial oversight is solid. There is, in addition, an advisory board which has parental representation. A parents' forum exists to support this, which is attended by a small number of parents and the

parental link worker. The centre seeks and takes account of the views of users, who are invited to evaluate the impact of the services they receive. However, users' involvement in helping to influence the direction in which the centre develops is only satisfactory.

The centre leader provides good professional support for staff. She has high aims for the development of the centre, which she communicates through her hard work and positive presence to staff and users alike. Governors now set performance management targets for the centre leader, but monitor the work of the centre only infrequently. Monitoring by the local authority is regular, but lacks rigour. The most recent 'annual discussion' was conducted with representatives of the governing body but without the centre leader being present, due to her absence through illness. Development planning is comprehensive but lacks measurable targets to evaluate the impact of activity.

The centre's environment is welcoming, bright and attractive. There are good resources for users and, for example, the sensory room provides excellent stimulation for infants. Sessions are well resourced and the centre's accommodation is used with imagination. Staff have good knowledge and are deployed well. Outreach provision is developing steadily and the centre's leader is placing appropriate emphasis on trying to make contact with, and support, the most vulnerable.

Centre leaders make evaluations of cost effectiveness, taking into account the costs of staff, venue and resources. However, the relevance of the information gained by this activity is restricted by limitations in the data available for them to use. The centre works to ensure equality and celebrate diversity. It has a number of multi-ethnic resources, which are attractively displayed. Festivals, such as Chinese New Year, are celebrated and there is recognition of Hindu, Islamic and Christian beliefs. Disabled access to the centre allows all users ease of access. Narrowing the gap data are available and used in the annual review of performance. They indicate that the gap between the lowest scoring 20% of children and the rest in attainment at the end of Reception is narrowing at a rate above county and National figures. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

The management team has satisfactory understanding of different vulnerable groups. However, it does not have precise enough data to ensure that users accurately reflect the community that the centre serves or to evaluate in detail the impact of its work. Self-evaluation is generally systematic and supported by some evidence of impact. There are suitable links between the priorities in the centre's development plan and its evaluation of the services it provides. Some agencies evaluate the outcomes of their service and provide this information to the centre leaders. The services provided generally deliver cohesive provision for users. Relationships between partner agencies are developing, although not all are fully engaged as yet. The centre contributes to developing and implementing partnership activities which include statutory, private, voluntary and independent providers.

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 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	3
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	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

The team considered the findings of the inspection of Rothwell Victoria Infant School. This judged arrangements for transition and information for parents to be good. Links between the school and the centre are productive and benefit parents. As a result, children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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 Rothwell Victoria Sure Start Children's Centre on 15–16 February 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

I would like to say many thanks to those of you who spoke, or wrote, to us during the inspection of your children's centre. It helped us a great deal. In particular, it showed us how proud you are of the centre and how much you value the support of the staff. We agree with you that it really is lovely accommodation and the resources are bright and attractive. We saw how at home your children are at the centre and how confident they are growing as a result. We can see that they enjoy activities and that some of you take advantage of the opportunities to develop your skills as well. The centre enables you and your families to develop healthy lifestyles and prepare for economic well-being satisfactorily. We know that some of you already volunteer at the centre. We know that you are asked for your views on the activities and that some of you are on the parents' forum or the advisory board. We think it would help the centre if more of you could help centre leaders develop the provision still further. One of the things that is particularly good about the centre is in keeping you and your children safe. We know that you have told us how comfortable you feel at the centre. We could see for ourselves that even very young children are happy and relaxed, because they feel safe.

We have asked the relevant authority to try to improve the range of information the centre gets. We have asked if it can provide more information about all of the different groups who need the centre's support. This way the centre can plan to meet everyone's needs more efficiently. We have judged the provision at the centre to be satisfactory, especially in the match of services to the needs of the community. We have also asked for those agencies that use the centre's rooms and services to let the centre know how successful they are. This will help the centre to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of different activities and make sure they are providing sessions to develop the most important things for families in your local area.

The leadership and management of the centre are satisfactory. Your centre is looked after by the governors of the infant school and the local authority. The centre leader is dedicated to providing good quality service, but the requirement for her to be regularly supported and challenged by the relevant authority is not being met as well as possible. This makes her job harder. We have asked for more regular monitoring to make the centre leader's job easier. We have also suggested that plans for improvement contain measurable targets, so that all staff can celebrate when they have achieved something. So, for example instead of planning to do 'more' of something, we have said leaders should say how much more they hope to attain and by when.

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