

Inspection report for The Rowans Children's Centre

Local authority	Bracknell Forest
Inspection number	367864
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Mike Capper

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Louise Clark
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Fox Hill School Pondmoor Road Bracknell RG12 7JZ
Telephone number	01344 312800
Fax number	N/A
Email address	louise.clark@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

Published: June 2011



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



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 local authority, centre staff, representatives from the advisory board and from partners that use the centre. Inspectors also spoke to parents and carers as well as some children.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including safeguarding policies and records, development plans and data on the impact of the centre's work.

Information about the centre

The Rowans Children's Centre is a Phase 2 centre that serves two wards in Bracknell. The centre provides a full core offer of services for young children and their parents and carers. These include health advice, family support and outreach, drop-in sessions for parents and carers and a range of activities for children.

The children's centre serves an area that is ethnically, socially and economically diverse. As a Phase 2 centre, it is located in one of the 70% most deprived wards in the country and 15.9% of children in its reach area have been identified as living in poverty. The rate of worklessness is 14%. The proportion of children living in households that are dependent on workless benefits is 11%. The largest ethnic groups within the reach area are White British and Indian, but in total over 25 languages are represented. About 18% of the centre's reach area speaks English as an additional language.

The children's centre is managed by the local authority. An advisory board that represents users, the local community and service providers is responsible for working strategically with the children's centre manager to identify the needs of the centre.

The centre manager has been in post for 18 months. She also manages The Sycamore Children’s Centre which is currently being established in a neighbouring district of Bracknell.

The children’s centre is located on the same site as Fox Hill Primary School but provision is not linked. At the age of three most children go to a number of different pre-school providers and nurseries. Children’s levels of development on entry to Early Years pre-school providers are below those expected for their age.

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 Rowans Children’s Centre provides a satisfactory service It has improved significantly over the last 18 months due to the drive and vision of the relatively new centre manager. There have been many helpful improvements such as developing facilities for outdoor play and strengthening the quality of links with partners. These are beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of provision. All of the users spoken to during the inspection were unanimous in their appreciation of the work that the centre does and the way that it is helping to improve their lives.

Members of staff are friendly and approachable and have built high levels of trust with users. Parents and carers speak very positively about the welcome and care they receive making comments such as, ‘It has helped me to gain confidence and meet other parents.’ The centre has many informal systems for getting the views of users through Children’s Centre chatter and by reviewing the impact of sessions when they have finished. However, the centre has not yet established a group such as a parents’ forum where users can contribute more formally to the management of the centre by sharing their ideas. This means that there are still some missed opportunities for parents’ and carers’ views to be heard so that the range of services can even more fully reflect their needs.

The centre enables the vast majority of its users to achieve satisfactory and

sometimes good outcomes in many areas of their lives. There are strengths in the way that the centre promotes healthy lifestyles, for example, with users being given high quality guidance and advice from the moment their children are born.

The care, guidance and support given to users are good. This is underpinned by good procedures to safeguard children and other users. Consequently, parents and carers and their children feel safe when using the centre. There is particularly strong support for vulnerable families and staff are skilled at linking together the services provided by different agencies, such as social care, education and health, to ensure the safety and well-being of users. As a result, the centre's partnership with others is good and has a positive impact on the lives of users.

Users say there is no discrimination at the centre and that everyone is given an equal opportunity to access services, whatever their background or ethnicity. The centre makes good use of outside providers to provide a good range of language courses for families who speak English as an additional language. These are well attended and have a positive effect on the development of language skills.

Although the centre provides a satisfactory range of services and activities for its users it is not yet engaging sufficiently with the relatively high number of young parents in the area. The centre manager has rightly identified that not enough of this group is currently accessing services by visiting the centre or through outreach work. While there are clear plans to develop this, it is an important gap in provision.

Self-evaluation is satisfactory although occasionally it is overgenerous. Evaluations at the end of sessions are thorough and are beginning to be used effectively to adapt plans and to respond to changing needs. Evaluation of the longer term impact of the centre's work by leaders at all levels, including the advisory board, is not yet strong enough to be fully effective. It is becoming stronger as more reach-specific data become available from the local authority but there are still gaps in the information provided by, for example the health authority . At the moment, the advisory board satisfactorily fulfils its role in providing challenge but not all are clear about the role of the advisory board in planning for the longer term development of the centre. Nevertheless, the centre has demonstrated in the way that it has worked over the last 18 months to successfully meet the needs of its main target groups that there is a satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority to access more data that can be used to measure outcomes, to celebrate successes and identify where improvement is still needed.
- Give parents and carers a greater role in shaping the services offered by the centre by establishing a parents' and carers' group.

- Strengthen the part played by the advisory board in providing challenge by ensuring that members are clear about their roles and responsibilities.
- Develop the range of services offered to young parents by
 - more closely assessing their needs and establishing how they can be met through outreach work
 - providing more activities within the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The centre is particularly successful at improving the emotional well-being of users. Parents and carers such as those who have suffered mental health problems speak highly of the support they have received from the centre. As one parent commented, 'I would not be who I am today without the centre.' Another said, 'The centre became my second home when I was in a bad place.'

Users have found sessions on keeping fit very beneficial. The centre provides a wide range of activities to support users' understanding of how to develop healthy lifestyles and this is a real strength of the centre's work. One parent summed up the views of others by saying that 'I am more confident about trying out new recipes after coming to cooking classes at the centre.' Activities such as 'Family Fitness', which teaches the value of regular exercise, and 'Stay and Cook', where users learn about healthy diets, are also helping parents and carers to adopt increasingly healthy lifestyles and to reduce obesity among children. With the new outdoor facilities, physical development is supported well. Children get lots of fresh air and they thoroughly enjoy climbing, rolling and building. Because of the good support they receive, mothers quickly grow confident with breastfeeding and data indicate that this is sustained well through the early months of a baby's life. Baby massage sessions are popular, providing a good opportunity for mothers to bond with their baby.

All adults who work at the centre give the highest priority to the safety and well-being of users and help users to develop their awareness of possible dangers. Safety routines are well understood and are diligently applied by all staff. When cooking, children are taught how to use utensils safely and outdoor play focuses strongly on safe practices. Outreach workers are diligent about looking for potential safety issues on home visits and they sensitively take appropriate action when any is spotted.

Relationships between staff and users are good and there are high levels of trust. This means that early intervention through the centre or outside agencies to provide additional support is readily accepted in most situations. Case studies show that partnerships with health visitors, nurseries and the emergency services, as well as links with other groups such as Homestart, are bringing about good improvements to the lives of children and their families. The Common Assessment Framework and child protection plans are used effectively to identify children who may be at risk and

provide them with additional help. Families in times of crisis feel confident about approaching the centre for support because they know that they will quickly be given the help that they need.

Users make a satisfactory contribution to the life of the community. Although there is no parent forum, parents and carers are able to make suggestions through informal contact, and these are listened to and, where possible, acted upon. For example, the timing of the Dad's Group was adjusted in response to comments from those who attended. However, although some parents and carers have ideas about how they think the centre could shape its services to respond more effectively to need, there is no formal system for making these views known to staff.

Children make satisfactory progress in developing basic skills in 'Pop-In' sessions, where they learn and play and have fun with their parents and carers. The centre is working closely with the local authority's early years team and with local nurseries and schools to improve the attainment of children when they start school, but data show that the impact so far is patchy. Recent work on storytelling is beginning to have a positive effect on literacy skills although it is too early to measure the outcomes of the project. Families who speak English as an additional language quickly improve their skills and this lays a good foundation for their future learning. Parents and carers are very positive about 'Parenting Classes' where they feel they learn important new skills to help them to manage their children's behaviour and understand how they can support their social and emotional development. The 'Music and Dance' sessions are also popular opportunities for parents and carers and their children to enjoy activities together.

Children learn to behave well and users say that they thoroughly enjoy their time at the centre. Users develop very strong relationships with each other and with members of staff. The centre provides satisfactory support to users to help them to improve their families' economic well-being, and where there is no service offered on site, staff diligently signpost where help can be given. Links with adult learning centres give users opportunities to access training but as yet there is limited data to show the impact of this support. Benefits advice is readily available through outside agencies and this is having a positive effect on the financial stability and economic well-being of families. Users are especially positive about the 'baby clothes swap shop' which provides helpful resources to families. As one parent commented, 'This has proved so helpful when I was having trouble making ends meet.'

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2

The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	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	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre provides a warm and welcoming environment and is effective at engaging with its users and meeting the needs of most of its reach areas. Families from the different ethnic groups within the reach areas are supported successfully by the centre and the services it provides. Parents and carers from all backgrounds are kept well informed, and there are many helpful leaflets and much ongoing advice to give guidance and support in areas such as sexual health, smoking cessation and substance abuse. Users are very confident that they will be pointed in the right direction if the centre cannot offer support itself. As one parent commented, 'The staff always know who is the right person to talk to.' This means, for example, that staff signpost where users can access adult training or employment advice when they are ready for this.

Assessment procedures are used satisfactorily to identify the registered users' needs, to target support and to improve their outcomes. Until recently a lack of reach specific data has made it difficult for leaders to test how well provision is having an impact on outcomes for its users. This has made it difficult to fine-tune provision to need but this is improving as the centre gathers more data. Outreach work is good at supporting target groups and on-site activities are also open to the wider community so that all have access to services. Family support workers and project workers are particularly successful at encouraging families, especially those who are vulnerable, to access the services that they need to ensure their safety and well-being. Support offered to these families is then effectively tailored to meet differing need. The centre is developing links with local refuges and homes for young parents but these target groups are still not accessing services as well as the centre would like.

Most targets groups are accessing the centre, with a particularly good uptake for mother and baby activities and parenting classes. The centre provides interesting and fun activities for older children before they move to pre-school settings or nurseries and these are greatly enjoyed by parents and carers and their children. In sessions such as 'Creative Play' and 'Pop-Ins' there is a good focus on developing basic skills and this has a positive effect on outcomes by improving behaviour and physical development. However, activities are not always adapted well enough to reflect the differing needs of users or to identify individual targets for improving outcomes for all users.

The good quality care given to users is supported well by specialist workers such as speech and language therapists. These have a highly positive effect on the early speaking skills of children and the informality of drop-in sessions with therapists give parents and carers confidence to talk about any concerns they have.

The good partnerships with health visitors, play rangers and the much improved outdoor provision are key factors in the success that the centre has in promoting healthy lifestyles. As one parent said, 'I have not got a garden but when I come to the centre I know my child will be able to play outside and use up some of their energy!'

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The work of the relatively new centre manager is having a positive effect on the work of the centre. She is passionate about doing the best for the community and the impact of recent developments and her high expectations were reflected in the comment of a returning member of staff who said, 'I did not recognise the centre because of the many superb improvements that have taken place.' Parents and carers feel that the centre manager 'is always there to offer help and support'.

Leaders at all levels are focused on ensuring that the children's centre meets the needs of its users and of the different groups within the community and they have developed good partnerships with others. Self-evaluation by all leaders is stronger on a day-to-day basis than over time. Until very recently there has not been enough data to help them to evaluate clearly the impact of what they are doing so that they can celebrate successes and identify priorities for improvement. The centre uses its facilities well and provides satisfactory value for money. The needs of most target groups are being met and resources are managed effectively to ensure that there are satisfactory improvements in outcomes for users.

The advisory board is keen and enthusiastic and it provides a useful link between the centre manager and the local authority. Members are supportive but not all are clear about their role in securing accountability and providing challenge to leaders. The

parental voice on the advisory board is relatively limited. Members of the board are aware of the need to keep a watchful eye on the workload of the centre manager as she continues to split her time between managing The Rowans and setting up a new centre.

Relationships in the centre are harmonious. Different religious beliefs and cultural needs are recognised and valued by centre staff. This helps to ensure that there is a good level of engagement in the centre's activities from people of different faiths and cultural backgrounds. Support from outside groups such as 'The KIDS Club' ensures that children with disabilities and their families are supported well and are able to take a full part in activities.

A key strength of the centre is its approach to safeguarding. All checks on the suitability of staff both in the centre and through its partners are good and the centre's records meet requirements. Health and safety systems are good and risk assessments are thorough and carefully evaluated. Training in how to recognise child protection issues is regularly updated for staff and they respond quickly when they have concerns about families at risk, working well in partnership with outside agencies to ensure that vulnerable children and families such as those who might be subject to domestic violence quickly receive the support they need.

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	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

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 Rowans Children's Centre on 24 and 25 May 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

During the inspection, we held meetings with most of the centre's staff and with many of the people such as health visitors, family support workers and project workers who come to help you. We were pleased to be able to speak to some of you to find out what you think of the centre and the services it provides. We would like to say a particular thank you to those of you who came in especially to talk to us. We took your views into account when we made our judgements.

Some of you told us that the centre has made a big difference to your lives. We found that the centre has satisfactory systems for finding out what it needs to provide to help you and your children. We found that the centre is particularly successful at helping you to learn about healthy lifestyles and it also helps you to keep and feel safe. You told us that you enjoy learning with your children at 'Creative Play' sessions and we could see that the 'Pop-In' sessions are very enjoyable and help your children to learn new skills. Many of you spoke positively about the way that there is support for you with your baby when he/she is born. The Baby Massage session is greatly enjoyed and there is good support from health visitors with breastfeeding and baby-care.

The centre provides a reasonable number of services and helps to promote community cohesion by helping families from different groups to meet with each other. The family support workers and project workers are good at finding the right kind of help and support. You told us that you like the way that the staff will find you support if they are not able to provide it themselves. This means that they can help you with accessing training, getting benefits advice and learning about employment opportunities.

We found that you have clear views about what the centre provides and how it could be improved and we have asked the centre to provide a more formal forum so that these ideas are recorded and opportunities to improve provision are not missed.

You were right when you said that staff are friendly and approachable. You feel well supported and comfortable about sharing your problems and asking for help. You told us that the centre provides you with lots of support when you are having problems. One area where we found that the centre could do more was in providing help for young parents who are not yet fully accessing the services provided. We have asked the centre to look at ways of getting this group more involved.

All of you that we spoke to said that you think highly of the centre manager and you can see that she is making things even better. Along with the centre's staff, and all the partners that provide a service at the centre, she is working hard to make the centre the best it can be. In order to do that, we have asked the centre to think about how it is going to check its effectiveness by looking at comparative data to see if what it is doing is having the desired effect. We have asked the centre manager to work with the local authority on this important area of development. The advisory board that helps to manage the centre is supportive but not all members are clear about their role in helping the centre to improve and this is another area we have asked to be improved.

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