

Inspection report for Visions Community and Children's Centre

Local authority	Rutland
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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 two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's leadership team, members of the Family First governance group, the local authority, partnership agencies, the community development officer working with the local army welfare team, members of staff and families using the centre.

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

Information about the centre

Visions Community and Children's Centre is a phase two centre. In partnership with local agencies it fulfils the full core purpose to a mainly rural community, spread over approximately 147 square miles. The centre is run by Rutland County Council. The local authority is currently restructuring its children's centres' provision with a hub in Oakham and spokes in Uppingham and Great Casterton. This inspection focused its attention on the main centre in Oakham but also evaluated the work in the two spoke centres in Uppingham and Great Casterton.

Rutland is not identified as deprived, and levels of unemployment and families in receipt of benefits are low. There are, however, some pockets of deprivation, and affordable housing and fuel poverty issues. An estimated 7% of children live in poverty. The population is mostly White British. The few families from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds are predominantly the foreign and commonwealth service personnel of two army bases in North Luffenham and Cottesmore. There are approximately 1,800 children aged under five years living in Rutland. A new influx of army personnel in 2013 will increase numbers in the reach area.

Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are above those expected for their age. The centre provides support to all children, and to

children with a disability or who have below average levels of development. The range of services offered includes school holiday activities, health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes and outreach services.

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

Outcomes, quality of provision and leadership and management, are all satisfactory. The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement is also satisfactory leading to satisfactory overall effectiveness. Friendly staff have built high levels of trust with families and, as a result, families feel well supported, especially when they are experiencing a difficulty in their lives. Parents told inspectors that they value the services and support the centre provides. ‘On this military base, it is difficult to get some mums out of the house sometimes; some fathers have now just left for Kenya, and I love coming here.’ ‘I am so happy to see how my child has developed in this group, he used to cling to me but he is playing over there now; I trust the staff so much.’ These are some of the many positive comments expressed by parents who use the centre.

The centre has the ability to improve outcomes and provision for families across Rutland. Those who take advantage of the services provided, including on the two military bases, appreciate the sensitive approach and high professional knowledge of staff. The open day ‘Meet the Parents’ is a reassuring forum to make new friends and meet centre staff. The centre is not yet good because the take-up of services by families who find themselves in circumstances that make them vulnerable is low and the centre has not yet fully engaged with all of them. For this reason, the centre is increasing its outreach work to support families, such as those isolated in remote villages or those who have transport difficulties. The difference that this strategy is making to the well-being of all targeted families is not yet fully demonstrated. Support for children who have a disability or special educational needs is effective. The equality of opportunity for families across Rutland is satisfactory.

Effective procedures and policies safeguard children and their parents. The centre’s

hub in Oakham and all its satellite venues are safe. Families known to have high levels of needs are assessed well. Some good work with individual parents, particularly young and new parents, shows the positive links that exist between staff from different agencies that work in partnership with the centre. There is evidence that well-coordinated early help has stopped problems escalating following the centre's interventions. The multi-agency approach on the ground is effective because front-line staff communicate effectively with one another on these specific cases, such as in domestic violence incidents. However, data across all agencies, particularly from health services, are either not readily available or not fully utilised to measure the effectiveness of services.

Governance arrangements and leadership are satisfactory and improving. Much has been accomplished following a rigorous independent review that clearly identified strengths and weaknesses. The leader of the centre and the head of service know what they need to do to secure further improvement. The development plan is comprehensive but targets to measure the effect of agreed initiatives are lacking. The Family First board has recently taken over governance of the centre and is yet to demonstrate sufficient challenge and effectiveness in holding the centre to account. The parents' forum is very new and families are not yet sufficiently involved in helping to plan and evaluate services. Staff development and training meet current needs. Those working in the centre are highly committed to bringing about sustainable improvements and have confidence in the current leadership. Effective day-to-day management means that activities run smoothly.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with partners, particularly the health service, to obtain relevant and up-to-date data which are clearly understood and analysed to increase the number of families using services and improve the outcomes for children, particularly those who are most in need of intervention and support.
- Improve the effectiveness of the Family First board in holding the centre to account for its services, by providing more challenge and evaluating whether services are making a real difference to families in the reach area.
- Develop the role of families in contributing to the governance of the centre so that more are systematically involved in making decisions and driving improvement.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Parents are provided with a range of opportunities to help them to adopt healthy lifestyles, and children's health outcomes in Rutland are above average. The percentage of mothers who sustain breastfeeding has increased and is above rates seen nationally. Some families who access activities already have children with above

average health outcomes. Concerted efforts, therefore, are now directed towards families who require intensive health advice, for example to reduce childhood obesity or advise lone parents on how to cook healthily on a budget. The emotional well-being of mothers, particularly new and young mothers, is monitored effectively and services, such as baby massage, are popular. The centre is yet to gather and analyse health data sufficiently to demonstrate the full effect of interventions on all targeted families. However, specific case studies demonstrate good progress where outreach family support workers have made a significant difference to the health and well-being of mother and child.

Parents feel that the centre and its community venues are safe and welcoming. Staff help parents develop their parenting skills effectively through courses and enjoyable group sessions, such as 'Stay and Play' and 'Messy Play'. There is good liaison with the army welfare team. Staff are knowledgeable in the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) approach and they are increasingly instigating this work to ensure that families are helped before situations reach crisis point. Case studies and family files show how well families respond to the support and, in the closed CAF cases, significant improvements are made in parents' understanding of how to keep their families safe. Family support workers tailor their work effectively to support children who have been identified as in need or subject to a child protection plan and they connect well with other providers of services, such as Living Without Abuse in domestic violence incidents.

Data show that children's levels of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are well above average in Rutland and the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest is narrower than seen nationally. Parents enjoy opportunities to engage in their children's play and learn how to contribute to their development. Staff from a local nursery regularly share their expertise for the 'Messy Play' sessions on the army bases. Mothers said that they were learning a lot from observing professional staff. Many sessions, such as 'Fun Under 1', 'Mini Olympics' and 'Bookstart Corner' help children make good progress from their starting points. Activities, such as 'Art Mates', are planned effectively to engage children who have a disability. The contribution the centre makes to children's learning and readiness for school is not yet good because some families lack confidence and they need more help to bring their children to these sessions so that opportunities to develop socialising and communication skills are not missed.

Parents have recently joined the newly formed parents' forum. Some parents are proud of their achievements, for example those having successfully completed their parenting programme. Few parents, however, are sufficiently engaged in planning and evaluating the programmes of activities to drive improvement, and their views, including those of fathers, are not fully represented. Rutland Adult Learning (RAL) provides a range of courses to improve parents' economic stability and develop employability skills such as improving literacy levels, preparing a CV or a job interview. The centre is not yet tracking whether these opportunities have made a difference to parents in the medium and long term. Access to specialist benefit and housing advice for families who are on low incomes is good.

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	3
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	3
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 staff use their local knowledge and work with partners to ensure that the range of services match the needs of the families in Rutland. The centre has good relationships with health professionals at a local level. However, the full range of health data, including pre- and post-natal information, is not used enough to offer support jointly and target services more precisely. Plans to work alongside the health visiting team to take services out to all communities require consolidation, particularly to reach those families who are hardest to engage. Outreach family support workers assess families skilfully to understand the needs of children and parents. Services on offer have improved their safety and well-being. Childcare providers are encouraged to share resources and good practice; however, the centre does not analyse outcomes of inspections enough to help providers become more consistently good or outstanding.

A choice adviser supports parents effectively to ensure smooth transfer to school. The centre uses the expertise of an early years teacher who has in-depth knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children's additional needs are identified promptly and parents are signposted to relevant services, such as speech and language therapy and the Aiming High team. The centre is committed to promoting the learning and development of all families. Consequently, targeted families are helped to access accredited courses to improve literacy and numeracy skills. Practical support includes paid transport and crèche facilities.

Strong and trusting relationships are developed between families and the centre staff. The venues used are welcoming and secure. Those who experience crisis in their lives confirm that they are confident to turn to staff in the centre, knowing that help would be provided. This is particularly reflected in the supportive atmosphere promoted in the army bases. The families with a foreign or commonwealth background are fully integrated in the activities on offer. The community

development officer uses her personal experience of service-family life to good effect. Staff undertake accurate assessments for those families who benefit from a high level of support, including those supported through the CAF process.

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	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Staff have faced significant challenges during the full review of children’s centres and the restructure in the local authority. Satisfactory progress has been made since the review. Staff are committed to the community they serve and to improving outcomes for families. Day-to-day management is well organised and effective systems provide staff with professional supervision so that they are well supported to deliver effective services to families. Staff have clear targets for their work; however, these are not currently linked to the key priorities identified in the improvement plan. Effective partnerships with health and social care professionals on the ground ensure that centre staff target services to support families identified as at risk of greatest need. However, the wealth of information on the demographics of the area is not specific enough and not held in coherent systems to improve the centre’s reach across Rutland.

Systems to demonstrate the difference the centre’s work is making to outcomes for children are underdeveloped. The centre’s registration system monitors more precisely specific groups accessing services, but senior staff do not yet use the full range of data that is available from partners to monitor outcomes for families. Senior leaders know what they want to improve and they have identified clear priorities. However, the views of parents and satisfaction surveys are not yet informing developments. Governance and accountability arrangements are now in place but it is too soon for the Family First board to demonstrate sufficient levels of challenge for the centre. Key indicators and targets are yet to be agreed to measure the centre’s performance and its effect on outcomes for children and families.

Staff make effective use of community venues to deliver a range of services in Oakham and Uppingham and across outlying rural communities as accommodation within the Oakham hub itself is restricted. The centre provides satisfactory value for money. There is no waste in resources and no unnecessary duplication of activities. The centre promotes equality of opportunities for all. Staff acknowledge that levels of participation in some sessions are low and the centre’s reach requires improvement.

The few families from foreign and commonwealth countries on the army bases receive good support and those spoken to during this inspection felt that they were treated with understanding and respect. Positive partnerships exist between the centre and other agencies. The Citizens Advice Bureau, for example, provides families with financial advice and relevant information on the benefits to which they are entitled.

Staff are appropriately trained to safeguard children. Policies on child protection matters are clearly understood by staff who are vigilant in identifying and responding to any potential dangers that families and children may encounter. Effective systems, such as recruitment checks, are in place to ensure those who work with children are suitable to do so. Protocols and practice for making referrals and sharing information within and outside the centre are increasingly effective. Staff monitor families closely and maintain sound levels of case recording in order to ensure that children are well protected.

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	3
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 reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

Inspectors looked at the inspection outcomes for childcare settings in Rutland and results in the Early Years Foundation Stage for each school.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Visions Community and Children's Centre on 7 and 8 November 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us. Your views were very helpful and contributed to this inspection. We agree with you that staff at the centre are caring and welcoming and provide you with appropriate guidance and support, especially when you need it the most. The centre is increasing the number of families accessing the different activities and some of you told us how much you enjoy and value the different sessions and how the activities develop your children's knowledge and skills. However, we think that it is a pity that some families who would benefit from support are not taking full advantage of what is on offer. We have asked the centre to check whether it is making enough difference to the lives of those who need most help and do not always have sufficient confidence to join in.

We agree with those of you who think that the staff working at the centre coordinate services well at a local level with health professionals, such as the breastfeeding and post-natal support groups. Sessions such as 'Big Chef - Little Chef' and 'Messy Play' provide opportunities for you to meet other parents and share experiences, thus preventing isolation and increasing confidence in parenting skills. We have asked the centre to target its work more closely to families with the highest levels of need and we are recommending that the local authority and its partners gather more specific data to support this work and measure whether services are helping all families, particularly those who are experiencing challenges in their lives.

We heard how some of you are benefiting from individual family support. Staff are appropriately trained to safeguard children, and the centre has effective systems in place to ensure that anyone who works with you and your children is suitable to do so. Staff work well to ensure you and your children access the right kind of support, including health visitors, speech and language therapists and the benefits officer when you need them. It was good to join some of you during the messy play and other sessions, including activities on one of the army bases, as you discussed different ways to play with your children. Mothers from service families commented positively on the help and emotional support they got when they returned from Cyprus and when partners leave for service.

The centre knows what it does well and what it needs to do better. Centre staff are developing a system to evaluate how well the services they provide are helping you and your families. For example, they know that some of you are accessing adult learning courses but they do not find out whether this is making a difference for you and your families. The centre has not yet set itself clear targets to improve provision

and outcomes to consistently good standards, and the Family First governance board is not yet effective in checking the work of the centre and providing a sufficient level of challenge.

We noticed that you have some opportunities to share your views, because staff ask for feedback after sessions, but few families offer suggestions when services require improvement. We have asked the centre to improve this aspect of its work. You can support the centre by sharing your views and getting involved as a volunteer or joining the recently established parents' forum.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us during the inspection and we are grateful for your views and comments.

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