

Inspection report for Ranikhet Children's Centre

Local authority	Reading
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Centre leader	Corinne Dishington
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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, local authority officers and a range of front line staff, partners and health professionals. They met parents and other centre users, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The centre is situated on an estate of mainly social housing in the west of Reading and is attached to a primary school. Just over half of the community that it serves is White British, though there has been an increase in the number of other minority ethnic heritages within its reach in recent years, mainly from Eastern Europe. Families live in a mix of privately rented, owner-occupied and social housing. A ten-year regeneration project began in the area in June 2010.

Three parts of the reach area are amongst the 30% most deprived in the country. Unemployment is above the national average. Twenty-six percent of the child population live in households which have no working adult and are eligible for benefits. The proportion of families with children known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Children's levels of skills and experiences on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage provision are lower than is typical for their age.

Ranikhet Children's Centre is managed directly by the local authority, having previously been managed by the governing body of the attached primary school. It was designated as a phase 2 children's centre in March 2008 and employs nine staff, including the centre manager. It provides families and children with a range of services, including family health, family support, ante-natal and maternity care, adult education, family learning and speech and language support. There is no registered

childcare at the centre, but it runs a crèche for centre users and a breakfast club for the attached school.

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

Ranikhet Children’s Centre is a good centre overall. It meets the different needs of its community well, and can demonstrate good improvement in outcomes for its families, including those in target groups. It has shown that it adapts well to change, not only in the community, as the ethnic profile of the estate has shifted in recent years and as the programme of regeneration has got underway, but also within its own organisation. Governance has moved from the attached primary school to the local authority over the last two years.

Good use of data and systematic checks on the quality of services have enabled the centre to keep on top of changes in need. When the proportion of Polish families amongst the centre’s minority ethnic groups was found to have increased from 4% to 44%, for example, the centre responded by taking on a Polish-speaking member of staff, and offering an English conversation group for non-native speakers.

Staff are well managed and organised, and feel able to do their jobs competently and professionally. Almost all come from or live on the estate, and have gained their qualifications and experience through the centre. Senior staff are currently developing a volunteer programme to enable more local people to become involved in the delivery of services at the centre and learn skills which will add to their employability.

Partnerships with other providers and agencies are excellent. The range of partnerships is far-reaching, but two in particular have a significant impact on large majority of families who use the centre. One is the link with midwifery and health visitors, which has resulted in the centre offering a ‘one-stop shop’ on site for all maternity services. This enables mothers and babies to enjoy continuity of care from the time when they book in at their doctors until their child goes to nursery. The

other vital link is with adult education providers, who offer parents courses to promote their basic skills, workplace skills, parenting skills and confidence. This has meant that economic and social well-being for a large majority of families is excellent and access to work has improved significantly, particularly for fathers.

Relationships at the centre are very strong and supportive, and families commented on how comfortable they feel there. They say that they can share their problems with staff without feeling judged. Children show that they feel settled and safe in the crèche, and staff interact with them skilfully, making good use of questioning and developing children's language carefully, in line with the centre's priority of helping children be ready for school. Limited use is made of the outdoor areas available to the crèche, however, and this reduces children's opportunities for development across all required areas of learning, particularly physical development.

Leadership and management of the centre are strong, and the centre is well supported by the local authority, which provides good quality information and support with business planning. The centre's own checks and priorities for improvement are thoughtful and well balanced, and reflect the findings of the inspection. Morale at the centre is high, and staff and partners work together successfully as a cohesive team. The centre is very inclusive and is committed to promoting equality and tackling discrimination. It has a good capacity for further continuous improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase opportunities for children to learn and play outdoors.
- Develop plans for increasing volunteering opportunities at the centre.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre works well to improve outcomes for families. Improvements in breastfeeding, stopping smoking and reduction of childhood obesity are all highlighted as priority areas in its current business plan, and there is already evidence of success. Breastfeeding is beginning to increase, from levels in line with the national average, thanks to the combined work of midwives, health visitors and charities on site, while smokers are signposted to specialist borough-wide provision in the town centre.

The centre's checks have found no issues with childhood obesity for Reception-aged children, but have discovered that there are problems for Year 6 children in the reach area. In response, it has run a number of well-attended courses on basic cooking for parents and sessions on 'Fun Food' for families. Feedback from a large majority of parents shows that they now feel able to cook vegetables, for example, or make a roast dinner, and are cooking for their families rather than using ready meals. Mothers and babies are also kept healthy through the take-up of vitamins at the

centre, which is the highest in the country.

Adults say that they feel safe at the centre, and that posters and signs on the walls tell them what to do if they have a concern about child protection. Children show from their behaviour that they feel secure, and older children are encouraged by staff to show consideration for little ones. The centre's records show that procedures for looked after children, those on child protection plans and those involved in Common Assessment Framework Processes are thoroughly followed, and because agencies work so closely together all is watertight.

Relationships at the centre are good at all levels. Children trust and respond positively to staff, and families from different ethnic heritages mix easily together during activities and courses. They are interested in one another's cultures. The centre welcomes older members of the community, and users of all ages get on well.

Children learn and develop well at the centre. The ongoing focus on improving speech and language development has led to a decrease in the proportion of children at risk of language delay from over 90% in September 2011 to under 10% in June 2012. Children make good progress from low starting points, although they are generally still below expectations for their age when they leave the Early Years Foundation Stage. In particular, children at the two main receiving schools perform at lower than average levels in creative development (now expressive arts and design) and in physical development. There is limited access for children to the outdoor play areas at the centre.

The centre's research has found that families on the estate are very aspirational for themselves and their families, and this is reflected in the high take-up of educational opportunities. Parents from more than 75% of the families registered are participating in adult education at the centre, and this includes a large majority of the lone parents and teenage parents registered. Attendance levels and success rates are high, with few drop-outs. For children, the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is reducing rapidly, with a decrease of 9% recorded last year.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2

The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	1
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How good is the provision?	2
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The centre uses a range of information well to plan services for families. Discussion with young mothers and lone mothers, for example, found that they wanted courses to help them feel good about themselves. From this, the 'Beauty Basics' course was established, which has succeeded in its original aim, and has also helped a number of parents into work. Family learning is targeted at helping parents help their children in areas of identified need. 'Rhyme time' and 'Book Start Corner' give parents ideas on how to develop their children's speech and language, while 'Mini-Movers' and 'Messy Play' promote physical and creative development.

Excellent partnerships with adult education providers mean that a wide range of opportunities are available for parents, who are able to learn basic skills in areas such as literacy, numeracy, computing and childcare. These courses are accessed by a large majority of parents from all target groups, including minority ethnic learners. A number of Asian mothers, for example, are taking childcare qualifications with a view to becoming childminders locally.

Adult education courses are well taught and well resourced. Tutors set good ground rules for attitudes and respect, and interact with learners at the right level. Parents attending courses feel that they are able to focus on their study, because they know that their children are well looked after in the crèche. Staff here plan carefully to meet the different needs of the different age groups who attend at various times, and are flexible when needs change.

The centre signposts services sensibly, for example where specialist provision exists nearby. Disabled children and their families are directed to a dedicated centre elsewhere on the estate. Jobseekers are signposted to the main Jobcentre Plus in Reading town, which is a short bus ride away and offers extensive facilities.

Case studies provided by the centre show agencies working together very effectively to ensure good care and guidance for families. Staff are willing to develop their skills to improve this. One staff member, for example, has become a breastfeeding counsellor in order to support mothers at groups where health professionals are not present. Parents feel that they can turn to staff whenever they need help. 'The children's centre offers us hope,' said one.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre is well led and managed and runs very smoothly. There are clear lines of accountability and governance from the local authority, after a period of uncertainty when governance arrangements changed. Staff are well supervised and have good opportunities for professional development, and they feel confident about their roles and responsibilities. The centre's business plan is well constructed, reflecting priorities common to all centres in the local authority, together with those specific to Ranikhet's reach area.

As a result of well-focused planning, the centre is having success in improving outcomes for its target groups and narrowing the gap in children's achievement. Funding is carefully spent and plans for cost-cutting are implemented. One member of staff has recently trained as an adult education tutor, for example, in order to save money on bringing in additional staff for some activities. The centre offers good value for money, based on good outcomes for families and good provision for adults and children.

All statutory requirements for promoting equality and tackling discrimination are fully met, and the centre is currently undertaking the eQualities award in order to support best practice in this area. Its arrangements for safeguarding are strong, and children and adults are well protected. Safeguarding checks are undertaken on all staff and adults who have unsupervised contact with children, and safer recruitment practices are followed. Staff are fully trained in child protection, and case studies show that they are aware of how to act on concerns and when to bring in other agencies. The centre is updating its child protection policy to combine its existing guidance on the use of mobile phones, in line with the new requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Outstanding partnership work makes a significant difference to life chances for families. One prime example of this has been the recent introduction of the Construction Skills Certification Scheme course, covering a safety qualification required by all workers on building sites. This has come about through research by the centre and its partner adult education provider into the needs of employers in Reading, and is particularly relevant given the building work underway on the estate as part of the regeneration project. So far, more than 70 fathers have completed this

course, and more than 20 to date are known to have gained employment as a result. For children, partnership work with local schools, health professionals and speech and language therapists have resulted in remarkable improvement in speaking skills.

The centre is successful in engaging with families in its reach area, particularly in the most deprived areas where a very large majority of families are registered. Parent surveys and course evaluations show a high level of satisfaction with the services provided, and a number of parents take part in the governance of the centre through the advisory board. The centre would like even more parents to be actively involved in its running, and is currently devising a plan for increasing volunteering opportunities to bring this about.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1
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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Ranikhket Children's Centre on 17 and 18 October 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Many thanks to those of you who met with us during the inspection, agreed to let us sit in on your groups or spoke to us about the centre. We were very grateful for your help with the inspection and interested to hear your views.

We found that the centre offers you a good range of activities and services, and you told us that that staff are very approachable and helpful, particularly in advising you on how to improve your skills and qualifications, or in supporting you if you have problems. They do a good job of finding out what the community wants and in developing services to match this.

You told us that you think the centre's activities are useful for you and that you enjoy them. We visited 'Rhyme Time', 'Book Start Corner', first aid, sewing handbags and courses in literacy, numeracy, child care and computing, and we spent some time in the crèche. You told us how you benefit from what the centre has to offer. We were impressed with the quality of the activities and courses, and with the resources available to you.

The centre plays an important part in the local community, particularly as the area is going through such a large programme of rebuilding works, and it makes a big difference to the health, education and well-being of residents. We have asked the centre to develop its plan for increasing opportunities for local people to volunteer to help with its activities, with the aim of increasing employability skills and ownership of services.

We found that your children are well cared for in the crèche, and that the staff are skilled at helping them to develop their speech and language. We have asked the centre to make sure that the children have plenty of opportunities to use the outdoor areas to learn and play, as well as the indoor room.

Senior staff run the centre well, creating a welcoming environment where there is something for everybody. They and the local authority check services carefully so that they know they are spending the centre's money wisely. They ensure that you and your children are safe at the centre, and they meet the legal requirements for safeguarding.

You told us that the centre asks for your views and makes use of them, and we know that some of you are involved in the advisory board. The centre is very grateful for this commitment and would be happy for more of you to be involved in this way. We hope that you will all continue to make the most of what the centre offers you and your families, and that you will continue to recommend it to your friends and neighbours.

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