

# Inspection report for Ronald Tree Nursery and Children's Centre

Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	362553
Inspection dates	27–28 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Joanne Harvey HMI

Centre governance	The Governing Body of Ronald Tree Nursery School and Children's Centre
Centre leader	Rosalind Parker
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Ronald Tree Nursery School and Children's Centre 121782
Linked early years and childcare, if 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.

## 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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early year's inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, the centre manager, other staff, representatives from partner services and local authority representatives, as well as talking to parents and carers. They observed the centre's work including; activities provided at the centre, a range of relevant documents and policies, safeguarding arrangements and data.

## Information about the centre

This phase one centre is attached to, and aligned with, Ronald Tree Nursery School and serves parts of the Avondale, Buccleuch, All Saints and Queen Eleanor Wards in Kettering, parts of which are amongst the most deprived wards in the town. The area is predominantly White British with a small percentage of families from minority ethnic groups. The centre is situated in the heart of a 30% most deprived Super Output Area but it covers four such areas as well as rural villages. These areas contain varying levels of deprivation and unemployment. The centre's 20% most deprived area contains a significant transient community. The 30% most deprived area has high numbers of workless households, and in parts, they are twice the national average. The number of lone parents claiming associated benefits is three times the national average in the 20% most deprived area.

The centre's primary location is a small room on the nursery site, which has recently been extended to provide two small additional adjoining rooms. Services are also delivered in the nearby Crescents Community Centre and the local Sikh temple. In the rural reach area, a range of services is also delivered in village halls and other outdoor community venues. The centre is directly managed by the governing body of the nursery school. A recently formed advisory board provides advice and assistance to a well-established sub-committee of the nursery school's governing body to which the centre is accountable. The headteacher of the nursery school is the head of centre and there is a centre manager who is responsible for the day to day running

of the centre. The advisory board is made up of representatives from a wide range of groups and agencies. A parents' forum has been established which helps support the work of the advisory board. The centre is managed by a small core team directly employed by the nursery school's governing body. A range of other services are provided by staff employed by partnership agencies who deliver services and activities for users of the children's centre. When they enter the Early Years Foundation Stage provision at the centre, children's levels of knowledge and skills are well 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**

**2**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**2**

## Main findings

'I cannot praise them any higher. This place is a lifeline.' This is how one parent summed up Ronald Tree Nursery School and Children's Centre. This good centre provides an extremely positive and welcoming environment for all its users. All staff work together seamlessly across the nursery and the children's centre to ensure equality of access to all. Diversity is celebrated well and relationships with families are strong. Families appreciate the work of the centre and are quick to praise the positive impact it has had on their lives. A typical view expressed by one user is that, 'Staff are caring and concerned for us all. I would not be where I am without them'.

The centre has achieved a great deal in a relatively short space of time, in a period which has included a significant reorganisation of its reach area. This is down to the ambition, drive and good leadership provided by the head of centre and the centre manager, coupled with the support of an enthusiastic and committed staff. The inclusion of all children and their families is of paramount importance. Leaders ensure a programme of delightfully engaging and stimulating activities is provided, along with ongoing concerted action to overcome weaknesses. This has resulted in a steady increase in the percentage of children living in the reach area being seen by centre staff. The very large majority of the most disadvantaged living in the 30% deprivation area are now engaging, along with their families, with the centre and its services and activities. It is in the centre's 20% deprivation area where children and families have been the hardest to reach. This population is highly transient and there has been relatively less success in engaging these children and their families. Centre

leaders have recognised this through their skilled use of data and have set their own ambitious targets for improvement. The centre has been particularly successful in empowering users to be involved in decisions about its work on a day to day basis. Every activity is evaluated by users and their feedback is used to inform future planning so that services match their needs and interests closely. Participation in the parent's forum enables them to develop confidence and other skills which they are now able to bring to the newly formed advisory board. These, amongst other successes, demonstrate the centre's good capacity for further improvement.

There are many effective ongoing multi-agency partnerships. These include for example, health visitors, midwives, Women's Aid and Jobcentre Plus. Other partnerships are used at specific times to respond to particular needs. For example, the charity MIND helps users with mental and emotional health issues. All work together to offer services to the whole community. Services are often creatively combined with 'Stay and Play' and other activities to make the best use of time and the limited space available. Each member of staff takes responsibility for leading a project based on an identified need in the community. These projects are frequently, rigorously and accurately evaluated by users and centre staff, and revisions made accordingly. Not all partners in service delivery are yet playing an equal part in working together with the centre to evaluate and plan further services so that the benefits of partner working can be maximised in the interests of users. Nevertheless, evaluations demonstrate that the centre is successfully improving the health, safety and social and economic well-being of those who take advantage of its services.

Outcomes for all users are at least good. For children, they are sometimes outstanding. Children, including those who are vulnerable due to their circumstances and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do extremely well in many respects because of the imaginative range of support and activities on offer. This is due in no small part to the excellent assessment and highly individualised planning and ongoing evaluation and tracking used to ensure children's needs are successfully met and their enjoyment secured. As a result, by the time they join the reception class in their chosen primary school, their knowledge and skills have caught up with what is expected for their age. Adults were also seen to enjoy and benefit from the range of support and services on offer. However, centre staff do not evaluate the longer-term impact of provision and outcomes for adults to the same degree as they do for children. Consequently, this makes it more difficult for leaders to demonstrate fully the impact of the centre's work for adults.

The centre has many good arrangements which ensured that at the time of the inspection, safeguarding requirements were well met. Staff training is up to date and staff are vigilant and alert so that correct and timely action is taken when necessary to ensure that everyone remains safe.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Identify, target and engage those children and adults who have been the hardest to reach and are in the children's centre's 20% deprivation area.
- Improve procedures to evaluate the long-term impact of the provision and outcomes for adults who benefit from the range of the centre's activities.
- Ensure all partners work together to evaluate and plan future services so that the benefits of partnership working can be maximised for users.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>2</b>
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Ronald Tree offers a good range of child and family health services. The centre is the primary site for antenatal sessions locally with up to 60 new parents attending at any time. They receive advice on birth, breastfeeding and baby care. A high proportion initiates breastfeeding and the proportion continuing to breastfeed after six to eight weeks is above that found nationally. Centre leaders recognise the need to focus on ensuring a similar level of success with smoking cessation. After attending the 'Young Parents Group', users report that they are better able to shop for a balanced diet on a budget and prepare healthy meals which they look forward to enjoying around the table whilst enjoying conversation together at the end of the day. They also value the access to contraceptive services, first aid, oral health, massage courses and sexual health screening. Various sessions are run in tandem, for example, 'Stay and Play' alongside the health visitor, to maximise resources and to facilitate the immediate response to any questions or concerns. Once users have accessed these services staff ensure that a high proportion goes on to access and benefit from the universal services on offer. Local health partners report that immunisation rates compare favourably with those found in other local centres.

Local data show that child obesity is an issue. In response, the centre provides many activities which promote physical activity, particularly outdoors, which include 'Wiggle and Jiggle', 'Forest Fun' and 'Woodland Adventures'. All are extremely popular, well attended and users report that they get ideas which they use themselves and are helping them to make good improvements to their health. Parents have identified for themselves that they need to be more physically active. In response the centre are running additional healthy road shows over the summer weeks to keep everyone active.

The emotional health of children is well promoted as is evidenced by the excellent progress shown in their development journals. A well resourced sensory room is used by children and adults. Where there are longer-term health or mental and emotional concerns at home which are at risk of impacting on children's welfare, staff are vigilant and swift in making appropriate referrals to partner agencies such as Mind or Relate, and putting the necessary respite or other support in place to ensure good health, safety and well-being. Parents confidently lead their own group called 'Ups and Downs' to support parents and carers of children with Downs Syndrome. Those in the early stages of learning English are supported successfully to improve their health, for example, with accompanied visits to health services and a well-being

worker who attends the multi-ethnic 'Chatterbox' group.

Ronald Tree, in collaboration with partner agencies, is effective in identifying and responding to the needs of their families. The use of the Common Assessment Framework for recording and coordinating support programmes is consistent. Case studies featuring family support and other workers illustrate how effective their work is in helping parents and carers to become more confident and successful in managing their family lives. Support for children with child protection plans and who are looked after is good. The centre provides a safe haven for many families who are made vulnerable by their circumstances. Users indicate that they feel safe when attending the many activities and services provided by the centre. The centre works hard to help parents and carers keep their homes safe but are currently working to speed up the process of allocating equipment currently hampered by time consuming administrative procedures. Effective programmes such as 'Parents Can' provide closely tailored support for families of children with additional needs, help them access additional support from other agencies, provide respite as appropriate as well as further improving parenting skills. Good help and support is offered for those suffering from domestic violence through the 'Freedom' programme and as a result they report that they are better able to keep themselves safe.

Children make outstanding progress because centre staff take excellent account of the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance when planning play and learning sessions. These sessions successfully help parents to make good progress in their understanding of how children learn through play and how they can develop these skills themselves. An impressive number of fathers attend the various groups. Participants report that participation in 'Parents Involved in the Children's Learning' courses has not only changed the way they play with their own child but has inspired them to become volunteers at the centre. Some parents and carers go on to take accredited courses. Other parents have gone on to complete beauty therapy, health and social care and literacy and numeracy courses for example. Members of the 'Chatterbox' group are now taking English for Speakers of Other Languages courses at a local centre. These achievements are celebrated but the progress adults make in their learning and development at the centre are not as expertly tracked as those of their children.

Users are making a positive contribution to the community in a variety of ways because of the encouragement of centre staff. For instance, an increasing number are not only volunteering at the centre but are taking the initiative to start and lead their own groups or expressing a desire to act as buddies to new starters. Their feedback strongly influences the development of further services. A member of the Parents' Forum said, 'It just keeps getting better and better, so many ideas just get taken forward'. The centre takes joyful experiences out into the community. For example, a spectacular and colourful 'Circus Day', an 'Ugly Bug Ball' event and a 'Splash Day' during which one parent commented, 'It's lovely here, the children are safe and the activities are great, you could not do these at home'. An excellent example of the way the centre promotes harmony and trust can be seen in the establishment of its activities within the Sikh temple. There is now a comfortable

integration of users accessing services at both the temple and the centre’s primary site. All recently enjoyed a ‘World Food Event’ together and one user said that, ‘The centre has helped different communities understand each other’.

A very high percentage of families across the reach area take up childcare and the centre works hard in partnership with other agencies, such as the local college, Jobcentre Plus and the Citizens Advice Bureau, to help develop employability skills. It also supports users with benefit claims and the management of finances. These initiatives are successful in enabling users to be proactive in improving outcomes for their families for the vast majority of users who are engaged with the centre.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

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

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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Provision is good because it is based on good assessment of the needs of families. Within this, for children, the assessment and planning to meet their needs is excellent. An interesting range of enjoyable and engaging activities is provided by the centre which promotes purposeful learning and development among users. Every effort is made by centre staff to work with families in need, although a small number remain hard to reach. Outreach services meet the needs of the vast majority of the wider community well. It is in the 20% super output area where over 50% of children live in workless households and where engagement is lower that centre leaders recognise they have to focus their efforts.

Assessment of individual cases is robust, whether for those referred by other agencies or for those who self-refer. Families are then provided with multi-agency support that meets their needs well. For children with additional needs, the detail of assessment and planning to meet their needs is outstanding. Clear, tailored programmes promote the health and social and economic well-being of users. This includes a strong emphasis on providing emotional support for children and adults to

boost their confidence and raise self-esteem. For many, this early work has been built on so successfully that they have not only gone on to manage family lives successfully without support, but they have had their aspirations and opportunities advanced. For example, a member of the Parents' Forum who is currently doing a psychology degree with the aim of becoming a counsellor said, 'This is all thanks to them giving me the confidence boost, having faith in me and giving me the opportunity to get experience through setting up a group volunteering'.

Good care, guidance and support, together with effective multi-agency working, ensure that families' access personalised support. This may be through attendance at groups, one-to-one guidance and advice in the centre or home, family support and specialist health services.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

Strong leadership and management at all levels ensure good-quality provision and a positive impact on children and adult users. Senior leaders communicate high expectations and a clear vision. They are determined to ensure that the centre is effective in improving the lives of all users. Clear roles and responsibilities, smooth day-to-day management and excellent relationships mean that staff work well together to improve outcomes for all users. Activities are directed through projects for which all staff take a leadership responsibility and are held accountable. Staff are passionate about the centre and its community. They are effective in ensuring that all children, parents and carers, regardless of differences or disability achieve and have the same equal access to the range of experiences.

The centre promotes strong partnerships wherever it can, for example, with health visitors, the adjacent community centre, the Sikh temple, social services and Women's Aid. Partnerships with childminders are strong and they regularly access the services provided by the centre and centre staff attend their groups, particularly to improve childminders' understanding and practice with regard to meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Productive links with other local settings have also been established. Several partners were keen to present testimonials to the centre's effectiveness. One said, 'I am confident when I know this



children’s centre is involved.’ Others praised the quality of support and communication, and the respectful, compassionate approach of staff. Leaders are now looking forward to encouraging the greater involvement of partners in evaluating the service provided and in planning for the future. Governance is good and systems to ensure accountability are secure. The recently formed advisory board is still developing but is already proving to be a valuable addition in its work alongside the governing body. It is providing additional support and challenge to centre leaders. Professional supervision is strong with clear performance management structures helping to ensure the effective work of staff. Resources are used creatively and well and finances are closely monitored to ensure that value for money is good.

Self-evaluation and monitoring, including the use of data, has become a strength. This has resulted in a clear development plan, which is closely focused on improving provision and outcomes for those most in need. It has sharp, measurable targets which make it easy to monitor success. Because staff are responsible for leading their own projects, they have become skilled in carrying out detailed evaluations of their own work which leads to further ongoing improvements. The quality of evaluation and planning for children is exemplary with the aim and impact of provision being absolutely clear. However, establishing similar high quality information to evaluate and track the impact of provision on outcomes for adult users is a focus for development.

Safeguarding arrangements, including those for child protection are good, with records being kept meticulously. All Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out. All staff have been trained and procedures are known to all. Policies are clear and implemented fully.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre’s policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

## **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](http://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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Ronald Tree Nursery and Children's Centre on 27–28 July 2011. We judged the centre to be good.

Under the careful guidance of the head of centre, the centre manager and other senior leaders, staff provide good care, guidance and support for all of you who use the centre. Those of you who spoke to us said, 'Everyone at the centre really goes out of their way to help'. Most importantly you said the centre helps improve your lives, particularly for those of you who are facing difficult challenges. One said 'I would not be where I am without them; they give me my sanity'. The centre staff have drive and ambition; they meet regularly to discuss the centre's work and plan for improvement. All staff place the utmost importance on you and your families and always provide a listening ear for you. They are passionate about creating a friendly and welcoming environment where you feel at home and able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you told us that you value the centre, which means you have no hesitation in using the services regularly.

The centre offers a good range of services and activities for families in the area, which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy and safe. The children's behaviour at the centre

is good and you and your children are safe there. Staff are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy by encouraging new mothers to breastfeed and promoting healthy eating through cookery classes.

The staff at the centre encourage you to engage in play with your children from a very early age at sessions such as 'Stay and Play', 'Saturday Dads' and 'Woodland Adventures'. We could see how much you and your children enjoy the activities you access at the centre and the positive effect these are having on you and your families.

To develop further the work of the centre we have asked staff to encourage more of those families who have been the hardest to reach to use the centre so that they can enjoy and benefit from the centre's work as much as most of you do. We have also asked them to keep a record of the progress adults make when they attend the centre which is of a similar quality to the excellent development journal they keep for children. Finally, we have asked them to encourage all the partners who deliver services in partnership with the centre to play their part in evaluating their work and planning for the future so that the benefits of partnership working can be maximised for all the centre users.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk to you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us a great deal during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).