

Inspection report for Riverside (Canterbury) Children's Centre

Local authority	Kent
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Centre leader	Janine Hodges
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare	Busy Bees @ Canterbury (EY333589)

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 manager and staff, parents, the chair of the advisory board, representatives of the operational board, health professionals and representatives of partner agencies and the local authority. The inspectors held informal talks with children and parents.

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

Information about the centre

Riverside Children's Centre is a phase one centre, designated in July 2008 and located in a densely populated area of Canterbury. Northgate, one of the three wards served, is among the 30% most deprived in the country. Canterbury City Council is accountable to Kent County Council for the management of the centre. An operational management board and independent district advisory board are in place. The centre's main site is located in its own grounds with enclosed play areas. The building is shared with a privately owned 80-place childcare setting. The centre delivers services from the main site and in community venues across the area, including Howe army barracks. The centre manager is supported by 13 full- and part-time staff directly employed by the centre or by other agencies, including a qualified teacher and a health visitor.

The centre's reach area is characterised by diverse neighbourhoods including extensive areas of social housing, a residential army barracks and a Roma Gypsy site. The turnover of population in the area is high. A rising proportion of children in the area (now 30.4%) live in workless households. The proportion of families from minority ethnic backgrounds (23%) is three times as high as in the county overall. The largest groups are from Nepalese or White European backgrounds. Most speak Polish, Spanish or Russian as their first language. Thirty six languages are spoken

among the centre’s users. Most children enter early years provision with skills, knowledge and abilities that are at or slightly above those expected for their age, although a significant minority are below.

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

Riverside (Canterbury) Children’s Centre makes an outstanding contribution to improving outcomes for families and meets its core purpose exceptionally well. The involvement of parents in helping to manage the centre and giving support to each other as peer-mentors is outstanding and a great source of strength. Parents’ views are absolutely integral to planning the programme and the design of services. Exceptionally close work with partner agencies ensures that health, learning and care services are seamless, particularly for new parents. A carefully balanced, adaptable programme is tailored to support groups and individual needs. As a result, children become sociable, self-confident individuals who are keen to learn. A great many parents give their time as volunteers which both adds to the centre’s resources and builds adults’ personal skills. Many make great strides in their skills as parents, keeping their children healthy and safe, and improving their family’s prospects for the future.

Excellent attention to inclusion drives the centre’s work. The centre makes sure that its services are known to all new families from different ethnic groups with young children in the area and that it is the heart of family learning for the great majority. A good many families benefit from activities at the wonderful, welcoming main premises. The centre’s innovative group work and home visiting into the community further widens access for groups who experience difficulties in accessing the main premises. All families are treated with evident respect. The centre listens carefully to the comments of families. Fathers, young parents and the rapidly increasing number of families speaking English as an additional language unanimously talk of their ‘confidence’ and ‘trust’ in the centre. The centre recognises that sharpening the objectives in planning will enable more accurate evaluation of the progress children make during centre activities.

Safeguarding practices, in partnership with a very wide range of organisations, are exemplary. Staffing arrangements, procedures for referral and the vigilance of all

partners ensures that there is a protective network around all families in contact with the centre. Exceptionally high proportions of the groups identified as needing additional support and targeted for involvement use the centre regularly. Fathers (of whom an outstanding proportion are registered with the centre), including young parents from Nepalese, Spanish, Japanese and Polish-speaking families, attend groups designed specifically for their needs and make extensive use of the centre's wider provision. Exceptionally strong needs analysis means that the centre is regularly reaching an excellent 93% of children from minority ethnic backgrounds and 88% in targeted hot-spot areas of deprivation. Health, well-being and economic stability improve rapidly for these families.

Advice and guidance supports parents' personal development outstandingly well so that many parents take their first steps towards financial stability and to employment or training when they are ready. Parents' achievements in their personal development are celebrated widely which encourages others to do well. Most children progress well from their starting points and make a smooth transition into school so that achievements in the Early Years Foundation Stage are improving in the area. Children who are closely tracked and monitored through specific childcare and communication development schemes progress very well, although this close attention to monitoring progress does not extend to all children who have attended the centre.

Exceptionally strong leadership, combined with robust self-evaluation and the outstanding participation of parents and partners in governance, means that this already excellent centre has outstanding capacity to sustain improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that all children attending the centre's activities and crèches achieve the best possible progress in their learning and personal development to match other excellent outcomes by:
 - linking children's expected learning and development gains systematically to planning for all activities and using observation materials comprehensively to evaluate the progress made towards them by all children
 - working with the local authority and partner agencies to gather information about the long-term outcomes for all children when they move on from the centre, to help assess the effectiveness of activities and set targets for groups and individual children even more sharply.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

The centre's nurturing of parents' involvement has an excellent impact on improving family safety, health and well-being. Parents' views are extremely well represented with a pool of 10 parents on the advisory board and the centre's operational

management board. Parents' suggestions about how to support families new to the area make sure that services are fully accessible in areas of greatest need, for example in the Northgate area. Parents benefit considerably from well-planned courses with nearly 100% completing basic literacy, numeracy or level one English as second language courses. A very high proportion extend their studies further. The volunteering programme currently supports over 30 parents in building their skills and confidence, with many going on to paid employment. The centre's provision leads to the excellent economic well-being and financial stability of families.

Support for transition into motherhood is seamless because health professionals target their support precisely to parents and children in poor health. Breastfeeding support groups, 'Amazing baby confidence' and the follow-on 'Mind, exercise, nutrition - do it' (MEND) group, build participants' emotional well-being and confidence to a good level. Three times more mothers than in the local authority area as a whole start breastfeeding and the number keeping it up is increasing rapidly at a time when the rate is falling nationally. Teenage parents are among the most enthusiastic to give their babies this healthy start due to dedicated teen peer mentoring.

Nutritional snacks and physical activities help parents to thoroughly understand the need to keep healthy and fit. As one parent said, 'We can't sit around all day – we need to get our children active.' A health trainer helps families most at risk of poor health, particularly those with diabetes and other disabilities, to make the changes they need in their lifestyles with 100% success rate against targeted outcomes. Partnership with the Kingsmead Leisure Centre provides a reasonable cost '3* membership' scheme, seen as an essential part of a healthy life by families. The obesity rate for children in Reception Year in schools is falling over time but is currently around the national average.

The centre's outstanding safeguarding arrangements result in children and their families being exceptionally well protected and achieve excellent outcomes. Relationships are strong and procedures for referring families at risk are both robust and sensitive in this tight-knit community, enabling families to seek help with children's behaviour, domestic violence and harassment confidently. The centre leads the way in implementing the Common Assessment Framework locally and its highly effective work has significant impact on reducing the number of formal child protection plans and the length of time children are on such plans. Parents appreciate the intensive support of the centre to assist parenting skills and one parent's comment is typical: 'I am a different person since doing the parenting course – I recommend it to anyone.' Home safety assessments and safety packs have helped significantly to reduce accidents to children.

Parents' personal development is often outstanding because of the very well-planned opportunities for mums and dads to be involved in leading and mentoring other parents in improving their skills, and through their enjoyment and achievement in activities such as Stay and Play. Children's progress and development are good overall. Where the centre targets and tracks children's progress, for example through

the community placement and 'Free for 2' schemes, children invariably make very good progress but the targeting of their next steps is not yet consistent across all activities. With considerable variation in children's starting points in the area, there has been a good improvement (from 44.6% to 62.4%) in two years of children reaching a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The achievement gap between the lowest-achieving 20% and the rest narrowed last year after widening in 2010.

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	1
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	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	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	1

How good is the provision?

1

Exceptional partnership work with a range of services within Canterbury City Council, including health visitors, midwives, the Army and private and voluntary sector organisations, ensure that the needs of the area are well known and responded to effectively. The health visitors' introduction card scheme is part of the welcome that the whole community of the centre gives to parents and families new to the area. Information about changes in family needs, community safety and safeguarding trends data is robustly shared at the district advisory level. Information about individual needs is shared sensitively at the local level by midwives and health visitors working at the centre. Formal 'team around the child' and referral systems bring assessment information to the centre so that solutions that have excellent outcomes are identified in partnership, and the well-developed outreach services are targeted to those most in need of support.

The range of individual and groupwork is finely balanced to ensure that support is always available for those in most need and is highly flexible because of the additional volunteer resource, for example at St Stephen's parent and toddler group. Parents' enterprising suggestions for services, such as bespoke Stay and Play sessions for specific language speakers, are supported enthusiastically. Partnerships with the voluntary sector, notably with The Rising Sun organisation which works with families at risk of or suffering domestic violence, provide an excellent protective

network to prevent further crises.

The centre's range and quality of activities such as Stay and Play, story and language provision are outstanding. Staff are skilled at choosing activities with parents so that everyone enjoys their learning and achieves well. Children and parents' language skills are fostered closely; the centre's books are used well to help build confidence in reading. The 'Soldiers' stories' project, in which fathers going on deployment leave recordings of stories for their children to listen to while they away, have been rightly recognised by professionals throughout the county and more widely as an outstanding project to promote well-being for particularly vulnerable families. The centre is developing increasingly more sophisticated data to track the future progress of children from working with schools in the area but it is too soon to see the full impact of this work.

Excellent guidance and support are integral to all the centre's activities. Centre users' level of satisfaction is outstandingly high. As one parent put it, 'There's nothing the centre cannot help us with.' Access to educational guidance, benefits and employment advice enables high numbers to take steps forward on the route to employment. Welfare benefits and employment specialists visit parents in the groups they normally attend and visit individuals with additional needs at home. The resulting success of parents' educational achievements is widely celebrated, for example with positive news stories in the local press. Parents are supported individually in making choices about childcare and schools for their children. The good quality childcare on site is appreciated by working parents. One parent's comment is typical: 'As a working parent, it is very easy for me to fit in health checks for my baby and this reduces the stress of working life.'

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	1
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

Leadership and management at all levels are excellent and ensure a year-round full programme that has outstanding impact on families' lives. Great care is taken to maximise the use of the main building with partners in health professions, counsellors and the care provider on site fully involved in service delivery. The centre uses all available information, especially the views of parents, to extend services across the area. The deployment of staff is outstanding. The outreach, play and volunteer coordinator staff are well qualified for their roles and together they work successfully to include all families in centre services. The centre has reached an

outstanding 88% of families in the area and has contact with almost every minority ethnic family, an impressive percentage of fathers and young parents. Staff use the centre's resources well and have created a fantastically inviting 'library area' in the main foyer to stimulate language development for the high number who use this facility.

Through partnership within the City of Canterbury and the County as appropriate authority, plus local management and operations boards, the centre has established clear and outstanding governance and accountability arrangements. Line management responsibilities within the centre and with partners are clear. Staff performance and stability are high and this leads to good continuity in services. Partners' and parents' self-confidence is raised considerably through having their views acted upon through their representation on the advisory and operational management boards.

Partnerships result in the highly positive inclusion of the most disadvantaged groups in the area, reflected in the high reach figures and the outstanding outcomes of families in the area. The achievement of young parents and those who speak English as an additional language, particularly isolated families, are rapidly improving as barriers to their participation are broken down. Safeguarding is at the top of all staff and volunteers' agenda. Vetting includes volunteers, and visitor procedures have been very carefully implemented with the guidance of parents. Staff are well trained in child protection procedures and play a full part in core child protection groups so that families quickly step away from the need for formal protection plans. The significant strengths in partnerships and user engagement underpin the sustainability of the centre's strengths.

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	1
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	1
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	1

<p>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</p>	<p>1</p>
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Busy Bees report (EY333589)

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Riverside (Canterbury) Children's Centre on 18–19 June 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We would like to thank those of you who came to talk to us about the work of the centre, especially those of you who came in to see us at a time when you would not normally be at the centre. Here is a summary of what we found.

The centre gives excellent all-round support and we congratulate you on your achievements. Leaders are ambitious for you, they listen to your views and encourage you to do outstandingly well, no matter what your starting points or the personal challenges that you face. Organisations work extremely well together to provide a complete range of services that help you through the natural changes of life and if a crisis arises.

You become healthy and enjoy respectful friendships at the centre. Many of you give back very generously with your time as volunteers and impressive numbers are involved in the management of the centre.

Many of you commented warmly on the seamless links between health services and childcare and the supportive way that groups are dovetailed on site. One parent's comment is typical: 'As a working parent, it is very easy for me to fit in health checks for my baby and this reduces the stress of working life.' We agree that the breastfeeding support groups help to build your emotional well-being and confidence. You look after your children's health very well and work on healthy lifestyles. The popular '3*' leisure scheme is a great incentive for you take up exercise at the leisure centre opposite Riverside.

Your children are confident and keen to learn. We were very pleased to see young children enjoying books so much with their fathers and mothers and thoroughly enjoying 'sign and rhyme'. Children are sociable and hold long, interesting conversations with one another and staff. Many can do this in English and their

home languages interchangeably because enterprising parents and the centre help to run Polish, Spanish, Japanese and Nepali-speaking groups to help their English language acquisition and fluency.

Staff provide an outstanding range of very high quality activities and children are well prepared for the start of school. The work that the centre does with other settings to reduce the difference in children's levels of skills and knowledge by the time they start school has begun to close the gap in achievement. Children mostly make good progress from their starting points in the Early Years Foundation Stage. A few make exceptional progress and use their language skills really well. We have asked the centre to look even more closely at how individuals and groups of children are doing so that all children can be supported in achieving as well as they possibly can.

From your success stories we know that parents do outstandingly well through contact with the centre. The level and quality of volunteering is a great achievement. Parents, who are fully vetted for safety, help out at the centre in complex roles such as peer-breastfeeding mentors. For a significant number of you, volunteering leads to qualification or employment. Your achievements encourage others to improve their lives and well-being.

The work that the centre does to help you and your children keep safe from harm is outstanding. Most services are applicable to all families and any additional services are promptly brought in and coordinated well through established processes, such as the Common Assessment Framework. Through courses and practical support, you become strong and confident in your parenting. The home safety scheme has helped families to reduce the number of accidents dramatically.

The centre's work with families at Howe Barracks nurtures positive family and community relationships for those of you in unusually stressful circumstances. The 'Soldiers' stories' project – in which fathers going on deployment leave recordings of stories for their children to listen to while they away – has been rightly recognised by professionals throughout the county, and nationally, as an outstanding project for family well-being.

Partnerships with other organisations are extensive. Experts are always contactable through the centre when you do need specialist help. As one parent told us, 'There's nothing the centre cannot help us with.' Access to benefits and employment advice is helpful to the great majority. You take up courses that are right for you in good numbers and success rates are high.

Riverside is a wonderful, safe, secure and welcoming environment for all groups in the community. Activities are accessible to all parents and children, including those with disabilities. Notably high proportions of young parents and fathers in the area attend. Working with Canterbury City Council, the centre takes your views fully into account. This helps the centre to put on parenting courses and Stay and Play

sessions in places that suit you. The number of families served by the centre is growing well.

Leaders and managers of the centre are forward thinking and the day-to-day management is outstandingly effective. The substantial contribution of parents on the operational management and advisory boards gives great vitality to the direction of the centre. Because of established partnerships and your continued input, the centre has outstanding capacity to go on improving.

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