

Inspection report for Robsack Children's Centre

Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	367862
Inspection dates	27–28 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Michael Kubiak HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Tracey Rose
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Robsack Wood Nursery EY331134

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.

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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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with centre users, representatives from the centre's advisory group, the local authority, partner organisations, smoking cessation advisor, early years team and volunteers. They also met with the centre's management team and a range of frontline staff. They spoke to centre users informally at various groups.

They observed the centre's work including a baby massage session, home safety course, a 'Play and Learn' service group and a pre-natal course. A visit was also undertaken to Robsack Wood Nursery. Inspectors looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation, business plan, service evaluations and case studies.

Information about the centre

Robsack Children's Centre was designated in 2006. It is based within the Robsack Community Centre. The building is leased from Hastings Borough Council. The children's centre rents space in the centre including a dedicated play room, office space and kitchen. Other rooms are available within the centre when required. The centre opens on Monday to Friday, from 8.00am to 5.00pm, all year round.

Children's centres in East Sussex are organised by district and managed by an area coordinator. Robsack Children's Centre is one of nine centres that make up the Hastings and St Leonards district. Staff are employed by the local authority. The centre runs some services directly and, in addition, commissions a range of services from local private and voluntary organisations. Day care is provided at Robsack Wood Nursery, which has been subject to its own inspection as part of the inspection of Robsack Wood Community School. The report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Various partner organisations are based at the centre. There is a Centre Advisory Group, which oversees the work of Robsack Children’s Centre and the neighbouring Churchwood Children’s Centre.

The centre’s catchment area is mixed in terms of deprivation. There is a mixture of privately owned and social housing, with a new development of private housing adjacent to the centre. The local population is mostly White British, with a very small percentage of families from ethnic minority families. The number of children under five living in workless households is above the national average. Children’s levels of [development](#) on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Robsack Children’s Centre provides good-quality services overall. It is welcoming to the community, knows its users well and has a very good understanding of the local area and some of the issues which users face. It offers an environment which is friendly, safe and accessible. Groups are run at the centre, either directly by centre staff or by staff employed by the commissioned services. These groups are well attended and parents value the support they receive. Some of the groups are managed by volunteers who are well supported by the centre to undertake this role. The safeguarding of all users is a high priority. Safer recruitment procedures are employed for centre staff, volunteers and commissioned services.

Partnership working is a particular strength of the centre and this work ensures that a cohesive set of services is delivered to individual families and the wider area. Services are well coordinated and staff have worked hard to build effective links with a wide range of partner organisations. Families benefit from this effective multi-agency working and may receive a package of individual tailored support which is provided by a number of different organisations. Staff empower parents and carers to make decisions. Case studies demonstrate the work the centre has on improving outcomes for users. Parents and carers report that they are able to make informed choices and are more confident as a result of attending the centre. Many parents and carers go on to volunteer at the centre or with partner organisations. The volunteer

programme provides opportunities for people to work at the centre, or with users within the community, and build their employability skills.

Evaluations and discussions with users demonstrate that users value the work of the centre and the benefits they obtain from attending. Comments from parents and carers about the work of the centre included 'brilliant' and 'invaluable'. Healthy outcomes for users are satisfactory. Centre staff have been working with health professionals and partner agencies on improving health outcomes for families and this remains a priority.

The leadership and management of the centre are good. Staff are based at the centre however may work at a number of centres across the area. Effective staff deployment, alongside regular reviews and evaluations of the services, support the centre's focus on providing value for money. There is good team work and communication between centre staff and with the wide range of private and voluntary community organisations. This is aided by some organisations being based within the same building. Staff know the community very well and understand the specific needs of the area. There is a clear commitment to improving outcomes for users within the reach area.

All parts of the community are welcome at the centre. The centre is aware of its priority groups and has undertaken work to engage them more.

The centre has a commitment to self-evaluation and staff are encouraged to be reflective practitioners. Partner organisations and the advisory group contribute to the self-evaluation process. Regular reviews and evaluations are undertaken on all services and user feedback is actively sought. Although it sometimes lacks detail, the centre's business plan sets priorities to bring improvements to the outcomes for users.

Data are available at national, local and centre level and are used to inform the centre's services. The self-evaluation and business plan and staff's local knowledge are effective in shaping future services and bringing about improvement. As a result, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the health outcomes for users by:
 - closely monitoring the strategies that have been put in place
 - ensuring that there are specific and measurable targets
 - evaluating the effectiveness of the strategies and revising when appropriate
 - ensuring that all staff and partners support and promote the work related to improving healthy outcomes.
- Develop further the business plan by ensuring that there are specific targets for all areas, that individual responsibilities for staff are identified, and that regular

review periods are built into the process, ensuring new targets are set when appropriate.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for users are good overall, with the exception of being healthy which is satisfactory.

Parents and carers are well supported in accessing the centre. Staff are aware of some of the barriers which parents and carers face in accessing the centre. Centre staff and volunteers support parents and carers with making an initial visit to the centre if needed. Users report enhanced confidence and self-esteem as a result of the encouragement and support provided by staff.

Children and their parents and carers play and learn together when they visit groups, including 'Play and Learn'. Good transition arrangements mean that children are well prepared and supported when accessing early years provision.

Children are kept safer in their homes through the support offered by staff at the centre and through outreach work. Structured parenting courses are well attended and feedback from participants is positive. Groups, such as the 'Insight Women's Group', demonstrate that participants felt more able to support their families as a result of the course. Parents who need extra support, including at times of crisis, benefit from individual, tailored support which may be provided by a number of different agencies.

The centre's leadership team works with the neighbouring school and early years settings at improving children's attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Tracking systems are in place to ensure that any gaps in attainment are identified early and, as a result, activities are amended to close any identified gaps in children's progress.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted at the centre. Children and parents and carers benefit from access to two outside areas where they can be physically active. Activities, such as 'Woodland Walks' and 'Aquababes', support parents and carers in accessing local facilities and provide opportunities for physical exercise. Families learn about healthy eating and making healthy choices through activities, such as the cookery course where children and parents and carers plan and cook healthy meals. Recipe books are produced following the classes which enable families to use the recipes at home. Healthy eating is promoted throughout the centre and through the on-site community café. Obesity levels, teenage pregnancy rates and smoking during pregnancy rates are high. The centre has made this a priority area of work and a range of strategies is in place. However, it is too early to assess the effectiveness of these.

The centre is an integral part of the community. Centre staff have built up positive

relationships with users. Parents and carers value the work of the centre. Many parents and carers go on to become volunteers at the centre as they appreciate the support that they received and want to give something back to the community.

The views of parents and carers are sought through formal and informal feedback. They have the opportunity to sit on the Centre Advisory Group, and the centre is actively looking at increased parental involvement in this group and at other ways to obtain the views of parents and carers.

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	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and 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 and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre is well established within the local community. It commissions a number of local organisations to run some groups. In addition, volunteers are encouraged, with support, to set up and run their own groups. Centre staff work with these groups to ensure that they are of good quality and that they are aware of the priorities for the centre. Information about the activities of the centre is shared with a wide range of people who are committed to promoting its good work. In addition, the centre staff undertake leaflet drops, attend community events and run information stalls at local venues. This ensures that the services are widely publicised and reach as many families as possible.

Support is tailored to the individual needs of families. The centre has a comprehensive range of procedures for assessing the needs of children and families. Monthly multi-agency meetings provide a formal opportunity for centre staff and a range of professionals to share information about individual families and, if appropriate, to devise a plan of support. Families referred to the Duty and Assessment Team, but who do not meet the threshold for their intervention, are referred on to multi-agency team meetings to see whether they can offer any appropriate support. Families needing immediate support receive prompt support and benefit from the good communication and understanding of roles which exist

between the different organisations. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process is used when families are identified as having a higher level of need. The centre is proactive in promoting the use of the CAF process. Case studies demonstrate the positive impact of this work. However, the centre does not have specific information about the number of children on child protection plans within its reach area.

Parents and carers are treated with respect and are seen as individuals. The centre has been successful in engaging some hard-to-reach areas of the community, including fathers and teenage parents. It is systematic in monitoring any changes in the demographics of the reach area. Excellent signposting ensures that parents and carers are aware of the wide range of services and support which are available.

The centre has developed a comprehensive volunteer scheme, working with partner organisations. Volunteers provide support through working directly at the centre or through schemes, such as 'Community Parents'. Volunteers actively promote the work of the centre. They receive a comprehensive training programme and are well supported in developing their skills and knowledge through excellent ongoing advice and training.

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre's leadership team is committed to improving outcomes for users and this commitment is shared by the centre staff team and partner agencies. A range of good quality services is provided which are matched to the individual needs of families. All centre staff, volunteers and partner agencies are aware of the wide range of services available. Effective signposting and joint working ensure that users receive an integrated package of support.

The Centre Advisory Group meets on a quarterly basis. It is aware of areas where it needs to develop as an advisory group and has been proactive in developing its skills and knowledge. The advisory group has begun setting targets and priorities for the centre. Although the parents' forum has recently disbanded, the centre is keen for

this group to be re-established as it understands the important contribution that parents and carers make to the centre. The centre uses evaluations of services and informal feedback to obtain the views of centre users. Feedback is obtained from parents and carers at community events. The centre is aware of the need to ensure that it obtains the views of as many families in the reach area as possible.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Safeguarding employment practices for centre staff and volunteers are given a high priority. Staff and volunteers do not commence roles until suitable clearance has been obtained. Commissioned services and partner organisations are responsible for checking the centre’s own staff and ensuring the staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding.

Equality and diversity are promoted well at the centre. Displays, information and resources within the centre are reflective of the local community. There are missed opportunities to reflect the wider community. Courses, such as baby signing and Makaton sign language, promote diverse methods of communication. A group specifically for children with disabilities/and or learning difficulties was established at the centre following feedback from parents and carers. This group is located at the centre due to comments about needing a centre which had easy access and car parking. The centre is fully wheelchair accessible and there is a lift which can be used to access the community café and rooms which are located on the first floor. The centre has worked hard to engage some groups. For example the ‘Kickstart’ group was predominantly aimed at fathers and male carers. The centre supports the work of the wider community by attending events, such as ‘Play in the Park’.

The centre uses local knowledge, case studies, evaluations and data to monitor and evaluate its services. Data are used effectively to set targets. However, a lack of centre-specific data in some areas means that the centre is not fully able to assess the impact of its work on improving outcomes. The centre is aware of this and is working to obtain accurate, centre-specific data for all areas of its work. The centre’s business plan is used to identify priorities for the centre. Centre staff are aware of these targets which feed into their individual performance targets. For some areas, the plan lacks clear measures of success and it is unclear who has overall responsibility for meeting the specific target.

Centre staff have built a good range of effective partnerships, particularly with those that are co-located in the same building. The centre has built up very good links with the local community primary school and nursery. Centre staff and partner organisations are encouraged to contribute to the centre’s self-evaluation and business planning documents. Many of these partner organisations are part of the centre’s advisory group and contribute to the centre’s work through it.

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	2
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understood	
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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Robsack Children's Centre on 27 and 28 July 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

The centre provides a welcoming environment for families. Many of you visit activities that are run within the community centre, where the centre is based. Some of you told us, and information provided by the centre also shows, that you have benefited from the services provided there. Many of you have gone on to become volunteers at the centre and through schemes such as 'Community Parents'. The centre offers a range of opportunities for you and your children to engage in fun activities. The provision of a crèche for some of the activities allows you to focus on your learning, whilst activities such as the cookery group allow you and your children to work together. We have asked the centre to ensure that you are fully supported in providing healthy lifestyles and making healthy lifestyle choices for your families.

The centre works well with organisations based within the building and in the community. Those of you who need additional assistance benefit from a package of support which may include people from a number of different organisations. Centre staff and partner organisations work hard to ensure that you know about the

services which are run at the centre. Those of you who may be worried about visiting the centre for the first time are supported.

Appropriate checks are completed to ensure that staff and volunteers working with you at the centre are suitable to do so. The centre provides you with a safe and secure environment.

The centre welcomes your views and comments and uses them to ensure that it is providing the services that you want for you and your children. The centre is constantly looking at ways that it can improve outcomes for you and your families. Centre staff are very keen to obtain your views in more ways.

The centre leaders know the centre well and have a good understanding of the issues and barriers that you face. The documents that the centre uses to plan its services and ensure that it constantly improves are generally good. However, we have asked the centre to strengthen some aspects of its business plan to make it more effective.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to meet with us and those of you we spoke to at the groups who told us your thoughts and views about the centre. We are grateful to you all and wish you and your families every success for the future.

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