

Inspection report for Romsey Close Children's Centre

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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY344609 Sure Start Children's Centre at Marish Primary School

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 the centre managers, members of the Children's Centre Forum, staff, local authority representatives and partner agencies, including representatives from the health service. They had informal discussions with parents, carers and children and visited activities held at the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, action plan, evaluations and data about people who use the centre.

Information about the centre

Romsey Close Children's Centre is situated on the site of the Marish Primary School in the ward of Kedermister, in the east of Slough. It is a full service children's centre, offering full day care and multi-agency services for families with children under five years. These include a weekly health clinic run from the centre and family support, including outreach work. The very large majority of services are delivered from the centre but some are delivered from community venues. The centre was designated in 2007 and is run directly by the local authority. The Children's Centre Forum contributes to the management of the centre and includes representatives from a number of community and statutory partners as well as parent representatives. The centre is open from 8.00am to 6.00pm, each weekday for 51 weeks of the year.

The Slough children's centres were restructured during May and June 2011. With effect from 1st July 2011, each of the five full service Centres has taken under its umbrella its neighbouring graduated Centre. Romsey Close Children's Centre is, therefore, the main site for the Vicarage Way Children's Centre, which is situated in the neighbouring ward of Colnbrook with Poyle. This inspection report focuses on Romsey Close Children's Centre.

The children's centre serves an area that is ethnically, socially and economically diverse. There is a range of different housing accommodation, including temporary

housing and accommodation without immediate access to outdoor play facilities. There are areas within the reach of significant deprivation, which fall into the 30% most deprived nationally. Around 18% of children aged under five years are living in households dependent on workless benefits. There are 1128 children under five in the reach area. Currently, 1008 children are registered at the centre. They come from 21 different ethnic backgrounds and speak 43 different languages. The largest ethnic groups within the reach area are White British, Indian and Pakistani. There are smaller percentages of other minority ethnic groups. There is an increasing number of families of Polish and Somali heritages and a number of asylum seekers.

The centre provides childcare for children under eight years and is registered on the Early Years Register and on the compulsory and voluntary parts of the Childcare Register. The centre provides a 51 place nursery for children from three months to five years. The nursery offers funded places for two, three and four year olds. It offers six different sessions within the hours of 8.00am to 6.00pm, including after-school sessions in order to offer flexibility for parents and carers. The levels of skill shown by children when they start the early years provision are generally below those expected for their age. The nursery was previously inspected in December 2009.

The centre holds the Bristol Standard Quality Assurance Award, the '2 Star Food Safety Award' and the gold level award for 'Smiling for Life'.

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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Romsey Close Children's Centre makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for families. This is because those in charge demonstrate a clear vision and have a secure understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development. A key strength of the centre is the way in which partners work together to deliver a cohesive set of services. Together, they are taking steps to improve the already good outcomes for families, particularly those from target groups, and to develop services further. For example, the centre has plans to implement 'Children's Centre Champions', a volunteer programme providing adults with opportunities to develop

skills in preparation for gaining employment.

The Children's Centre Forum works well as a team to plan improvements for the benefit of families. The data provided by the local authority help staff and the forum to identify the areas of need in the wider community. The centre reaches around 89% of the families in the reach area, including those from target groups, such as high risk families, families from minority ethnic groups and lone parents. Whilst fathers access the services provided by the centre, such as 'Family Links' courses, it recognises the need to increase the number of fathers taking part in centre activities. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve further is good.

Children's safety and well-being are enhanced by the effective implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures, which are fully understood by staff. Staff build trusting relationships with families so they feel able to engage with other professionals to access specialist help. Staff work in strong partnership with the early intervention team to target specific support for those who need it most. Several case studies confirm the positive impact this intervention has on improving families' lives, including children who are looked after or subject to child protection plans. There is good support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The centre is extremely welcoming, inclusive and offers a friendly, safe and accessible environment. Staff are passionate about their work and go out of their way to ensure families feel welcome and offer good levels of care, guidance and support. Families told inspectors how staff spend time listening to them and supporting them, particularly when they are experiencing a crisis. This includes supporting those who are experiencing domestic violence. Parents told inspectors, 'I was welcomed with open arms' and 'Staff are so understanding and not judgemental'.

Outcomes for families are good and improving. Those using the centre enjoy and highly appreciate the good quality services offered. Children make good progress in their learning and development. The 'I-Talk' speech and language programme that was introduced in January 2009, coupled with specific input from speech and language therapists (SALT), has a significant impact on children's language and communication skills. This is evidenced through the recent Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores (EYFSP). The data shows that the children who attended the centre's childcare provision, including those accessing two-year-old funding, have made secure progress. There is a 17% increase in the number of children reaching the expected stage of development from their low starting points in communication, language and literacy. The 'I-Talk' language monitoring tool shows the numbers of children who were at risk of language delay and who are now making expected progress has increased from 50% to 63%. This demonstrates that the achievement gap is closing for these children.

Families respond well to the advice and guidance on child development, weaning, immunisations and breastfeeding support provided by health partners at the weekly health clinic. Immunisation take up rates in the area are high. Families, including

those considered harder to reach, attend the clinic and staff then introduced them to other services. As a result, some groups now run at full capacity, such as 'Stay and Play'. Many users benefit from English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses, which build their confidence and self-esteem, and make it easier to be part of the community.

Children and their parents and carers develop a good understanding of how to keep safe when out and about. Centre workers have supplied a thousand high visibility vests for children and tips on road safety when out in the community. Such work is supported by supplying families with the publication 'It's fun to go out but...', produced by the Child Accident Prevention Trust (Capt), a picture book to share with their children, whilst providing adults with key messages in relation to road safety.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop further the work to support parents in preparation for employment, including the implementation of the volunteer programme.
- Increase the proportion of fathers taking part in the centre's activities so that fathers benefit more from the service provided.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The promotion of healthy lifestyles and supporting emotional well-being are central to all services. Parents and children who attend the centre are well informed to make healthy choices about food based on positive and practical experiences. For example, through cookery classes and providing healthy snacks during activities. The centre holds the 'Smiling for life' award and children understand the importance of brushing their teeth. The oral hygienist visits activity sessions to help parents and carers develop good dental hygiene practices. Mothers identified with post-natal depression are helped to bond with their babies through baby massage courses and the 'Talking Therapies' group, which is run by health nurses. The course helps mothers in the transition to parenthood and provides opportunities to deal with negative thoughts and become less isolated as a result.

All services within the centre ensure children and their families stay safe. Families have very positive relationships with staff and approach them at any time for guidance and support. As a result, staff know families well and quickly identify when they may be experiencing difficulties or a change in circumstance. The 'Family Links' parenting course supports parents, including some fathers with behaviour management issues, and helps to improve relationships within the family. Courses are tailored to meet the different needs of target groups. The centre runs specific courses for teenage parents and Asian families. These courses are held at different venues in the community, such as the 'Life Hostel' for teenage parents and the women's refuge. Parents realise how such support helps them recognise how their

parenting impacts on their children's behaviour. One parent told inspectors, 'I realised the problem was not with my children but the problem was with me.'

The children's centre is seen as a safe place for families. Adults who are victims of domestic abuse are helped to make significant changes to their lives. The 'Freedom Programme' run by the Berkshire East and South Bucks Women's Aid helps parents to realise the effects an abusive relationship has on them and their children. After attending the programme, one parent reported, 'I realised it was never my fault' and that the programme has helped her to grow in strength and determination.

Early intervention strategies ensure children are protected effectively against harm. Children who are looked after or subject to a child protection plan are monitored closely and those with a Common Assessment Framework are supported well. Children enjoy learning in many different ways and make good gains in developing the skills needed for the future. Children behave well and have positive relationships because they are making good progress in their personal development. Parents report the benefits of their children accessing referred places in the nursery and recognise how this helps their learning and development and prepares them well for school. This is evidenced by the 2011 Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores, as 81% of children, including those considered more vulnerable, scored at least 78 points across the areas of learning, which exceeds the local authority average.

The support given for parents with children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is especially good. The 'Bubbles' group provides children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities opportunities to support their physical development and effectively provides parents with practical support to manage their children's specific needs. This target group are fully included in the life of the centre. One parent reports that such support has made family life much calmer.

A parent focus group is held annually to formally seek the views of users in order to inform services. Less formal opportunities are used at other times to seek the views of families, for example through the use of questionnaires to evaluate services, and a comments box. Children's views are routinely incorporated into the planning of activities and when staff skilfully identify their next steps.

The centre works with adult learning partners to deliver a good range of training opportunities for families. These include courses to support emotional well-being and parenting skills. Courses that lead to qualifications are offered, for example basic literacy and numeracy either at the centre or venues in the community. Available evidence, for example through case studies, demonstrates that some families are improving their economic stability and independence. This is because families access support from Citizens Advice Bureau, help with benefits, and housing advice, and others are gaining qualifications. The centre is planning to implement a volunteer programme in order to improve the outcomes for adults in developing skills that prepare them for gaining employment.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target 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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

2

Centre staff have a good understanding of the needs of their community. With the Children's Centre Forum, they make good use of the data profile supplied by the local authority. This, with the information they gather at registration, ensures services meet the needs of the majority of the community, recognising that more can be done to increase the number of fathers accessing services. Owing to the good and established partnerships, staff have been successful in reaching the very large majority of families with young children in the reach area, with around 89% of children under five accessing services.

Good assessment procedures for those who require targeted services mean that staff have a clear understanding of the needs of children and their families. This includes very good use of the electronic Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and referral to the 1st Response team. Referrals are assessed and reviewed at a multi-agency panel, which results in the allocation of well-coordinated services. Family workers coordinate 'team around the child' meetings to meet children's and families' specific needs, securing multi-agency working. The positive partnership with health visitors results in referrals for those considered more vulnerable increasing well as the centre is reaching more harder to reach families. As a result, the gap in most outcome areas for those from target groups compared with other families is narrowing.

The centre provides a good range of weekly activities. These are well attended and, with some being so popular, such as 'Stay and Play', parents have to ring on the day to book a place. However, the centre ensures that a number of places are provided for those in most need. For example, one parent told inspectors how the centre reserved a place when she and her children were experiencing a crisis and did not have access to a telephone to book a place.

The centre encourages families to undertake both family and accredited training in order to improve their family experiences and, for some, to improve their skills in preparation for employment. However, the centre recognises that collecting data about the success of those accessing training and providing opportunities to become volunteers will provide a greater number of adults with skills to gain employment and economic stability. Families' achievements are celebrated as certificates are issued for the successful completion of courses. For those who do access accredited training through 'Life Long Learning', their journey is followed using individual learning logs.

Families have access to a very good range of information, guidance and advice regarding topics that are relevant to them. Staff are extremely sensitive to the fact that users may wish to access some information in private. For example, staff display information regarding domestic violence in toilet cubicles so adults can access this without being observed by others. Parents greatly value the good care, guidance and support given to them. This helps them to gain confidence in their parenting skills, which means they feel less anxious so they can make positive changes in their lives. Staff are skilled at helping families. One parent reported, 'They go above and beyond the call of duty to ensure our children are safe.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The staff are very well led by a committed and passionate senior leadership team which is wholly focused on attaining the best outcomes for families. Staff have quickly adapted to the recent changes in the staffing structure. They are enthusiastic and work well as a team, and it is clear that they enjoy their work in helping families to make positive changes in their lives. The self-evaluation for the centre is accurate and has identified key priorities for development that link to strategic planning at a local authority level. Staff value the professional development opportunities, such as the support they receive to improve their spoken and written English.

Governance arrangements are secure at all levels and there are clear lines of accountability in place. Members of the Children's Centre Forum, including partners and parent representatives, fully embrace the centre's work and together they set realistic yet challenging targets to further improve the outcomes for families. This includes increasing the number of fathers accessing services and the implementation of 'Children's Centre Champions'. User engagement is positive and parents and

carers are invited to evaluate the impact of services they receive. Centre staff invite parents and the wider community to the annual parent focus group in order to seek their views to shape services. Such meetings are advertised in the local newspapers and those who attend receive a gift voucher for a children's store.

There is a range of monitoring and evaluation systems in place to ensure services are of good quality and targeted to meet the needs of families. The centre monitors the effectiveness of commissioned services to ensure they have the desired impact on outcomes for target groups. The centre has decommissioned some services where they have not demonstrated good value for money. The centre provides good quality childcare provision. It offers six different sessions during the day in order to provide parents with maximum flexibility and affordable childcare. This is particularly appreciated by those families who work shifts. The flexibility of sessions is considered when children access the nursery as part of a specific support programme; for example, one child attends sessions after school in order that the parent can spend required one-to-one time with the older teenage sibling.

The local authority has recently reviewed the management structure of children's centres, which has resulted in the effective sharing of staff teams, services and resources. This, along with the coordinated approach to the allocation of services through the panel process for those families who require specific and targeted support, demonstrates good value for money.

Safeguarding arrangements are given good priority and robust measures are in place to protect families. The premises are fully secure and staff carry out detailed risk assessments to maintain a safe environment. Rigorous recruitment procedures are in place to ensure that all adults working with children are suitable to do so. All staff have completed child protection training and have a clear understanding of how to safeguard children. There is clear evidence of improved outcomes for looked after children and/or those subject to child protection plans, because the centre is pro-active and works effectively with key agencies to reduce the risk of harm.

The centre has a strong commitment to providing an inclusive environment and removing barriers to services. Childcare places are provided so parents can access courses. The centre is accessible to all users. Support is provided for children and families with English as an additional language. The established and effective partnership working with key partners, such as health professionals, the 1st Response Team, women's aid, speech and language therapists and the early intervention team ensures services are integrated and accessible to the wider community. The centre is successfully narrowing the achievement gap between groups. In particular, the recent Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data shows that the gap for those children in the reach in the lowest 20% is closing. In 2010, this was around 30%, dropping to approximately 24% in 2011.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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

The Romsey Close Children's Centre nursery was previously inspected in December 2009. This inspection of the children's centre was informed by the findings and judgements made at the time.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Romsey Close Centre on 14 and 15 September 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Your children's centre provides you with an attractive, safe and inclusive environment where you and your children feel safe, valued and respected. Those of you that we spoke to told us that you really enjoy the range of activities on offer, from drop-in groups, such as 'Stay and Play', 'Cooking Courses' and 'Music and Story

Time'. From our observations, discussions and case studies, we were able to see that the centre has a positive impact on your lives. The centre has embedded 'I-TALK', a speech and language programme into the childcare and activity sessions and as a result, children make good progress in their communication and language skills, reducing the numbers of children at risk of speech delay. You told us how your children are benefiting from attending sessions in the nursery, which is preparing them for school.

We found that staff provide you with good levels of care, guidance and support. You told us that you highly appreciate the support you receive from staff and how they take time to listen, particularly when you may be experiencing challenging circumstances in your lives. Some of you told us, 'I was welcomed with open arms,' and 'Staff are so understanding and not judgemental'.

Staff are enthusiastic and work well as a team. They are committed to the centre's work and focused to help you make positive changes in your lives. Outcomes for users are good and improving. We enjoyed hearing about events, such as 'Slough Talks' and how you had the opportunity to engage in a range of activities helping you to support your children's language and communication skills. The centre serves a diverse community and you told us how you and your children are learning about and celebrating different cultures. It was good to hear how those of you who do not speak English are helped by staff or other parents to access services, and information is provided in other languages. Access to English for speakers of other language courses (ESOL) is helping you to feel part of the community.

The support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and you told us how staff help to ensure they access specialist support. The move to school for these children is carefully planned in order to ensure a smooth transition. We heard how fathers access some of the centre activities such as attending the 'Family Links' course and 'Stay and Play' sessions. We have asked the centre to look at ways to increase the number of fathers accessing centre activities, so they too can benefit from services.

The centre works well with health partners in supporting you and your families to improve your health. You told us that the advice and guidance you receive about child development, weaning, immunisations and breastfeeding is helping you to make the right decisions as your children grow. You told us how your children enjoy healthy snacks during activity sessions and those attending the nursery are developing good habits as they brush their teeth after meals. Events such as 'Safety Week' help you improve your awareness of safety in the home and when out and about in the community. Staff encourage children to develop a good understanding of road safety as they provide children with high visibility vests so they can be seen when out walking and crossing roads with you when it is dark.

Partnerships with key agencies are strong so they can offer the correct support and guidance. Staff and partners are effective in assessing the individual needs of children and families in order to ensure you receive the correct support. As a result,

there has been an increase in the number of children accessing two-year-old funding. Your children do well here, making good progress in their learning and development and, like many of you, grow in confidence and skills. We found out how courses such as 'Family Links' help you to develop parenting skills and strategies for understanding and managing children's behaviour. One parent told us how the course made her realise how her parenting impacts on how her children behave. As a result of attending the course, family life is calmer.

We found that the centre carefully plans the use of available space and resources and provides good value for money. For example, your children can access places in the nursery so you can attend parenting courses.

Safeguarding procedures are implemented well and staff demonstrate a good awareness of what to do to ensure you and your children are safe. For example, leaders follow robust practices to ensure that all those working in the centre are suitable to do so and staff are trained in how to safeguard children. You told us how you feel supported when you experience a crisis in your lives, including as a victim of domestic violence. It was good to hear how the 'Freedom Programme' helps you to make positive changes for you and your children so you feel safe.

We know that the centre provides you with a range of opportunities to evaluate the activity sessions and courses you attend. There are parent representatives on the Children's Centre Forum, helping to shape future services. Staff take account of children's views as they observe children during their play. They use this information to make activities even more inviting and plan their next steps in their learning.

Those in charge have set clear targets in order to continue to improve the range of services they provide so they can reach even more families in the community. They have plans to implement a volunteer programme called 'Children's Centre Champions' in order to provide you with more opportunities to gain skills in preparation for employment.

We would like to thank the centre users for speaking with us and contributing to the inspection at Romsey Close Children's Centre.

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