

Inspection report for BRA6 Carousel Children's Centre

Local authority	Essex
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Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Carousel Nursery and Day Care (EY332274)

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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 manager, outreach workers, health professionals, members of the parents' focus group, the area manager and deputy head of service of '4Children' and users of the children's centre services.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Carousel children's centre opened five years ago, in a former school building, and is a Phase 1 centre, providing the full core offer. It is based in a mixed area with some high levels of disadvantage. The reach area for the centre, based on the 2010 Child Benefit data, includes 1325 children under five years and their families, 420 of whom live in the 30% most disadvantaged areas. There is a relatively large Polish population living in the area, and also a Traveller community. There are 21% of children under five living in workless households, living on benefits. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are below those expected nationally for their age.

The Carousel Children's Centre incorporates: an integral 'youth wing' providing a range of informal learning opportunities for young people between the ages of 13 – 19; an 11-14 years play strategy group which runs every day during term time; a static double-decker bus which offers free soft play sessions to all families with children under five; a healthy eating café run by a local charity which supports adults with learning difficulties in gaining work based skills; a team of specialist health professionals are based within the centre offering a range of services including: community paediatrician, enuresis clinic, orthoptics clinic, named health visitor support, public health nurse, speech and language development, C-card assessment,

self baby weighing, developmental unit, healthy living team and breast feeding support.

Governance of the centre is by 4Children with its effectiveness monitored by the Braintree District Children's Centre Partnership (BDCCP). Parents play an active role in the Focus Group which brings together Carousel partners. The voice of the Focus Group, including parents' views, is passed on to the BDCCP via a report and a representative from the children's centre. Minutes from the BDCCP are then shared with the focus group.

Links with job centre plus have been limited due to their capacity to extend their services into the community. This is currently being reviewed. An outreach worker has been trained to provide a range of advice to families in need of this type of support.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

The Carousel Children's Centre provides an outstanding service to families in its reach area. This results in outstanding outcomes for children and other users of the centre's services. Over the last 18 months the centre has made outstanding progress in reaching families across its area. Over the last 18 months the centre has made outstanding progress in reaching twice as many users across its area. As a result the centre is reaching the large majority of families, including its target groups. This is due to the extraordinary enthusiasm and drive of the centre manager whose unrelenting focus on improving outcomes for all users, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, has inspired and energised staff to give their utmost in serving the reach area. For example the work with the local Traveller's community is outstanding and illustrates how, when professionals work together, all potential users are enabled to access services. In the words of the outreach worker, 'It was successful as we are being persistent and sticking to our promise.' Another driver for improvement is the centre manager's considerable skill in delegating responsibility to her staff. This has engendered even greater commitment due to the trust and value placed on their work, for example the development of the play bus.

The centre manager receives excellent support from the area's '4Children' team whose wide experience and excellent understanding of the priorities for children's centres has enhanced leadership of the centre. For example the family tracking system introduced by '4Children' has proved invaluable in enabling children's centre staff and other agencies to work very effectively together to improve outcomes for individuals. Whilst there are excellent examples of collaborative working across all agencies, there is not yet a consistent and robust relationship with health professionals at a local level. Although this has been recognised at a strategic level and some action has been taken to address this, there is more to be done so that all working relationships with health professionals are consistently effective.

The centre has developed excellent processes for self-evaluation and identifying the key priorities that will make a difference to user engagement and thus further increase the reach of the centre. However, these are not always reflected sufficiently sharply or succinctly in written self-evaluation or the service delivery plan.

Users are exceptionally pleased with all the courses and activities available to them at Carousel. They talk about the 'lifeline' that the centre has provided especially at times of crisis. For example one user explained that the series of home visits made by the outreach worker enabled her to overcome her post-natal depression. 'I did not want to leave the house. After several visits, she persuaded me to go for a walk to the shops and soon after that I went to a group at the centre.' This user went on to be a member of the focus group which helps to run the centre. This case is typical of the excellent support given by the outreach workers. Home visits have also supported families through the difficult times preventing the need for child protection plans. All users feel exceptionally safe in the centre and there are excellent and extremely robust systems in place to safeguard all centre users.

The pre-school and day nursery have improved from good at the time of their previous inspections to outstanding with significant improvement in the last year. The nursery manager and the dedicated children's centre qualified teacher have made an outstanding contribution to improving outcomes, through the excellent transition project, for Early Years Foundation Stage in the most disadvantaged parts of the reach area. They have succeeded in closing the achievement gap between the most disadvantaged and other children.

The combination of excellent leadership of the centre and very effective self-evaluation has resulted in excellent provision and outstanding outcomes for users. Thus the centre has an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further develop consistent and robust links with health professionals at a local level
- Ensure that written self-evaluation effectively captures the full extent of the impact of children centre services.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Children at the Carousel day-care and nursery achieve outstanding health outcomes. They eat very well enjoying the extremely well presented and nutritious meals. They are active throughout the day in the well-equipped outside area although the wider environment is not used as much as it could be. Because of the excellent work with young children and their families, childhood obesity rates are lower than those nationally and in the local authority. The healthy eating café supports parents in providing healthy meals for their children. Children and their parents are active together in the outside area, the soft play area in the play-bus and through buggy walking courses.

Outreach work from the centre has contributed to a reduction in teenage pregnancies and all young parents are well integrated into group activities. Users talk about the benefits of baby massage and how this has helped them to bond with their babies. The baby weigh facility is used well and for many users this is an introduction to the groups and professional support available at the centre. First-aid courses are popular and always over-subscribed. Users say this has helped them to be more aware of safety at home thus contributing the outstanding safety of users. They welcome the crèche because this enables them to participate in courses and would like this facility to be available at all groups. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress in their development though the use of the sensory room with their parents and soft play on the play-bus. Users report good outcomes following parenting courses especially where their children are on the autistic spectrum. They say this gives them a greater understanding of their children's behaviour. Children centre staff have excellent professional relationships with social care professionals and this ensures the safety of children on child protection plans. However there is not yet sufficient collaboration with health professionals at a local level and although the health visitors' areas have recently been aligned with the children's centre reach area this has not yet had time to change the current picture.

Whilst there are excellent outcomes for children in their enjoyment of learning and in their achievement, outcomes for adults learning are not as extensively developed. Groups offered are very well attended and much appreciated. Users say they really enjoy the opportunities given to spend quality time with their children and in making new friends with users with the same concerns that they have. Due to the lack of support from Job Centre Plus, there are limited opportunities for users to explore further qualifications. However there is good signposting for those interested in becoming childminders and a thriving childminders support group.

Users make an excellent contribution to the running of the centre. They are keen to give their views about provision and how this could be improved or enhanced and say the centre staff listen to and take on board their ideas. There are a number of successful self-help groups, notably the Real and Enthusiastic View of Integration (REVI) and foster carers support groups. The latter feel that the centre's willingness to facilitate their meeting contributes to the well-being of the children and young people in their care. Children at the Carousel nursery and day-care are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their education. However the lack of engagement of Job Centre Plus in the reach area has limited the centre's capacity to support users back into work. However, the centre has overcome this through the good training received by an outreach worker who is able to give benefits and housing advice to users where this is needed. Users say they would also like support writing their curriculum vitae (CV) and in gaining computer skills. The children's centre is currently investigating further training for staff to deliver this.

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	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
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	2

How good is the provision?

1

The children's centre has good systems in place to assess the needs of users in the reach area. For example there is robust, ongoing evaluation of current courses and groups both whilst they are running and at the end of the course or activity. Non user questionnaires are sent out via the local housing associations and whilst this recent initiative has given rise to some helpful suggestions as well as contacts with new users the centre has not yet had time to follow this up in detail. Other innovative initiatives have been undertaken, for example a summer fete at the centre and linking with other community activities enabling them to take place in the children's centre.

All courses are popular and very well attended. Users speak very highly of staff and the excellent organisation and opportunities for one-to-one discussion and advice

that the courses enable. There is excellent celebration of users' achievements during and on completion of courses, for example the impressive learning journeys constructed during the age-related groups for children. The children's centre café provides an outstanding opportunity for adults with special educational needs and/or disabilities to gain new skills for example in food hygiene and preparation.

Users receive excellent care, guidance and support both on visits to the centre and in the home visits made by centre staff. Outside speakers enhance the drop in sessions and users receive expert advice about a whole range of issues to improve the quality of their lives. The children's centre makes excellent use of a range of advice leaflets. The take up of these is monitored very carefully and this provides additional evidence that a new course or group may be needed, for example to support toileting or develop good sleep habits for young children. There are excellent opportunities for self-help groups to use the centre to meet and put on courses. For example the Polish community speak very highly of the facilities and encouragement the centre have provided.

There is excellent provision for children at the Carousel day-care and nursery which ensures the outstanding outcomes they achieve in all the areas of learning. For example the high quality planning of free-flow activities.

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	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

There is good governance of the centre by the Braintree District Children's Centre Partnership (BDCCP). The centre management is required to give an account of its activities and impact every three months and the centre manager receives a good level of challenge regarding outcomes for users. However, although the partnership has a lot of data about how services and courses provided by the centre are used, this has not been presented in a form that has enabled non-professionals to ask the more searching questions that were highlighted on the inspection. For example it appeared at first that the centre was only reaching a minority of those most in need of its services. However after further analysis, it was found that in fact a large majority of these were being reached. Parents are extensively involved in decision making through their involvement in the focus group however, there is no user representation at BDCCP and this is under review. There are effective written agreements and service level agreements with professional partners that are comprehensive because they include all relevant information for example

expectations for safeguarding users. The Common Assessment Framework is used exceptionally well by centre staff who are confident to liaise with all professionals and take a lead role where this is appropriate.

Users help to shape services through suggestion boxes, questionnaires, newsletters, feedback boards in all courses and groups, and through the parents' forum. There are effective management and supervision systems in place including rigorous performance management and clinical supervision where this is required. Resources are used exceptionally well to meet the needs of users. For example where there is insufficient funding for a popular activity that produces excellent outcomes, the centre manager is proactive in seeking alternative sources of income. The centre therefore gives excellent value for money.

There are many excellent examples of how the centre promotes equality and celebrates diversity in its work. For example the close links forged with the Polish community have enabled Polish users to gain confidence to attend groups and courses. The work with the Traveller community is a great strength with provision and outcomes. However the centre is not always as sensitive to the concerns of all users for example although the breastfeeding support group is very popular some users feel it is exclusive and does not meet the needs of other feeding methods like formula feeding. In the words of one user, 'A feeding group would be better as we still have concerns about feeding and sleep patterns.'

Processes and procedures for safeguarding users are exemplary. There are full risk assessments for every group and every activity. For example the café is used by the community and those coming in for refreshments must sign in and be escorted to and from this facility. There are daily health and safety checks and a rigorous cleanliness regime following use of the play-bus and sensory room. The centre has a wide range of partnerships and most are highly successful.

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	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
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	1

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	1

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The inspection of the Carousel nursery and day care which took place the day before the children's centre inspection was taken into account. This judged nursery and day-care provision to be outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the BRA6 Carousel Children's Centre on 26–27 October 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

My colleague and I very much enjoyed our visit to your children's centre and would like to thank all you who very kindly gave your time to come and speak to us so that we could get a clear picture of how well your centre recognises and caters for your needs.

We were particularly impressed with the centre manager and how hard she has worked to come up with new activities and ideas to meet your needs. She has made some excellent improvements to how the centre is running since she arrived and she works really well with all the staff. She is particularly good at helping them to run projects, like the play bus, which they really appreciated. The area team of '4Children' give her excellent support. She is very good at evaluating how well things are going however she is not quite so good at writing everything down as clearly as she could. We have asked her to shorten her written reports so that they cover what really matters to make further improvements to the services offered and so that success can be measured more easily.

It is wonderful to see how well professionals from all agencies work together to ensure the best outcomes for users. You told us how useful it is to have specialist health professionals located at the centre however we were disappointed that midwives and health visitors were not working with the centre as effectively as they could and we have asked the centre to improve this area of their work. We think it will help the centre to reach even more people in the area.

The Carousel nursery and day care has made significant improvements since it was last inspected and the outcomes for children who attend there are impressive. They all make very good progress. The special project that the nursery manager has been working on with the children's centre teacher has made a huge difference to the achievement of children by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and has successfully closed the gap between those whose circumstances make them vulnerable and other children.

You told us you liked all the courses and groups the children's centre run and that you are consulted on what works well and where improvements or new groups are needed. We have mentioned your comments about how you value crèche facilities so that you can attend courses and how you would like these for the courses that cater for different age groups like the two- and three-year-old course. We also mentioned some concerns raised about the breast feeding support group not including those mothers who are using formula to feed their babies. We recognise, as do centre staff, that all new mothers need advice about feeding their babies and about how to encourage regular sleep patterns. It was also good to hear how many of you get involved with the focus group and how this is another way open to you to make sure your views are heard.

The centre ensures that you and your children are exceptionally safe and has excellent procedures to ensure that any concerns are dealt with effectively.

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