

Inspection report for Pathways Children's Centre

Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	365829
Inspection dates	10–11 August 2011
Reporting inspector	Jane Neech HMI

Centre governance	Hampshire County Council
Centre leader	Karin Hale/Sarah Gibbs
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Ringwood Library Christchurch Road Ringwood BH24 1DW
Telephone number	01425 472545 or 07515 084119
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	Pathways.cc@hants.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.

Report published: August 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:

- the needs of local families, particularly the most vulnerable and demonstrating outcomes
- improving users understanding of promoting safety in the home
- users views on services provided and future changes
- ensuring partnership work results in high quality provision.

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 managers, staff, parents and carers, the chair of the advisory board and representatives of partner organisations. They also talked informally with parents, carers, staff and children throughout the working day at the centre. Inspectors observed the centre's work, reviewed case studies and looked at a range of documentation. They considered evaluations of the sessions and the latest report on the questionnaires completed by users.

Information about the centre

Pathways Children's Centre opened in 2010 as part of a local Sure Start programme. The centre serves the town of Ringwood and communities across the surrounding rural areas, including several villages which are close to the New Forest. The centre is managed directly by Hampshire County Council. An advisory board is in place, made up of representatives from parents and carers, members of the community, for example local schools, and partners such as health.

The centre operates from a base within Ringwood Library. It is a phase two centre providing the full core offer of services including family support, child and family health services and links with Jobcentre Plus. The centre serves a range of families, including a settled Traveller community and many professional families. Almost all local families are of White British heritage with very few from minority ethnic groups.

The children's centre has an activity room, office and storage space for resources. The centre is signposted in the library and there is a reception area for separate signing-in arrangements for staff and visitors to the children's centre. From the outside of the library the centre has its own intercom system for entry. Fire evacuation procedures are displayed in line with the library procedures. Further

facilities are available for activities at Greyfriars Activity Centre and Trinity Church hall, both situated near the children's centre. The Saturday Dads' Club takes place at a local school. Outreach work includes play activities in Bransgore and Burley villages.

The centre serves several rural areas whose families are in the 40% most deprived in the country, as well as many more affluent families. The number of families without work and receiving benefits is low. However, some families experience rural isolation which makes them potentially vulnerable. The proportion of children with disabilities and those families who may be potentially vulnerable attending the centre is small. The children's centre works with other professionals including health visitors, midwives and speech and language therapists to deliver services to users of the centre. The majority of children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and experiences that are broadly in line with those typical for their age.

At the time of the inspection the centre was undergoing a merger with the nearby Bridges Children's Centre to become part of the New Forest West Rural Cluster. The management of the new children centre group is under review. The current centre coordinator is assisted by an outreach worker. They are supported by a part-time finance and part-time administrative assistant. The centre coordinator has just returned from maternity leave, during which time the centre has been led by an acting centre coordinator. From September the acting centre coordinator will continue to run the centre whilst the merger with the Bridges Children's Centre is taking place.

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

Pathways Children's Centre meets the needs of families well. A key strength is the welcoming, stimulating environment that the centre offers, which underpins the outstanding learning and development it provides. Users of the centre value the way staff understand and give priority to meeting their needs. The good relationships between staff and users provide a strong foundation for the excellent care, guidance and support offered by the centre. As a result, the centre is well regarded within the community. The programme of events built up since the centre opened provides a full range of services and consequently attendance is high.

Another key strength of the centre's success has been the quality of leadership during a time of change. Both centre coordinators have established effective arrangements for the continued delivery of integrated services which improve the lives of families in the local area. Added to this, the stalwart work of the outreach worker has contributed exceptionally well to the high-quality care and support given to individual parents and their families. The effective advisory board knows the needs of its target groups well. Staff continually evaluate the work they are doing and how well this supports families. Consequently, those in the reach area show loyalty to the centre and return as their families grow.

The strong partnerships that exist lead to positive outcomes for the centre's users. The centre provides a range of services such as breastfeeding support, Baby Massage and Messy Play that are increasing the knowledge of parents and carers about ways to promote health, learning, childcare and child development. Users transfer ideas and experiences from what they do at the centre to their family life at home. This promotes healthy lifestyles well and reinforces excellent learning and development. Partnership arrangements support centre users developing or enhancing their skills for the workplace, as well as those users who wish to make career changes. Access to support from Jobcentre Plus is readily available and job opportunities are regularly promoted.

The good integration of services between key partners benefit families and individuals so families improve in health and children, who may be potentially at risk of developing at a slower rate than their peers, are promptly identified. Speech and Language Drop-In sessions at the Bridges Children's Centre identify initial concerns. These are quickly followed up by one-to-one sessions at Pathways Children's Centre. The centre is an inclusive and harmonious setting. Equality is well promoted through a tailored approach which reflects the needs of parents and carers and their families. The centre works hard to identify the needs of the most vulnerable and those who are hard to reach. Feedback from users shows that outreach work has been particularly successful where families may be isolated, and in meeting the needs of groups and individuals, so that participation rates are continually increasing.

Staff and other adults give good attention to safeguarding users and their families. As one parent put it, 'The centre is a safe place to be.' Risk assessments are conducted regularly for all activities. The clear systems between the centre and Ringwood Library mean that staff work together in ensuring all visitors to the building are safe. The focus on safety in the home has been successful and welcomed by parents who regularly seek advice from the centre. Where users may potentially be at risk of harm staff act promptly to enlist the support of relevant partners to support individual families. Case studies show that this area of the centre's work has been particularly successful in leading to the increased engagement of individuals and their families.

The centre listens well to users' feedback on services and the contribution of parents through the advisory board, and adapts its current and future work accordingly. Assessments are in place to identify and respond to users' needs. As yet these are not coordinated from an initial baseline assessment when families first come along to the centre and this limits the opportunity to monitor how well families are doing over a longer period of time in order to measure the effectiveness of the centre's work.

Senior leaders and the centre staff have a good understanding of the strengths in provision. They are continually striving to build on the services already offered, such as reviewing Messy Play sessions in outreach areas. Consequently, actions taken have a discernible impact.

The centre uses data well to chart and monitor the engagement of each user group. Pathways staff have an accurate understanding of each community and work well with other professionals, such as through the Common Assessment Framework to provide support for individual families and their children. The centre keeps up-to-date information about user engagement which feeds into their strategic plan and resulting actions. For example, by moving the venue of an activity in one of the rural areas, the take-up by target group of users improved dramatically.

Staff are effective in measuring success and are aware that the next step is to refine evaluation systems further, particularly those relating to baseline assessments and monitoring of the longer term effectiveness of the centre's work, are at an early stage. During a period of change of leadership, the centre's coordinator and acting coordinator have been effective in continuing to develop good protocols for

partnership working and thereby provide strong leadership. Resources are well managed and there are clear quality-assurance procedures and expectations. The local authority challenges the centres' work well and offers advice, which contributes to the centre's good capacity to build on current successes and develop further through its merger with the Bridges Children's Centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Establish a baseline assessment procedure for all families new to the centre, in order to further develop the analysis of the progress of parents, carers and their children over time.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The good outcomes for families are because Pathways Children's Centre provides a wide range of quality activities, responsive to users' needs, that are developed in partnership with other agencies. Strong arrangements have been established with health visitors who work closely with the centre staff to provide expert antenatal and postnatal support for mothers. This is well targeted and effective. The breastfeeding group is well supported by professional expertise. The peer support between mothers for breastfeeding has also been particularly welcomed. As a result of the range of support, an increasing number of mothers continue to breastfeed after six to eight weeks from giving birth. Users of the centre receive comprehensive advice on healthier lifestyles through interesting and fun activities. One parent reported that the advice she had been given about weaning and sleep for her baby had resulted in her feeling much more confident in the way she cared for her child. Consequently, the baby had better sleep and eating patterns. Parents appreciate being able to borrow resources such as cookery books on healthy eating. A favourite activity during Messy Play is making fruit 'smoothies' and parents report really enjoying trying out the recipes at home. Participation in health-related activities is good for all groups, including those who may be potentially vulnerable. Specialist information, such as that on immunisations, dental care and specific health-related issues, is available to all centre users. In one parent group the adults have a quiz to help them identify signs of common childhood illnesses. Evaluations and discussions with parents clearly identify the positive impact of these activities on parents' confidence in dealing with health concerns.

The centre's good relationships with families and their children allow staff to identify any safety concerns with families and intervene quickly. Case studies and interviews with parents show how staff promote home safety awareness effectively. Parents and carers learn how to improve safety in their homes through talking to staff about issues, such as where to place stair gates when stair banisters do not start at the bottom step. Parents are given safety items such as plug covers in their free 'goody bags' and are able to purchase safety items at special events put on by the centre. Outreach work helps families, including those who may be potentially vulnerable, to assess risks in their own homes and provides advice about safety equipment.

Children at the centre enjoy a stimulating and diverse range of activities which includes 'welly walks' that promote physical health outdoors. Children are very interested and engaged in their environment and try out new activities with confidence. For example, babies crawled through tunnels with great excitement in the Under Ones session. All children achieve exceptionally well because good attention is given to developing early communication and language, so that any gaps in achievement are closing. An increasing focus on early communication skills through rhymes and songs has been particularly successful. Parents and carers take home leaflets with words and actions for songs to continue at home. Links with pre-schools and schools suggest that children continue to do well as they grow older.

Staff have high expectations regarding social interaction and model positive behaviour towards adults and children. Consequently, children develop very good personal and social skills. The Baby Massage sessions are well attended by parents and help to develop the bond between parent and child. Consequently, parents and children respond well to one another. Parents', carers' and children's high enjoyment is evident through the increasing attendance at activities such as Messy Play, so much so that the centre is now providing two groups as numbers are large. Mothers report that the Saturday morning Dads' Club, held at a local school, is also very popular because children and fathers enjoy time playing together.

Users are involved in running the centre through the parent forum and parent representatives on the advisory board. Parents' suggestions are valued and used to shape the sessions. The Lone Parents Group sets its own agenda for meetings and this is much appreciated by users. Parents discuss issues such as how to manage toilet training. Friendships between parents are strong and users report often using the activity room at the centre for a picnic or meeting for a chat and coffee when the room is available.

The centre and outreach work supports individuals with problems exceptionally well, such as postnatal depression, or alcohol abuse. Parents report that in such cases the centre has been a 'sanctuary'. Staff engage well with partners to ensure users receive accessible advice and information to help them make important decisions, such as career changes. One parent reported how helpful the centre had been with advice as to how to become a childminder. Many users return to professional jobs and the centre is particularly successful in providing courses that are of interest and appropriate whilst parents are taking their maternity leave. Users are consulted as to the courses they would like. The centre works closely with Ringwood Library to support these activities, so that by providing a crèche parents have the opportunity to learn new skills, such as making silver jewellery. The work of the centre supports and encourages parents in business enterprise. For example, one parent, keen to start a cake making business, has grown in confidence as a result of the encouragement received from other parents and the centre staff. Partnership working with Jobcentre Plus means that parents have regular information about employment opportunities.

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	1
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

Assessment processes successfully identify the needs of children and their families. The details that staff collect sensitively from users themselves, and from other organisations working alongside, enable staff to get to know the families exceptionally well and tailor the services to their individual needs. However, the formalised use of a baseline assessment of all families and children, together with the analysis of their progress over time, is in its early stages.

The good range of services provided by the centre meets the needs of families in the area. The very inviting activity room at the centre in Ringwood Library creates a welcoming atmosphere for parents and their children. Sessions are well planned and effective in engaging users in interesting activities. 'Fun Days Out' are well supported by mothers and fathers and provide parents with wider opportunities to learn with their children. Parents report that resources provided give them a different perspective on the sort of toys their children enjoy playing with, for example wooden toys and malleable materials such as salt dough. Resources are of high quality and stimulate children and parents to learn and develop exceptionally well. In an outstanding Under Ones session, observed during the inspection, babies showed sustained interest in the toys, musical instruments, books and resources for physical development.

The centre benefits from the partnership with Ringwood Library who provide Tots and Tinies story time. In this way parents and their children are introduced to early literacy skills and parents are encouraged to make use of the library resources. The centre acknowledges the value of developing early literacy skills and encourages parents to share books with their children in many of its activities. The centre continually strives to engage the hardest-to-reach families in helping parents develop their children's early literacy skills, as well as other aspects of parenting, and adapt their services accordingly. A key to one area of success has been to replicate sessions, such as Messy Play, in outreach rural areas.

The quality of individual support for families is outstanding and in all cases is available for as long as it is needed. Individual support is not restricted to session times at the centre. Parents who may be feeling isolated or potentially vulnerable are welcomed at all times and this is particularly valued by users. Strategies are in place to ensure parents receive personalised support for their individual circumstances. This gives parents the confidence to attend the centre, where very positive relationships encourage them to take part in very purposeful learning activities, such as a bead-threading activity particularly enjoyed by the Traveller community. Parents particularly enjoy making a scrapbook of ideas for playing and learning together with their children so that they could try out new ideas at home.

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	1
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

Leadership of Pathways Children's Centre is effective. Local authority agreements with all partnership agencies are in place. There is a range of accessible and accurate data which inform the centre's self-evaluation. The local authority supports the centre with advice on how to build on its current work. The advisory board is working with staff, users and partners to develop a vision for the future as the centre merges with the Bridges Children's Centre. The staff team is well motivated and enthusiastic and consequently they are making a difference to children and families in the local area.

Inclusion is given priority and is used in planning all centre activities and programmes, particularly in reaching out to the target communities in rural areas. Users at the centre view staff extremely positively. Information from parent questionnaires shows there is a high satisfaction rate. Parents also fill in questionnaires for their children who say they enjoy all the activities offered. The trusting relationship between the staff and users means that parents and carers are confident when learning new skills. The centre is firmly determined to make a difference to all groups, such as the Traveller community and particularly those who may be subject to discrimination. The way in which a range of parents and carers including, new parents, grandparents, and those from ethnic minority groups are welcomed and included in activity sessions, such as in an outstanding parent and baby singing session, promotes equal opportunity and celebrates diversity.

Robust procedures are followed by a range of professional agencies to monitor children's welfare and to provide support where necessary. On occasions, in times of crisis for individual families, the centre is very diligent in providing additional support as well as being proactive in ensuring all relevant agencies are working together. Attention is given to ensuring that staff are suitable and safe to work with children. Staff are well trained to identify and deal promptly with concerns relating to child protection. Clear protocols are followed by staff and other agencies with regard to reporting any concerns relating to children's welfare or possible abuse. Processes for Criminal Records Bureau and recruitment checks are in place and comply with local authority requirements.

Self-evaluation is used effectively and correctly identifies the areas for improvement. Careful consideration is given to adopting and developing services for families which can be evaluated. The centre has identified the need to develop a tracking system by which to measure its impact on families' development and well-being in order to build on its current good practice. Sessions are thoroughly planned and evaluated by staff and users to measure their effectiveness in meeting the users' needs, and careful analysis is used to shape further work. The centres' service delivery plan links well to the priorities for target groups and builds on the current provisions and outcomes for users, such as further developing outreach work for the settled Travelling community. Targets are based on strong analysis of data which includes the input from partners.

The protocols for sharing information are well established. Leaders have identified priorities such as developing new opportunities when the centre merges with the Bridges Children's Centre. The popular Dads' Club has already made plans to join with the Bridges Dads' Club to incorporate alternating the venue for activities between different sites. Staff recognise the value of the centre being sited within Ringwood Library and both the centre and the library staff are keen to develop this partnership further. As a member of staff from the library put it, 'Having the children's centre means the library is a more vibrant place.' Governance of the centre is good and leading to a clear understanding of the needs of families and their children. The board regularly reviews performance targets and sets challenging actions to build on the centre's current good work.

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	2

statutory duties	
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

Inspectors looked at the Ofsted interim assessment report of the local Ringwood Church of England Infant School when considering children's Early Years Foundation Stage attainment. The Ofsted assessment judged the school to continue to be outstanding.

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 Pathways Children's Centre on 10 and 11 August 2011. We judged the centre as good overall with many strengths, including the way the centre cares for you and how the centre provides for learning and development for you and your children.

We thank those of you who helped us with our work. Your information is very important to us. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you, members of staff and other professionals who work with the centre. We appreciated the telephone discussions arranged with some professionals who were unable to come and meet with us.

Pathways Children's Centre provides a good range of services that are helping children and families in Ringwood and the surrounding area. Throughout the inspection, parents and carers were keen to tell us how the centre had helped them. We were particularly impressed by the case studies that showed the difference that the centre is making. We really enjoyed finding out how the centre has helped some of you with the things you do at home, such as providing you with advice on safety, healthy eating, childhood illnesses and getting your child to sleep.

Actions taken to support you and your children's learning and development are outstanding. Another excellent strength is how the centre responds to your individual needs and gives you support and advice. The centre is working closely with many organisations, such as health professionals, to build on the range of services that are available to you. The centre also works closely with Ringwood Library, where it is situated, to provide opportunities for you and your children to learn about early literacy skills. You gave us many excellent examples of how the centre has helped you learn new things and develop parenting skills.

The good range of programmes and activities offered include helping new mothers who choose to breastfeed their babies. You are also good at supporting each other with feeding your babies. The centre is effectively helping you to encourage your children to develop their communication skills very well. Your babies particularly enjoy doing the action songs and rhymes with you and the centre gives you the words and actions to do at home. You told us that fathers enjoy playing with their children at the Saturday morning Dads' Club.

The centre's management team has good procedures to make sure staff and volunteers are suitable and well trained to work with your children. You appreciate the advice given by the centre on safety in the home and have valued the opportunity to purchase safety equipment. Many of you explained just how important the centre is in your families' lives. You told us that staff listen well and help to get you the right support, for example for speech and language. The support is provided quickly and professionals and others work closely together to support families and children. This includes those communities who live in rural areas outside Ringwood.

Children make good progress because they engage well in a range of interesting activities. This prepares them for their next steps in learning and for school in the future. The centre staff make sure they check whether you have enjoyed courses or sessions. They respond by making changes based on your comments. We were impressed that you are keen to learn new skills. You make use of the opportunities provided by the library and centre together for adult courses, and the provision of a crèche for your children. Some of you are considering a new career direction and the centre has been helpful in giving you advice.

The centre's management team knows that to build on their current success it needs to make sure it has a coordinated approach to assessing where families new to the centre are in terms of their existing skills, learning and development. This means they will be able to build on their current work by tracking and analysing the progress of families and their children over time. The centre recognises the importance of this area of work particularly in the light of the planned merger with the Bridges Children's Centre and we have asked the team to develop these strategies.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to speak to us, we are very grateful and wish you every success for the future.

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