

Inspection report for **Rotherhithe Primary School (Early Years and Parents' Centre) Children's Centre**

Local authority	London Borough of Southwark
Inspection number	365720
Inspection dates	17–18 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Christine Davies HMI

Centre governance	The governing body of Rotherhithe Primary School and Children's Centre
Centre leader	Gary Barrett
Date of previous inspection	No previous inspection
Centre address	Rotherhithe Primary School Early Years and Parents' Centre Rotherhithe New Road London SE16 2PL

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Linked school if applicable	Rotherhithe Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Rotherhithe Primary Early Years and Parents' Centre

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.

An inspection of Rotherhithe Primary School was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. An inspection of the registered early years childcare provision was carried out as a single inspection event with the inspection of the school. That inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The report is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspector's and an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with leaders and managers, staff and representatives of the local authority and partner organisations. Inspectors observed the work of the centre and talked to adults and children attending. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including a number of case studies.

Information about the centre

The children's centre is based in a purpose-built unit adjoining Rotherhithe Primary School and is managed for Southwark Council by the governing body of the school. The Early Years and Parents' Centre was designated as a Sure Start children's centre in March 2008 and moved to its present main building in September of that year. The centre provides the full core offer of learning and development activities for children under five and their families for a Phase 2 centre. The main building accommodates a self-contained early years registered childcare day nursery provided by the school. It is open daily in term time for up to 26 children from six months to five years old. About a quarter of the children attending the childcare join the school's nursery classes and some continue to attend an extended day in the children's centre childcare until they are five years old. Other rooms in the building provide office space, a small kitchen and a meeting room. There is an enclosed outdoor playspace. The centre shares a separate cabin-style building in the grounds of the primary school. Other services and outreach sessions take place in health centres, libraries and other children's centres nearby. The centre manager is assisted

by an outreach worker and four full-time early years educators. Other staff are contracted on a sessional basis to run learning and development activities for the centre's users. An advisory board is in place, made up of the headteacher of the school, a parent and representatives from the community, partner organisations and the local authority.

The area served by the centre is among the 30% most deprived in Southwark. A much higher than average proportion of children under five in the area is of minority ethnic heritage, with the largest group among them being Black African. Over 40% of children under five speak English as a second language. Nearly half of this age group live in lone- parent households or in workless families or have benefits claimed for them; many fall into two or more of these groups. Nearly half of the population of children in the area live in socially rented housing without any outdoor play space. Children's level of development on entry to early years provision in the Rotherhithe area is very low compared to the national average. The proportion of children with life-limiting illnesses in the centre's reach area is higher than in the borough as a whole. Other childcare that is available in the local area includes childminders, private, voluntary and independent providers. The primary school linked to the centre hosts out-of-school care provision for older children.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The centre provides satisfactory support for children, their families and carers. Leaders and managers have established a clear purpose and vision as a Sure Start children's centre, building on the school's pre-existing early years childcare provision and extended services to young families. Over a three-year period, the centre has moved away from a focus on providing childcare that served a small group of families very well towards provision to meet a wide range of the needs of children under five in the area and their parents. Services and activities are at a satisfactory level of development overall, providing the full core offer for a children's centre. The centre provides satisfactory value for money. The recent employment of an outreach worker has had a good impact on the centre's capacity to deliver activities in line with community needs and users' views.

The centre works well with other agencies to safeguard users and to ensure that families know about, and can access, services to tackle their needs. Clear strategic links with Southwark Council and local professional networks enable managers and staff to gain a good understanding the wider challenges faced by groups in the community.

Staff and managers make satisfactory use of the space available in the two separate buildings and enclosed outdoor area of the school grounds. The quality of provision is satisfactory overall. Well-qualified staff foster a warm, inclusive and caring atmosphere that encourages new users to continue in contact with the centre. Information, advice and guidance sessions, including some commissioned by the borough, are provided in other venues in the community. A coherent range of services is offered, in partnership with other organisations. Evaluation and quality monitoring processes are planned into most of the short-term activities and the information is put to good effect in helping the centre to select which sessions to run in the future. However, assessment of individuals' progress and the monitoring of provision, including the childcare on site, lacks the consistency necessary to identify and remedy all weaker areas of practice and to sustain high quality in all provision.

Children and adults using the centre enjoy the range of enjoyable and purposeful learning activities and outcomes are satisfactory overall. The best achievements are among previously isolated families who are now in regular contact with the centre. Improvements in their emotional well-being and their access to health services are good. Many regular contacts enjoy making a positive contribution to the centre's future plans. Some parents, particularly those with English as an additional language, are starting to gain practical skills in literacy and in helping their children to enjoy reading. A few users are beginning to move towards better economic prospects with the support and guidance provided by the centre and partner organisations. Most of the children attending the childcare on site make at least satisfactory progress from their starting points, although this applies only to a small group of children in the area. The centre is developing a portfolio of high-quality childcare on offer in the area, although it is too soon to see the impact of this work for children in the wider community.

The centre's assessment of its effectiveness is limited as it places too much value on the rapid expansion it has made in the range of activities and does not fully take account of all outcomes and the overall quality of provision. The centre does not collect information about the progress of all users consistently well and, for example, does not collect data on the progress of the children who are not in childcare on site. Plans are in place, but not implemented, to recruit two key members of staff and extend the use of information and communication technology resources for data management. The information gathered from partners is not always detailed or up to date enough for the centre to gain a clear picture of its effectiveness and to set measurable targets for improvement.

Clear governance and accountability arrangements are now in place. However, weaknesses in monitoring and setting targets mean that the centre has not established and sustained a high quality of provision overall; the resulting outcomes for users are inconsistent. Offsetting the inconsistency, managers and staff have established good professional networks to support improvement and they involve regular users effectively, so that the centre has satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority and local partners to gather more up-to-date and detailed information about outcomes for all users so that it can evaluate its own effectiveness and set realistic targets.
- Implement systematic quality assurance and monitoring procedures to ensure high-quality provision in all activities.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The centre learns about outcomes mainly from the evaluations of the users themselves and through sharing information with professionals from partner agencies in locality meetings. Parents using the centre say their health and well-being, and their children's, are improving rapidly through the influence of enjoyable exercise and walking groups. They enthusiastically take up healthier eating after the 'Shop, cook and eat' programme. Families are organising more sessions for themselves. New parents, some of whom were previously vulnerable and isolated, improve their confidence through the baby massage courses. The centre has contributed greatly to the borough's success in take-up of immunisations, attendance at baby clinics and, particularly, in encouraging breastfeeding. Three out of the four parent-mentors in the borough started their involvement at the centre's well-attended breastfeeding café.

Children in the childcare and parents attending activities feel safe and secure. They say they have confidence in the centre. For example, a parent reflected the views of many, saying, 'We don't like standing on the pavement waiting for the buzzer to be answered, but we know there has to be good security for our children in this area.' However, children using the centre need the guidance of adults to behave safely and are at an early stage of developing skills to keep themselves safe.

Users enjoy the learning and development activities on offer. 'Stay and play' sessions have proved so popular that an extra session per week has been put on. Most parents using the centre make satisfactory progress in educational and personal development and in acquiring better parenting skills. Some parents in targeted groups, including many with English as a second language, enjoy learning about their children's communication and language development through story telling. Bookstart programmes and English courses have inspired a few parents to take up courses leading to qualifications. Aspirations in the area are low as parents are aware of the lack of realistic job opportunities, although a small number of parents have been supported to find childcare and return to suitable training or work.

The growing number of children under five who use the centre improve their behaviour and skills in playing together, although there is no systematic

measurement by staff of their achievement across all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children enjoy their time when in the childcare. They develop good attitudes to learning and are well prepared to settle in quickly to school. Children benefit particularly well from continuity and support by familiar adults when moving on to the linked primary school. Most children in the childcare achieve an average or better level of development for their age. However, the number of children benefiting is small in comparison to the number of children under five in the area. Little impact is evident on how the centre is closing the attainment gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children in the wider reach area and their peers in the Early Years Foundation Profile Scores. Insufficient impact evidence is gathered from the centre's targeted services and from the emerging childcare portfolio, which are at an early stage of implementation.

Children using the centre's services form positive relationships with other children and adults. Parents who take part regularly in the centre's activities contribute well to evaluations of its work and say how much they appreciate that the centre makes their views central to future plans. Parents are routinely consulted and their views are influential in deciding the days and times of activities. Parents show some enterprising behaviour in setting up new skill-sharing groups that are financially self-sustaining. The centre effectively unites and attracts an increasing number of parents through well attended fun and information days that are open to all.

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	3
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	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

Staff gather sufficient information about groups and individuals to ensure that the majority of users' needs are met. The centre understands the general needs of people living in the area, for example the levels of deprivation. A number of families in the area are of uncertain immigration status and parents are reluctant to give many personal details about themselves. Staff carry out detailed initial assessments for children placed in childcare, but not always for children attending other activities. Little additional assessment is done by the centre when a user has been referred by an outside agency. Observations of children in the childcare on site are not always

evaluative. Apart from self-evaluation, little assessment is made of users' progress through participation in the wider children's centre. The centre does not fully gather information from outreach and partnerships. As a result, the centre does not always have the information to plan for, and target, particular groups in detail.

Staff and those contracted to run specific activities are knowledgeable and approachable. Users say they feel well cared for and welcome in their contact with the centre. Regular users of the centre respond well to the personalisation of learning in follow-up activities and enjoyment is high, although targets set for them by the centre staff are not always precise or challenging. The childcare offered on site is well regarded by current users. However, the high quality of the childcare provision recognised in the last inspection has not been sustained and care is satisfactory.

The range of services offered by the centre, apart from childcare, is good and meets the needs that professional networks have identified for the community. Activities focus well on the priorities of supporting parents and children in living healthy lifestyles, as well as improving adults' literacy and learning to help children under five to achieve well in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Increasing numbers of parents who previously did not take up services have taken up purposeful learning. Partnerships with statutory, voluntary and private providers give users improving access to good support for family health. Users have good access through the centre to specialist provision, such as speech and language therapy. Good physical access enables the centre to offer integrated activities that are open to adults and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, although few specialist activities are held at the centre. Professionals from early intervention teams and child and adolescent mental health services are supported in assessing and working with targeted individual children in surroundings that are readily adaptable to their needs.

The centre gives a high priority to improving the economic stability of families in the area and this has satisfactory impact on shaping flexible advice and guidance services. Managers and staff provide some drop-in advice sessions at times suggested by parents although the take-up is generally low. Staff working throughout the centre signpost parents effectively to advice sessions run in other venues by partner agencies including the Council, JobCentre Plus and the Blackfriars Settlement voluntary agency to meet housing, benefits and training needs. Outreach, one-to-one advice and courses for the few parents actively seeking work give satisfactory help for them to find routes to qualification and employment.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

After a period of change, the decision making and supervision arrangements for the children's centre are now established and are workable. The composition of the advisory board has a good, broad base of expertise that supports the centre well. Accountability arrangements are clearly laid out in strategic agreements between Southwark Council, the centre and partner organisations who are commissioned to provide services. This good governance establishes a focus on supporting deprived families and raising children's achievement which is clear to all partners and users. The aspirations of the centre provide clear motivation to staff for the development of the centre to its full potential.

Safeguarding the vulnerable families in the area is a high priority and arrangements, policies and procedures are good. The main building is designed with security in mind. Vetting of all staff and contracted workers is comprehensive. Staff take up good-quality child protection training alongside other agencies and adopt good practice with vulnerable families. The centre collaborates with health, the linked primary school, and children's services to protect children and uses the common assessment framework to promote early intervention preventative work for children in need of services.

The accessibility of the premises is good and work to promote equality and tackle discrimination is satisfactory. The area's cultural, ethnic and religious diversity is reflected satisfactorily in resources and activities. Policies and practice promote the inclusion of all children and their families, although few precise groups are targeted. Outcomes are improving where support is targeted, for example for the centre's users who speak English as an additional language who become more involved in planning new activities.

Partnership work in the locality and strategic links with Southwark Council are well established and effective to help the centre understand the wider needs of the area. Partners contribute regularly through locality networks to evaluation of the centre's services. However, the centre does not always get the data it needs on outcomes for users. This has an impact on the centre's ability to assess its effectiveness, for example in knowing whether inclusion strategies are effective for all groups and individuals.

The processes for setting and reviewing priorities in the centre's development plan are satisfactory. Although the centre has comprehensive strategies for the ambitious plans to improve outcomes for users and to include more groups and individuals, its effectiveness in assessing its direction and progress is limited. The information collected by the centre from partners and from its own user data does not tell the whole story. With its current resources, the centre does not monitor the quality of provision systematically and, as a result, the high quality and impact that the centre

aims for are not consistently reached. The centre does not yet have administrative systems in place to assist staff and managers in analysing the effects of their commissioned services and outreach contacts. Not all outcomes for users are known and tracked to inform future plans.

Relationships between staff and the families using the centre are consistently positive. This has enabled the centre to encourage users to take up more services and to give their comments. Users give good feedback on the close collaborative work of the centre and partners, which they say provides them with seamless guidance and support. For example, users appreciate the signposting from health visitor drop-ins to specialist assessment services for children's developmental needs. Users' views have been influential in helping the centre to shape some services, particularly the provision of childcare on site, and user satisfaction is high.

The centre's close focus on improving outcomes has resulted in some improvement in users' lives. Gaps in the centre's information about outcomes and in the identification of action to target weaker areas of provision are holding back the rate of improvement. The centre has satisfactory capacity to overcome these weaknesses and improve because of the strengths of leadership and management in working with partners and taking account of users' views.

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	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	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	2

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

An inspection of the maintained school, Rotherhithe Primary School, was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision, Rotherhithe Primary School Early Years and Parents' centre, was carried out as a single inspection event with the inspection of the school. The inspection team for the children's centre worked alongside the inspection team for the school and childcare. The report of that inspection is available on our website 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 the the children's centre at Rotherhithe Primary School Early Years and Parents' Centre on 18 and 19 February 2011. We found that the work of the centre is satisfactory overall.

Thank you very much to the parents, carers and children we met during the inspection for taking the time to tell us about the children's centre and how it helps you.

We found that the children's centre provides a good range of support to parents that is growing rapidly. You told us that you feel relaxed and welcome in the centre. You and your children thoroughly enjoy everything that you take part in.

Regular users of the centre improve their own and their families' health and well-being through learning at the centre. 'Shop, cook and eat' sessions are popular. Parents and children enjoy taking up physical activities in groups, but the centre does not yet know whether this is having any effect, for example on obesity of children in the area. Some users, particularly those with English as a second language, have made great strides in improving their own enjoyment of reading and many parents understand much more about their own children and their early learning.

You and your children feel safe and secure in all the centre's activities. Safety procedures are good. One parent spoke for many when she said, 'We don't like

standing on the pavement waiting for the buzzer to be answered but we know there has to be good security for our children in this area.'

Throughout the inspection, parents, and carers such as childminders, told us that the centre staff are approachable and get to know the families very well. Parents told us that they get along well together and enjoy learning about each others' backgrounds and cultures.

You are sharing skills with each other in new group activities that you design with the outreach worker. Some of you are going forward as peer mentors to help other parents, for instance in taking up breastfeeding, and a few have found suitable qualification courses through advice sessions arranged by the centre.

We were very pleased to find that leaders and managers base their plans for activities to a large extent on the needs of parents and children in the area. Users' views have been important in deciding on the days and times of the childcare provision. The centre is working closely with other childcare providers in the area to make sure that more families with young children can find the childcare that suits their needs.

Managers and staff make the best of the space at the main site and work closely with the school to run as many activities as possible, although you told us you want more activities like cooking.

The centre works closely with other organisations to ensure you have expert advice and guidance on health, benefits, training and employment and can access some specialist services that you need quickly.

Inspectors found that the management of the centre is satisfactory overall. Partnerships with other organisations are strong and the advisory board listens to partners and users well. The centre is already taking steps to recruit staff to vital administration and childcare management roles that are vacant at present. To become even better, the centre should work with all their partner organisations to gather better information about the effect of their work on users, so that they know how well they are doing. The centre should do more, in a routine way, to check that all its activities are as good, well planned and helpful to you as they can be.

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