

Inspection report for Rushden Community College Children's Centre

Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	365839
Inspection dates	23–24 May 2012
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Centre leader	Colette Tait
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Rushden Community College
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: June 2012



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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 additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff, parents, carers, representatives from the stakeholders' committee and the local authority, and with community and health partners.

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

Information about the centre

Rushden Community College Children's Centre is on the same campus as Rushden Community College. It is a phase two children's centre. It fulfils its core purpose by providing health and family support services that take place on site, in local venues and in the home, and by signposting services for childcare and education. A large majority of families are from White British backgrounds with the remainder from a number of different minority ethnic groups. An estimated 900 children aged four and under live in the reach area. The centre covers a small geographical reach area. Three super output areas are in the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The social and economic position of families is mixed. About 26% of children under five live in families that are dependent on workless benefits. Around 5% live with a lone parent. The proportion of disabled children and those who have special educational needs or children who live with a disabled parent is below average. Children's knowledge and skills when they enter early years provision are below average. There are approximately 400 fathers living in the reach area.

The local authority has delegated the management of the centre to the governing body of the linked community college through a service level agreement. A stakeholders' committee, which acts as an advisory board, provides a strategic overview. The committee includes centre staff, parents, carers, health partners,

community members and representatives from staff and the governing body of Rushden Community College.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Rushden Community College Children's Centre is satisfactory overall with satisfactory outcomes. Registrations have increased since the centre opened and the live birth data available from January 2012 has helped the centre to register families early in their child's life. Previously, it was not clear what proportion of users living in the reach area were accessing the centre's services. The centre manager works closely with staff, users and community partners to provide a varied range of services, activities and groups which meet the needs of those users who attend regularly. Parents who have attended since the centre opened three years ago are overwhelmingly positive about what it provides for them and their children. They have learned much about their children's learning and development from knowledgeable centre staff and from each other.

The centre has satisfactory capacity to improve. Until recently, a lack of data specific to the reach area hampered the centre's ability to evaluate its effectiveness objectively. The centre's improvement plan reflects the centre manager's personal knowledge of the reach area and its needs. Nevertheless, a rigorous analysis of outcomes has not taken place, especially for children living in workless families and those who live in the 30% most deprived super output areas. Governance is satisfactory. The stakeholders' committee, which includes several parent representatives, meets regularly to monitor the range of services. It contributes to the centre's improvement planning and ensures that resources are found to support planned improvement actions. Performance is managed satisfactorily. Training has skilled the staff to give advice directly to users about a range of outcomes.

Parents who attend groups at the centre are encouraged to bring with them a healthy snack for their children. Concerns remain with the rising number of children in the Reception Year who are classified as overweight or obese. Children make

satisfactory progress in their learning and reach the levels expected for their age at the end of the Reception Year. However, the centre does not evaluate the impact of its work on children's attainment when they start nursery. Children who attend activities engage well with activities and toys put out by centre staff. Parents learn why their children do what they do through discussion with staff about their learning behaviours. Staff assess children's learning carefully and comments are matched to the developmental bands in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and to the way children are learning. However, children's next steps are rarely recorded to show parents how to extend children's learning. A growing number of parents volunteer at the centre. Satisfactory support for further education and training, getting back to work or finding out about benefits entitlement is available for parents who request it.

Good care, guidance and support promote parents' good understanding of how to keep themselves and their families safe. Good safeguarding arrangements ensure users' safety when attending groups held at the centre and in its outreach venues. Families experiencing change, challenge or difficulties receive targeted support in the home to help them overcome the difficulties they face. Extremely positive relationships give users the confidence to ask for help with any concern or worry. Children behave well and get along well with each other and staff because they feel safe and secure. Parents make a good contribution to the centre's work through regular formal and informal discussions and meetings.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Collect and collate data specific to the reach area about outcomes for target groups and individual users to aid an objective evaluation of the centre's work against measurable improvement targets.
- Carry out a rigorous analysis of the data and put measures into place that help the centre to be sure that it is meeting the needs of all key target groups living in the reach area.
- Work closely with partners to implement effective procedures for improving families' health and economic well-being outcomes, and children's achievement when they start nursery.
- Extend assessments and the records of individual children's achievement by including next learning steps and show parents how they can help to develop further their children's learning.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Since registrations have increased, attendance at 'Baby Weigh and Play' is high. The number of mothers who breastfeed their babies at six to eight weeks has risen over the last two years and is similar to the national average. The proportion of children classified as overweight or obese at the end of the Reception Year fluctuates and

was broadly average last year. The small number of families who have attended the 'Cookstart' group are positive about how the sessions help them to provide healthy meals on a budget. Good support for mothers that the centre knows about and who are experiencing postnatal depression results in positive engagement in activities and groups for them and their babies.

The overwhelming majority of users who attend activities say that they feel safe and that their children are safe. Parents and carers are involved in evaluating all evacuation practices so that they know what to do in an emergency. Free home-safety checks and clear individual guidance help them keep their children safe in the home. Accidental injuries in the reach area are below national figures. A small number of children are subject to a child protection or child in need plan. Carers and the children they look after are supported extremely well through groups and in the home. Parents are equal partners in supporting actions derived from their children's assessment under the Common Assessment Framework. They attend all regularly held review meetings and are fully involved in discussing improvements with their children's family worker.

The proportion of children achieving 78 points across the assessment scales in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile with at least six points in personal, social and emotional development and in communication, language and literacy at the end of the Reception Year fluctuates each year. It was average in 2011. Children who come to one of the centre groups enjoy being adventurous. A toddler was pleased to walk up a slope unaided for the first time while another steered a sit-and-ride trike safely along the play roadway. Activities, such as messy play or exploring materials in a treasure box, encourage children to be inquisitive learners. The gap between the lowest 20% and the rest is closing slightly faster than the national rate. The take-up of the free places for three-year-olds is below average. About a third of disabled children and those who have special educational needs known to be living in the reach area attend groups and activities or receive effective outreach support in the home. Parents, including fathers, attend a range of courses held at the centre to improve their parenting and other skills, with first aid, food hygiene, parentcraft and baby massage being the most popular.

Parents make a good contribution to the centre's governance and decision-making processes. Users give their views formally at groups such as 'Listen and Lunch' and parents' forum meetings, and informally through feedback forms. Users value the consistency of groups and that they are rarely cancelled. Relationships between staff and users who access the centre are extremely positive. One mother expressed how the centre helped her to find new friends when her baby was born. Parents take part in a number of community events over the year.

A good number of teenagers and young mothers come to the designated weekly lunch club. They value the opportunity to talk to people of a similar age about work and their children's behaviour and development. Information from the Jobcentre is displayed in the main room. Centre staff make appointments for users with the Jobcentre which can be held at the children's centre or at the Jobcentre. A few adults

have completed accredited English and mathematics courses. The Citizen's Advice Bureau is available by appointment to give advice about benefits and reducing debt. Several users volunteer at the centre.

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	3
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	3
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?

3

The range of activities, services and groups offered by the centre meets the needs of those who engage with the centre well. 'Rhyme Time' and music activities effectively promote the communication skills of children who attend. 'Parentcraft' classes, 'Bumps and Babes' and 'Reality Strikes' groups enable staff to meet with expectant and new parents to give timely advice about child health, learning and development, and welfare needs. First-aid courses help users to update their qualifications. Activities and groups enable users to support each other. One parent expressed how groups have helped her and her child to make friends and how this has helped the transition to nursery. The range of activities, services and groups is good but does not fully meet the needs of families who live in the reach area because a significant number have not been accessing services. The centre does not have the data to analyse if those not accessing services are a particular target group or live in a particular area. Centre staff and/or health partners make referrals to speech and language specialists to support disabled children and those who have special educational needs should the need arise.

Parents enjoy joining in with their children's play and value being able to let their children play in the knowledge that they are safe. Children engage fully with a varied and plentiful range of toys and resources. They concentrate on one task for a good length of time for their age and learn to share toys and resources amicably. Staff observe the children's play and note their learning. Staff identify the next steps for children's learning and provide additional resources to support and extend their play. They do not always record these in a way that informs all parents how to develop

and extend their children's learning. Parents and carers who attend 'Little Thinkers' develop a good knowledge and understanding of their children's learning and development. Their progress is recorded in their children's individual learning journeys completed during the course. Assessments under the Common Assessment Framework are comprehensive and detail precisely the individual support the children and their parents should receive at activities held in the centre and in the home.

Users' well-being is given top priority. Care, guidance and support are good. Staff know their families well. They are skilful in noticing any changes in mood and quick to offer confidential and discrete support when they do. Sun cream and sunhats are available to ensure children are protected when playing outside on sunny days. The quality of outreach services is good. The centre gives good support to families in the home or at specific and tailored groups.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The centre has an accurate view of what is going well, and improvement priorities are relevant. All staff, partners and parents who attend groups are involved in the self-evaluation process through regular surveys and meetings. However, the views of the wider reach area are not yet collected systematically. The centre manager is aware that a lack of data specific to the reach area until recently has been a barrier to identifying all target groups and individuals who live in the reach area. A profiling exercise is about to be carried out to help the centre to target its resources and to measure its effectiveness against outcomes for users.

Governance is satisfactory. The stakeholder committee is fully involved in decision making and ensuring resources are available to support the range of activities offered. The committee oversees and monitors the arrangements for ensuring users' safety and welfare including checking that assessments under the Common Assessment Framework are followed and reviewed regularly. It is not yet involved in checking the effectiveness of services against outcomes for users. There is some frustration that data have not been available until recently to support a rigorous analysis of the needs of the centre's wider reach area.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. Staff check that the accommodation is safe prior to the start of all groups. The centre has comprehensive procedures to check

the suitability of all staff, partners, volunteers and visitors. Risk assessments for all venues, activities and resources are comprehensive and known by all staff. For example, reminders about the possibilities of allergies from shaving foam and oils used in baby massage are detailed.

All staff are fully committed to improving the quality of services. All are clear about their roles and responsibilities as a result of focused performance management. Partnership with the health service is resulting in some improvements to family health, although outcomes still fluctuate from year to year. Strong partnership with the local church enables groups to run closer to where some users live. Partnerships with Jobcentre and local pre-schools are still developing. Childminders are very involved in the centre's activities. The accommodation is organised well to meet the needs of those who attend. The centre gives satisfactory value for money.

The centre promotes equality and diversity satisfactorily. The diversity of the reach area is celebrated well through events and activities but the centre does not promote actively enough the cultural diversity of Britain and the wider world. Families with disabled children and those who have special educational needs who engage with the centre receive good support through outreach or at one of the groups they attend. Discrimination is not tolerated. All groups are free so that cost does not prevent families from attending. The engagement of users is satisfactory. A crèche supports parenting courses. 'Parentcraft' classes and a group for fathers and working parents are held at convenient times and so are well attended. Registrations have risen since the centre opened. It is not yet known if those who have not yet registered belong to one of the centre's key target groups.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the	3

reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

No further information was used to inform the judgements made during this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Rushden Community College on 23–24 May 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for telling us so much about how much you and your children enjoy coming to the centre. Extremely positive relationships with staff and each other help those of you who have a concern or worry to seek help quickly. Many of you told us how much you value the personal support you have been given from time to time and how you value that groups always take place and are rarely cancelled.

A varied range of activities support those of you who attend well but outcomes are satisfactory because a significant number of people living in the reach area are still not engaging with the centre's services. The centre helps you and your families to keep safe by encouraging you to follow procedures for signing yourself and your children in and out of groups. There are good opportunities for you to contribute to the centre's work. You welcome being able to give your views and to volunteer, including representing others on the centre's stakeholders' committee and having a part in the decision-making process for the centre. Outcomes for children's learning across the reach area are satisfactory. Take-up of free places for three-year-olds is below average. An average proportion of mothers breastfeed their babies, but obesity levels in young children still give some cause for concern. There is satisfactory support to help those of you who are out of work to return to education, training or work. We have asked the centre to work closely with partners to improve health and economic well-being outcomes for your families, and to help children to start nursery with higher levels of achievement.

The centre manager gives positive and supportive leadership. She is supported by a skilled staff team which offers good care, guidance and support to help you and your families improve your lives. This is especially so for those of you who experience challenges in your lives from time to time. Those of you who attend 'Little Thinkers'

value learning how to understand your children's behaviour and development. Staff observe your children's learning closely during sessions and record the information in groups and, sometimes, in individual learning journeys. They note what the children are learning, how they are doing it and the levels they are reaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. They do not always record your children's next learning steps. We have asked the centre to improve this so that you can learn how to support your children's learning and development at home.

The centre has become the place to go for those of you who use its services. The number of registrations has increased but the centre has not received until recently enough data to help it check that everyone who lives in the reach area is benefiting as much as those of you who attend groups regularly. We have, therefore, asked the centre to collect, collate and analyse data for your area to help it evaluate its effectiveness and to encourage the engagement of those groups and individuals not yet registering and attending groups.

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