

Inspection report for The Marshes Children's Centre

Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	384162
Inspection dates	5–6 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Mary Hinds

Centre governance	The Governing Body of Rakegate Primary School
Centre leader	Jayne Jackson
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Rakegate Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Triangle Childcare EY346472

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the governing body, the advisory board and local authority, the centre coordinator, senior staff, outreach workers, partner providers, members of the community and parents and carers. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The Marshes Children's Centre is a phase two purpose-built centre operating from one main room. It was designated in 2007. It is co-located on the same site as Rakegate Primary School. The centre provides a range of integrated services that include health, family support, crèche facilities and early years' advice and guidance. Most services are delivered from the children's centre, which works closely with other children's centres in the cluster as well as a local childcare provider.

The local authority has delegated governance and accountability to the school's governing body. The centre also has an advisory board which has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development. The advisory board comprises the headteacher of the primary school and representatives from parents and carers, partner agencies, the voluntary sector and the governing body of Rakegate Primary School.

The children's centre serves a community which is densely populated. Housing is a mixture of privately owned, housing association and council-owned properties. The large majority of local families are of White British heritage although there are a small number of Asian heritage families in the reach area. The children's centre is in an area which has pockets of high levels of deprivation. Unemployment is high, and

the percentage of the local population accessing benefits is higher than the national average. Children enter school with skills well below those expected for their age particularly in personal, social and emotional, and communication, language and literacy development.

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 centre coordinator leads by example and provides strong and effective leadership. The advisory board and the school governors support the centre well, so that all resources and provision are used effectively to match the needs and wishes of all users. As a consequence, outcomes are good overall. Consultation with users about the quality of provision on a day-to-day basis is effective. Although there is a forum for parents and carers, it does not yet influence the work of the centre at a strategic level.

Thoughtfully planned developments which have been successfully carried out serve to exemplify the centre's good capacity to sustain improvements in the future. For example, the centre coordinator has built on previous strengths and carefully targeted those parts of the centre's reach where support, advice and activities are most needed. This has resulted in a doubling of numbers accessing the centre's activities over the last two years. There has been a significant increase in the involvement of fathers, lone parents and adults from minority ethnic groups attending the centre. This also reflects the centre's good commitment to equality of opportunity for all users as the centre ensures that no group that needs its support is neglected. This is greatly appreciated by parents. As one commented, 'I am very pleased with the centre, my child can now speak English and she is meeting all her developmental milestones.'

The centre evaluates the quality of provision and the extent to which activities meet users' needs. The coordinator uses available data provided by the local authority to influence the centre's improvement planning which identifies appropriate and relevant areas for improvement. However, the local authority's data do not provide

the full range of information about the success provision has on improving outcomes for children and families outcomes over time or how the centre is performing in relation to other centres at a national level. Furthermore, some key partners are unable to provide information which would be relevant for the centre to use in order to evaluate fully the extent its work has on improving all outcomes in the reach area.

The centre is highly valued by parents and carers and well regarded by the community it serves. The centre's great strength comes from the inclusive nature and warmth of the welcome it provides for everyone. From the feedback and myriad evaluations that the centre receives, it is evident that all users feel valued and treated equally. Excellent arrangements underpin the care, guidance and support that the centre provides for its users. This is particularly so for those who, at times, because of their circumstances might potentially be at risk. The various needs of users are addressed effectively through good partnership work, especially with health professionals and other childcare providers, early identification, swift referral and sustained outreach support. Arrangements for safeguarding are effective, ensuring the well-being and safety of children and of their parents and carers.

Staff are highly motivated to do their best on behalf of users. They are well-trained workers who match their thorough understanding of the community and its families extremely accurately to the services they offer and the partners with whom they work. A real strength is the very effective promotion of the mental and emotional health of users. This helps to raise their confidence and self-esteem, as one parent confirmed, 'If it wasn't for the support from the staff in the centre I wouldn't be the person I am today.' Users who want to embark on adult training are supported well by the centre. There are good links with external providers which have resulted in some adults completing accredited training. As a result of this, there are an increasing number of users gaining employment, voluntary work and further training.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that the parents' forum helps to inform the strategic direction of the centre.
- Work closely with the local authority and other partners to gather and analyse information that will enable the centre to identify how effectively it is meeting needs within the reach area and to compare its performance with other centres from across the country.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Healthy lifestyles for all users are promoted very effectively by, for example, the well-attended food nutrition courses, designed by the Primary Health Care Trust. Similarly many parents have successfully lost weight through a weight management course designed by the Primary Health Care Trust, and delivered by the centre's family support workers called 'Top Bodz'. Additionally, the good partnerships with

health professionals have also helped to improve immunisation rates and these are now above average. Staff are swift to respond to the needs of any users who might at times be vulnerable, raising their self-esteem and helping in any way they can, as one parent said, 'I get depressed, but there is always someone who will listen to you.' Many parents expressed their delight and pride following a confidence boosting course, which has enabled them to make new friends, and to be members of the parents' forum. Outreach work is of high quality and thoughtfully planned to respond to the individual needs of those children and adults who because of their circumstances may be potentially vulnerable. This results in strong and effective provision for those children who have a child protection plan and for those who are subject to the Common Assessment Framework processes.

Arrangements to promote children's awareness of how to stay safe are good. Effective liaison with partner agencies also helps to ensure that users are safe; for example, the centre provides advice and training on how to keep users and their children safe at home, working closely with another children's centre where parents and carers have access to a home safety project. This is followed up with an interactive workshop prior to fitting resources, such as stair gates, fireguards and cupboard latches to help make their homes safer.

The large majority of children behave well and make good progress, from very low starting points. They enjoy the range of activities and, as a result of the targeted support, make good progress, especially in their personal development and language skills. Children with English as an additional language and/or language delay have benefited from a 'Talking Group' developed by the centre's teacher and key partners within the local authority. Improved outcomes are confirmed by the centre's partner schools, who say that children are often better prepared for starting in the various nursery classes, particularly as they have benefited from effective transition arrangements in the summer holidays though attending a programme called 'Right Start'. The early skills of many children bloom through attending sessions, such as 'Stay and Play', with their parents and carers. The learning journey portfolios developed by the teacher provide evidence of good progress in all six areas of learning, and enable parents and carers to understand key developmental milestones. They also encourage parents and carers to practise these early skills using ideas and resources from the centre in their homes. The centre celebrates the achievements of parents, carers and children with displays in all main areas of the centre.

The centre helps parents and carers benefit from the range of courses provided to help them to develop their confidence, to raise their aspirations and acquire skills for the future and prepare for their return to the world of work. Many parents spoke highly of the volunteer schemes which provide practical experiences, induction training, as well as volunteering opportunities in the community. Invaluable work with families, developing positive behaviour, and nurturing programmes are supporting parents and carers who report they now enjoy parenting and developing their own positive behaviour strategies.

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	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

Good communication with a range of agencies ensures that a high priority is placed on children's well-being. The centre identifies specifically those parents and carers who would gain the most from using the centre. Multi-agency meetings and liaison work with health and social professionals ensure that potentially vulnerable families are identified. The use of assessment and evaluation is firmly embedded and informs the work of the centre, enabling children and families to get the help and support they need through the effective use of Common Assessment Framework procedures of early identification, monitoring and evaluation. The centre provides both universal and targeted services to meet the needs of all users and the wider community flexibly. Activities meet a wide range of needs, are of good quality and promote purposeful learning, enjoyment and development. These are proving to be successful in improving parenting and overall outcomes for children and their families. The 'Stay and Play' sessions often incorporate activities which help potentially vulnerable families such as positive play behaviour and themed sessions relating to health and home safety. Parents and carers are signposted well to good-quality adult learning, and activities are improving parenting skills and life chances. For example, centre staff help parents to write professional curricula vitae which often lead on to employment opportunities, as one father states having gained full time employment, 'This would not have been possible without the work of The Marshes.'

The centre has excellent mechanisms for supporting families in crisis tailored to the needs of the reach area. Group work and/or one-to-one programmes and prompt referrals to other agencies contribute immensely to the physical, mental and emotional health of users and their children because care, guidance and support are outstanding. Users from different age groups and ethnic and religious backgrounds express high satisfaction with the way the centre and partners engage with them. The centre carefully inducts children and users into activities, and encourages users

to access health care and to improve their own health. The centre has been effective in helping users to stop smoking, as one parent commented, 'The Marshes have also helped my partner quit smoking, and this has remained so since.' Support for adults who speak English as an additional language is provided by several partners; one of these, Base 25, holds workshops at the centre as well as translating information leaflets in several different languages.

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

Leaders at all levels are strongly focused on providing a good range of services, particularly for potentially vulnerable users. The centre coordinator is a driving force for excellence and continual improvement. All staff share her high expectations and have risen to the challenge of change and innovation in order to improve outcomes. Teamwork among staff is excellent and contributes well to the positive ethos and welcoming atmosphere in the centre. Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of their services and have sensible plans for improvement.

There is effective communication and liaison with partner providers to ensure that centre staff are well placed to respond to any issues that might arise. However, current systems for gathering and presenting data currently make it somewhat difficult to measure success accurately, because data provided by the local authority and key partners do not always focus on outcomes. The centre routinely seeks the views of those who use the centre and they express high rates of satisfaction. However, the centre has yet to formalise ways by which the views of parents and carers expressed at the parents' forum can influence the centre's decision making processes.

The governing body is committed to improving outcomes for users in the local community and works closely with the advisory board which provides challenge and support to secure progress. The centre provides good value for money and uses the available resources wisely to ensure those within its reach are served well. The promotion of equality and diversity is a strong feature of the centre's work. For example, families with children who have disabilities are rapidly referred to relevant specialists. Staff at all levels ensure that problems are shared and successes are celebrated, and there is growing evidence that the centre is becoming more effective in closing the gap between different groups. The centre adopts all good safeguarding

practice across all areas of its work. Procedures for child protection are fully up to date with all staff trained to the required levels. Similarly, clear arrangements ensure that employed adults and volunteers are suitable to work with children and with potentially vulnerable adults.

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

Not applicable

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 Marshes Children's Centre on 5 to 6 July 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

I would like to thank those of you who gave your time to talk with us and share your views about the centre. Your help in this respect is greatly appreciated. We were delighted to hear how you appreciate the work of the centre and the guidance and help that the staff provide. You told us that the centre is a very safe and welcoming place. Inspectors agree with this view and think that staff work extremely hard to ensure the health and safety of all who use the centre. The centre is also good at helping children in need of safeguarding by working very closely with other agencies, such as the health service and social care, and ensures that you and your children are safe and, as far as possible, protected from danger.

The children's centre provides a good range of services that are helping children and their families in Wolverhampton. Throughout the inspection, those of you we met were keen to tell us how you and your children have benefited from activities like 'Stay and Play' and the parenting and nurturing courses. It was good to hear how these activities are helping you feel more confident and ready to face new challenges. From our observations and from what you and others told us, your children are growing in confidence and making good progress in their learning, especially in their behaviour and language development. The care, guidance and support that you and your children receive are excellent. This is because the staff are very successful at helping all of you to decide how to improve your lives and then making sure that you access the right services to do this. You told us that you appreciated that there is always someone to help or offer advice. Those of you who have felt isolated and alone with your problems have made friends as a result of the centre's work. The centre's coordinator is very responsive to your needs and, as a consequence, over the last two years the numbers of parents and carers taking part in the centre's activities has doubled in many areas. The centre is managed well by the centre coordinator and she is supported by an enthusiastic staff. Together, they work well as a team to make sure that activities are of a high quality and effectively improve outcomes for you and your children and families. Staff listen to the feedback that you provide and use that information to enhance the quality of provision when necessary. However, the centre does not always provide you with opportunities to contribute to decision making through the parents' forum. We have asked the children's centre to improve this aspect of its work.

The centre benefits greatly from the help it receives from the advisory board, the governors of the primary school and from the local authority. Everyone is working constantly to meet your needs and to find ways of making the centre even better. However, what the centre lacks are all the facts and figures readily available from the local authority and other agencies to see how well it is doing in relation to other children centres. The centre works well with its partners. The partnership work with health professionals is particularly strong and is helping to ensure that you and your children lead increasingly healthy lifestyles. You also told us that there are good links

with the local childcare nursery, and the nursery class on the same site which are beginning to make it much easier for your children to move from one stage of their learning to another. The centre is also good at providing opportunities for you to develop the skills that will help you find jobs in the future and at helping you to maximise your skills.

Thank you again for the time you took to come and speak to us. It is clear from these conversations and from the information gathered by the centre that you have very positive views about the children's centre.

We wish you well for the future.

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