

Inspection report for Ramsbottom Children's Centre

Local authority	Bury
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not Applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not Applicable

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre users, representatives from the local authority, the centre's advisory board, partner organisations, and staff. They spoke to centre users formally and informally at various groups.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at sessions in operation in the children's centre and in nearby locations. They also looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation, action plan, safeguarding procedures, evidence files and case studies.

Information about the centre

Ramsbottom Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre designated in December 2009. Since January 2011, the children's centre has operated from a new, purpose-built building in the centre of Ramsbottom, with use of rooms in the library opposite along with a number of community venues. The centre serves children from birth to five years and their families. It offers family support and early learning services. The number of children in the reach area is 802 and the centre engages with 72% of these children and their families.

The centre is based in a rural area on the outskirts of Bury. Of the 17 ward areas in Bury, Ramsbottom has some of the best health outcomes, and low unemployment levels. Within the reach, there are pockets of deprivation which necessitated the establishment of a children's centre. Nine per cent of the working age population claim some form of benefit and over 50% of claimants have been in receipt of benefits for over five years.

Ramsbottom, and neighbouring wards, has an older profile than the borough and North West England as a whole, and its residents have the highest average age of all of the borough's Local Area Partnerships. The most noticeable difference is that there is an under-

representation of residents in the 20 to 34-year-age-group, and an over-representation in the 35 to 59-year-age-group.

Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority, in conjunction with the advisory board. The board includes parents, providers, members of the local community, voluntary organisations and other professionals.

Most families are of White British heritage. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and knowledge at the levels expected for their age.

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

Ramsbottom Children's Centre meets the needs of its community well and delivers good provision. Outcomes for parents, children and users are good overall and outstanding in staying safe. Most families in the reach area use the centre. A wide range of services for parents and children are planned and offered in conjunction with partners. A multi-agency approach, especially with health professionals, is effective.

Activities are offered at the centre, at a range of accessible venues, as well as in the home. While there is a good range of activities for children from birth to two years, the centre is still developing more activities for children aged between three and four years. Programmes take place at flexible times and include a Saturday morning dads' group. Very good breastfeeding support is available and is particularly effective in responding to the needs of professional women returning to work. Expertise has been developed to respond to the small but growing number of women suffering from postnatal depression.

The care, guidance and support offered to families are outstanding. An effective and coordinated approach uses the expertise of a range of specialist providers. The outreach team, in particular, ensures that families most in need of support have access to the services they need and often act as advocates on their behalf. The care and support offered to individuals and families at times of crisis are exceptional.

Many adults using the children's centre improve their employability and self-confidence through parenting programmes and there is good signposting to the local college. All premises used by the children's centre are carefully risk assessed and provide a safe environment. Outstanding safeguarding arrangements are embedded well into all elements of the centre's guidance, practice and support.

Partnership work is a strength of the children's centre. Strong links with health partners, with the local registrar, with housing and other statutory agencies all contribute to improving outcomes for users. Parents have the opportunity to provide feedback on provision, mainly through direct feedback to staff and through programme evaluations. The centre has identified that it must continue to identify ways in which it can gain the views of all users through the establishment of a parents' forum. Work is presently being undertaken with the local authority to secure and extend links with the education services, including local schools and early years provision.

The centre understands its community well and the self-evaluation is accurate and with a clear understanding of what needs to improve. Centre staff are well qualified. Centre management is good and staff receive supportive and regular supervision. The collection of accurate and timely data is helping to improve performance management. Target-setting is now established and is moving towards a focus upon a smaller number of priority targets to ensure ongoing challenge and a continued improvement in services. The use and management of resources are outstanding. Many outcomes are at least good and improving. Together with its other key strengths, the centre has a good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Focus upon a smaller number of key priorities, setting ambitious targets to ensure a more strategic response and continued improvement in performance.
- Develop the Early Years Partnership scheme in conjunction with the local authority across all providers to ensure that progress can be better monitored and progress better evaluated.
- Engage more three-and-four-year-old-children in the centre's provision.
- Consult with more centre users through the establishment of a parents' forum.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

All outcomes for users of the centre are at least good and the extent to which children are safe and protected is outstanding. Provision and activities at the centre, supported by the outreach team, ensure that the most vulnerable families are engaging with the appropriate health services. The centre has developed, in consultation, a range of activities that offer an opportunity for babies and children to be active. These include 'Wellies and Worms', walks for families in the local park, 'Tiddlers' swimming and 'Baby Moves', an active session for babies. Many initiatives are developed in close partnership with other health professionals,

including midwives, health visitors and health trainers. The children's centre staff often act as advocates for those parents who lack confidence to deal with professionals. The rates for initiating breastfeeding and breastfeeding at six to eight weeks at 50% are consistently above the average for Bury and nationally. Provision of ante- and postnatal support, through 'Bump and Beyond', along with a drop-in breastfeeding clinic, 'Baby Bistro', has led to improved confidence in breastfeeding and general baby care.

Children and their families are exceptionally well supported in relation to being safe and protected. At the centres and through home visits, parents' knowledge and skills are developed so that they have an excellent understanding of dangers and how to keep themselves safe. Parenting courses provide the opportunity to develop confidence in a caring and supportive environment. Many parents speak of the children's centre as offering a 'lifeline'. 'The children's centre has given me back my confidence', said one. The centre staff make particularly good use of the Common Assessment Framework and Child in Need plans. Preventative strategies are developed very effectively with early intervention by a committed multi-disciplinary team. Children attending the centre behave very well and have a very good understanding of how to keep safe.

Children and adults enjoy learning and achieve well. Community engagement in children's centre programmes has increased, with activities particularly well promoted to those in most need. A range of activities offered in, and through, the centre has ensured that outcomes have improved for both parents and children, in particular those from the identified target groups. Local teachers report that children attending 'Stay and Play' sessions are well prepared for transition to school. A high number of children are achieving 78 points or more on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and there is evidence of narrowing the gap between the lowest 20% in the Early Years Foundation Profile and the rest. The local authority is developing an Early Years Partnership scheme, for all providers of childcare in Bury, to develop further a coordinated approach and to improve transition arrangements to school.

The children's centre plays a pivotal role in its community. It also brings together the strengths of partners to meet the needs of users in a coherent and effective way. Some families are involved in the governance of the centre through their membership of the advisory board. Parents and children were encouraged to help design and draw up plans for the outdoor play area. The centre is an extremely welcoming place where everyone is treated with consideration and respect. The very effective outreach team provides a comprehensive package of support and referrals for the most vulnerable families, which leads to improved confidence and independence. Advice to families on debt management and benefits has improved economic stability.

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	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.	2

How good is the provision?

2

Centre staff have an in-depth understanding of the area the centre serves and are particularly effective in meeting the needs of children and families with circumstances that make them vulnerable. The outreach team of three staff conducts home visits, supports individuals and families very well and encourages and supports families to engage with the centre and with other services. Very strong partnership work ensures an appropriate and responsive approach. The centre is highly flexible, changing opening times and running sessions in the early evening or at weekends. The centre is busy and participation rates are improving. Attendance at individual sessions is high. In 2011/12, 606 sessions provided a range of universal and targeted services, with an average attendance of 12 per session.

The centre promotes purposeful learning well. Parents welcome the opportunity to come together in groups to learn in different and engaging ways. Parents speak of the fact that, 'There is something every day' in outside venues that are accessible and well located and, 'Lots of messy play – something we can't do at home!' Children's learning is individualised and the 'Stay and Play' sessions are both fun and successful in developing effective learning habits. Parents are encouraged to use prior experience and knowledge to contribute to programme development. The centre celebrates achievement well and helps to raise aspirations of children and parents. Users grow in confidence and develop and extend their personal and social skills well. Work with three-and-four-year-olds is limited with fewer activities on offer.

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. Personalised support enables families to develop effective strategies to ensure their health and well-being. The centre coordinates the offer across a range of specialist services to ensure that all needs are met. The work of the outreach team ensures that families are empowered through the quality of the support to change their lives for the better. The centre is particularly effective at times of crisis. Many parents spoke of the selfless commitment of centre staff, who make themselves available at all times to help, and to offer advice and support. One mum said, 'If the children's centre had not helped, I would still be with an abusive partner and the children would be in care.'

Information and guidance on a range of health-related issues, including smoking cessation, alcohol and drug misuse, and more sensitive information regarding domestic abuse and sexual health are easily available, either through leaflets or through activities for parents.

Close partnership working with a local church provides good information to families around debt management. The children's centre has responsibility across the authority for establishing and supporting crèche provision which ensure that parents can benefit from learning.

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.	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance arrangements are clear and accountable. Team Bury, the local authority, is responsible for the children's centre through an advisory board. The advisory board has benefited from a development programme with clear terms of reference and an excellent induction for new members. The board now effectively monitors performance, reviews progress and contributes to future planning. The local authority, following a restructure, provides good quality data on a regular basis and has recently established clear targets for the centre through a performance management plan. Centre staff are planning a focus on a reduced number of priorities to ensure a response that reflects the development plan and continued improvement in performance. Professional supervision and management arrangements are well defined and are effectively supporting staff. Managers and staff are enthusiastic, motivated and committed to improvement. Through the development of strong partnerships, integrated provision has successfully evolved. This is meeting identified need and has secured improved outcomes for children and their parents.

The centre is managed in a way that ensures the best use of resources. Although a small centre, it is very well used and provides excellent value for money. All outcomes for families using the centre are at least good and the centre clearly meets the needs of its community. Resource planning, including the deployment of staff, is well established and takes very good account of the need for sustainability. Resources to support learning are plentiful and of a high quality. The centre operates from environments that are attractive and welcoming. Staff are professionally qualified and benefit from effective professional development opportunities. Value for money is outstanding. All staff are involved in the self-evaluation process and the judgements made are broadly accurate with managers and staff knowing the area they serve well. Staff are committed to achieving targets and securing improvement.

Provision for all groups is central to the vision of the centre. All statutory duties are effectively met, and an inclusion policy provides each child with personalised support. Good strategies have improved engagement and outcomes for some priority groups, such as

fathers, with a dads' group meeting on Saturday morning. The centre actively promotes equality and supports diversity through, for example, the celebration of multi-faith festivals. The highest priority is given to safeguarding children and adults and all policies and procedures are consistently implemented. Very effective risk assessment procedures are followed. Recruitment and vetting procedures for staff are high quality. All staff and members of the advisory board receive regular training on safeguarding.

Effective partnerships provide an integrated approach ensuring that families, and target groups in particular, have more opportunities in life and improved outcomes. Families using the centre are able to influence the shaping of provision. There are good consultative mechanisms and the evaluation of courses is both thorough and seeks a wide variety of feedback. Centre staff are strengthening consultation mechanisms by introducing a parents' forum, following a request from parents.

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 secures 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	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.	2

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Ramsbottom Children's Centre on 24 and 25 September 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit, we looked at the centre's activities and resources and spoke to staff. We enjoyed particularly the chance to talk to many of you during our inspection of the centre. You told us how welcoming the centre is and how helpful and supportive the staff are. You told us how accessible the centre is, how you can get answers to questions that are worrying you, and get good information about how your children develop.

Your children are progressing well in their communication skills, and with their personal and social development. The centre is a very safe environment and the centre staff make sure that safeguarding is a high priority. There are many opportunities for you to make new friends and learn new things. You told us that you found some of the parenting programmes particularly useful. Above all, you told us how much you and your children enjoy the activities and we saw that too.

You feel very well supported by the centre and told us how often it provides a lifeline when things are getting on top of you. The centre is good at working with partners, particularly in health, so that you receive a full programme of support that meets your individual needs.

We were impressed with the care, guidance and support offered at the centre and in the home by the outreach team. We judge that this aspect is outstanding.

You told us how much you appreciated the opportunity to find advice about health issues, support for breastfeeding and weaning, as well as the chance to join in on fun activities such as 'Mucky Pups' and 'Wellies and Worms'.

You told us the centre makes a real difference to your lives and we agree.

The staff at the centre are very committed to making the centre even better. We have asked them to make sure that everyone can be really involved in the running of the centre through the establishment of a parents' forum. We have suggested that they plan more activities for the three-and-four-year-old children. We have asked for clear priorities to be established for the future with targets to measure how well the centre is doing. We have also asked the local authority to continue to develop their Early Years Partnership scheme so that all early years provision can be better coordinated and monitored.

Thank you very much for your welcome. We enjoyed talking with you and wish you all well for the future.

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