

Inspection report for Rock Ferry Children's Centre

Local authority	Wirral
Inspection number	367863
Inspection dates	24–25 May
Reporting inspector	Dave Ellwand
Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Helen Richards
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Little Ferries Day Nursery EY335771

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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, senior leaders, front-line staff and representatives from the local authority. They also held discussions with members of the advisory board, a wide range of partners, the headteacher from the adjacent primary school, and service users, parents and carers.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's operational plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Rock Ferry Children's Centre is located on a site shared with Rock Ferry Primary School. It was designated as a phase one centre in 2007. It provides the full core offer of services to children and families in the Rock Ferry ward.

Most families in the area are White British with a small proportion from minority ethnic groups. All the super output areas in the centre's footprint are in the top 30% most deprived in the country, with both obesity rates and rates of underweight children significantly higher than the Wirral average. Worklessness and the proportion of families on benefits exceed local and national averages. Within the reach of the centre there are high proportions of youth unemployment, teenage pregnancy, crime and low levels of literacy and numeracy skills. Children's overall levels of skills on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are below, and sometimes well below, those expected typically for their age. There are high numbers of children identified with significant delay in their speech and language acquisition. Rates of looked-after children are high in Rock Ferry, at three times the average for the borough.

The centre manages Little Ferries nursery on site with 28 places, 12 of which are for children under two years of age. The centre has a smaller satellite centre nearby which it uses fully, for example, for parenting sessions, and takes activities into other schools, centres and a hostel for young homeless people. It works closely with other children’s centres in the area to provide a full service. The centre is open from 8am until 6pm, Monday to Friday, 51 weeks of the year.

The centre has a recently reconstituted advisory board which consists of partner organisations, members of the community and parents. The centre’s governance is provided by the local authority.

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

This is a good children’s centre. The quality of care is outstanding, as is reflected throughout all the centre’s activities. This has a significant impact on improving the lives of some families that are considered very vulnerable, and expressed by one parent clearly as, ‘I would be lost without the centre.’ The centre and outreach workers have built trusting relationships with families in the community and strong relationships and a high level of mutual respect were observed between users and staff during the inspection. The centre is well recognised by families as a place where they can readily get help, advice and very useful information. Parents and carers say about the centre staff, ‘they are very professional but always approachable, polite and friendly.’

Safeguarding and equality procedures are of good quality and all policies are up to date and followed correctly. Users appreciate the concerted efforts made by the centre to ensure their safety and that of their children. Risk assessments and safety procedures are carried out very well, with good consultation with users and the excellent provision of additional resources, such as baby monitors, for families to use at home.

The centre is very effective in seeking users’ views through evaluations, via parents

on the advisory board, discussions and message boards, as well as through the informal 'Creation Station Parents Forum' where users are encouraged to discuss the centre's work while they enjoy taking part in craft activities. As a result, the centre tailors its provision well to meet users' needs based on their views.

The centre provides a friendly, welcoming and very safe environment for all its users. The centre management and staff have a very good understanding of the needs of the families and their area, and they give very thorough consideration of the issues and barriers which face the users. Much of the provision is innovative; users appreciate what the centre does and they are confident that the staff will help them. A typical view expressed by a user is: 'They're there not just for the children, but also for you and the whole family, always ready to help, and always giving you confidence that you'll be able to cope afterwards.'

Rigorous procedures ensure that policies are put into practice and staff and providers are held to account appropriately. Strengths and weaknesses of the centre are known well by leaders and action plans to address any areas for development are discussed and considered with staff teams and partners.

Outcomes for users and the provision offered are good and improving, as is shown in observations by inspectors, and in the case studies, evaluations and data provided by the centre. There has been good progress in closing the gap in achievement between the lowest attaining 20% and the rest of the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children enjoy their activities in the centre. The centre's overall performance has improved considerably and outreach work has also been effective in engaging some families considered vulnerable and hard-to-reach. In the last two years the centre has registered around 40% of the families with children under five years of age, but the centre recognises more of these families should gain access to the full range of their services.

The centre's self-evaluation is accurate, reflects the contributions of staff, users and partners, and is broadly in line with inspection findings. The leadership team are aware that further use of data will strengthen the process, and enable more accurate evaluation and better target setting for improvement. The centre's capacity to improve is good.

The local authority provides a good level of support and challenge for the centre. Systematic reviews and supervision sessions by officers and managers, supported by good development and training opportunities, all improve outcomes for users. Peer review with other children's centres in the borough is also enabling the sharing of good practice. Partnerships with the local authority and the schools in the centre's reach are effective. Relationships with all partners are strong and multi-disciplinary working provides an effective integrated service. However, despite offering a range of services within the locality, Jobcentre Plus does not currently provide any sessions in the centre. The centre team provides good information, advice and guidance about adult learning programmes and welfare benefits.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further develop the partnership with Jobcentre Plus to provide better opportunities within the centre for those dependent on unemployment benefits to find work and receive good quality employment advice and guidance.
- Increase the proportion of families, especially those considered vulnerable or hard to reach, to use the full range of the centre's services.
- Improve the self-evaluation process by:
 - using relevant data on outcomes more effectively to enable better monitoring of progress
 - ensuring evaluations consider the impact of services on families and the wider community.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

All users of the centre speak highly of the safe and welcoming environment of the centre, and of the outstanding quality of care. Many describe how they were initially reluctant to engage with any health or support services, but that the centre and outreach staff successfully built up trusting relationships that gave them the confidence to access the services provided. 'Everyone here is encouraging, including the reception and cleaning staff, and no-one's judging you when you need help,' was a typical comment by a centre user.

Good partnership work helps increase the take-up of maternity services. These include flexible sessions at different times of the day, and outreach activities such as the 'pregnancy roadshow' and the 'midwife's shop' in the main shopping areas and at special sessions for very young parents. The centre works with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to tackle a common issue in the area of late disclosure of pregnancies and late registration with maternity services. Opportunities for free pregnancy testing in the centre are in the early stages of development.

Health outcomes for children, parents and carers are improving in the area. The centre uses a wide and innovative range of approaches, such as the 'Rock the Ferry' community choir, to support positive mental health through developing good relationships in a supportive, focussed group. Parents value their increased awareness of healthy eating, exercise and nutrition, and children are successfully introduced to a wide range of healthy foods and drinks and have a chance to grow food in the centre garden. Support for users to give up smoking is well used, and both centre and outreach staff are trained to help. There is well-considered provision for improving users' emotional health. Parents and carers told inspectors they appreciate the effective support from the centre staff at specialist sessions and from the good links the centre has fostered with mental health services.

Parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are especially appreciative of the help of the centre and its partner agencies in ensuring both respite support and very effective guidance on health and nutrition. The centre gives good support for breastfeeding and works well with Home Start, the partner agency commissioned by the PCT to visit new mothers from the area while they are still in hospital. The numbers of mothers initiating and maintaining breastfeeding are increasing, though this is still lower than the averages in the borough and nationally.

Children and parents feel very safe, and users value highly the thoroughness of the centre staff in ensuring that policies and practices in safeguarding and risk management are followed and reviewed. Case studies show very good partnership support for families experiencing domestic violence. One parent gave an instance of this support: 'My child has a key worker, and a second key worker, so there's always someone around who knows us, and we're welcome to ring them at any time when we need it.' Domestic hygiene projects, safety schemes and courses in emergency first aid have improved children's safety and contributed to an 8% reduction in emergency hospital admissions reported in the area. Parents told inspectors how the courses and support have helped them respond to any health concerns more confidently and calmly. Social care professionals provide good support to children whom the centre identifies as vulnerable including those with child protection plans. The multi-agency approach is well developed with very effective communication and coordination, so that a variety of agencies work together to address families' needs quickly and effectively.

Children enjoy learning greatly, with good personal and social development and their progress is well assessed and tracked through the Early Years Foundation Stage. 'Talking tots' and similar projects are used well by centre staff with the parents to support children's talking and pre-reading skills. Transition arrangements from the centre to schools are robust and there are good partnerships to support children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Case studies and meetings show parents' success in accessing training and education, with continuing support from the centre to ensure good attendance and achievement. Parents and carers contribute well to the centre's running with suggestions and feedback. They always receive a full response from the centre.

The centre provides information, advice and support over a very wide range of topics, including access to training, benefits and job opportunities. Jobcentre Plus does not currently provide any sessions in the centre, and does not have the tailored support which could better help centre users to explore opportunities to train or work.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

<p>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</p>	<p>2</p>
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The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

The quality of care for users and their children in the centre is outstanding. Users recognise that they and their families are very well supported, and appreciate the efforts made by the centre and partners to provide programmes of activities and support, personalised to their needs. For example a mobile phone was bought for users by the centre to ensure that they could discretely call for help if there was domestic violence at home.

Relationships within the centre and with the community are strong. All users interviewed during the inspection showed great appreciation and respect for the centre staff. One user described the effect the centre has had on her life, 'I've had a complete turn-around in my life and I'm now confident helping my children and others in the community.' The Common Assessment framework (CAF) and 'team around the child' processes are well used to ensure that support is effectively targeted and meets the needs of children at risk of being considered vulnerable. Assessments fully involve partner agencies in working with families. Centre and outreach staff ensure all children are supported well; they liaise with paediatricians, mental health, educational psychologists, special educational needs coordinators as well as health and social care practitioners to respond well to families' needs. Managers review the processes fully and ensure that outcomes are checked and shared with partner groups as appropriate. The support for families in crisis is particularly good. For example, the pilot project to give intense support to families in the local hospital's neonatal unit is particularly effective at establishing positive relationships with new mothers at a challenging time.

The managers and the staff team have a good understanding of the area and work closely with the community so they can direct users to a very wide range of provision. The outreach work has been successful in bringing some hard-to-reach families into the centre. However, some rates of participation in particular areas of the centre's reach are low and the centre recognises that they should attract more families from these areas to use the range of services at the centre more effectively. Good assessment practice, in conjunction with the Early Years Foundation Stage

consultant ensures any concerns regarding children’s development are effectively referred to the appropriate service to address needs swiftly. For example, 40 families have accessed advice and guidance at the centre about speech and language development following concerns raised by the centre. Formal language assessments and speech therapy are now provided regularly at the centre.

The headteacher of one of the schools the centre serves confirmed the valuable work the centre does in working alongside Early Years Foundation Stage teachers, providing early identification of additional concerns, and helping children make smooth transitions into the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre promotes learning well, also supporting adults to gain qualifications, celebrating achievements and offering a wide range of courses to improve parenting skills. They have good contacts with parents, carers and the wider community to assess needs and, as a result, have identified some areas of skill training which will help future employability. However, Jobcentre Plus does not have the capacity to provide the detailed support at the centre to help users explore employment and training opportunities further.

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 centre leader, with the good support of her staff team has developed the provision so that outcomes for users are good and improving. There is effective coordination with other provision to avoid duplication and ensure the best use of resources which contributes to the good value for money the centre provides. The management team has high expectations of the service to continue to improve opportunities for children and families in the reach area. Staff are confident about the future development of the centre and have retained good morale despite recent reorganisations. Users are very positive about the role they can play in shaping the centre, and appreciate the professionalism of the staff and their responsiveness to users’ views.

Effective partnership work with a strong multi-agency team offers an integrated service and improves the lives of some of the most vulnerable families in the reach area. Partners describe the centre’s role as being at the hub of the multi-agency

approach, 'providing good partnership working with professionalism and inspiration.' Partners recognise that all the agencies at the centre should work more effectively with vulnerable and hard-to-reach families, to capitalise on the good relationships which the centre has established with them. Partners have high expectations of the centre to increase the numbers of families with whom they are involved.

The centre is promoting equality of opportunity and diversity well. Policies, user comments and observations during the inspection demonstrate that it is an inclusive environment. Relationships are respectful and users say they feel valued. Safeguarding procedures fully meet current requirements and staff know with whom to share concerns. Staff meetings and training provide updates on effective safeguarding practice. In addition, all rooms in the centre show useful information about domestic violence and sexual health. Recruitment procedures are robust and the supervision of staff by the centre leader includes regular safeguarding checks and updates. Information sharing is appropriate and timely, both between staff and with partner agencies to ensure users are safe and their needs are well met.

The staff team is well led, providing a fully integrated service with well-understood lines of responsibility and accountability. The local authority provides good supervision arrangements and governance of the centre, leading to improving provision and outcomes for users. The quality of data available to the centre has improved considerably and further improvements have been agreed to give the necessary detail to measure the needs of each super-output area and to measure its impact against all the local indicators. As yet it is too soon to see the impact of this on the centre's improvement planning and the management of the service has identified a need to have stronger and more evaluative self assessments.

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 adults	2
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	2

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

The children's centre inspection findings were informed by a parallel inspection of the separately managed Rock Ferry Primary School on 23–24 May 2011. The full inspection report for this event can be found on the Ofsted website.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Rock Ferry Children's Centre on 24–25 May 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Those of you who spoke to us during the inspection told us how well the centre supports your families and improves lives in the local community. You told us that the centre takes outstanding care of the people who use it, and one parent said clearly 'I would be lost without the centre.' The centre and outreach workers are well trusted by families, and the community recognises the value of the centre for support and information. Parents and carers say about the centre staff, 'they are very professional but always approachable, polite and friendly.' We judged that the centre is good at safeguarding children and at promoting equality and diversity. We heard of the strong efforts which staff make to create a safe and welcoming centre, and to help you keep safe in your home.

We heard that the centre is good at keeping you informed, both about your children's progress and the opportunities for learning how to improve your family's health. We judge that the centre management and staff have a good understanding of the needs of your area, and they give a lot of thought about how to make the services better. We appreciate that the centre tries out many new ideas, to see how

to give the best service. You are asked for your ideas and your views of the quality of the centre, and the centre showed how it takes note of what you say.

The centre monitors how well it is doing, and has shown how its provision is good and still improving.

Children are well prepared for going on to primary school, and are making good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children enjoy their activities in the centre and behave well. The centre's overall performance has been getting better over the last two years. Many families with the most need for support are well looked after, and the centre has been able to bring in around 40% of the families to use the services here. We are recommending that the centre adds to this, and tries to attract more families in the area to use its services.

We judged that the centre is good at setting out what it is doing to make improvements, but we recommended that it makes better use of the statistics for the area to measure how well it is meeting your local needs.

We judged that the local authority is good at giving both support and challenge to the centre, and that good management and supervision help to improve the centre's services. Partnerships with all the organisations who work through the centre are strong and bring together services so they can support families well. However, Jobcentre Plus does not have advice sessions in the centre any more, and we are recommending that senior managers work with them to find a better way of tackling the unemployment in the area and give better advice about finding training and jobs when users are ready for them.

We welcomed very much the comments you made to us, as it helped us get a very clear picture of your centre and its impact on your lives. Thank you and we wish you every success in the future.

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