

Inspection report for The Roundabout Children's Centre

Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	386930
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2012
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Centre leader	Kathryn Bryans
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Bayards Hill Primary School (URN: 123044)
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	The Roundabout Centre Day Nursery (URN: EY273721)

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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, representatives of the governance and advisory board, partner agencies and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

Information about the centre

The Roundabout Children's Centre is a phase two centre situated on the Ormerod Site in the Headington area of Oxford. The centre was designated in July 2007 and serves a community that falls into one of the 30% most deprived areas nationally. Areas of relative prosperity are interspersed with pockets of deprivation.

The Roundabout Children's Centre's reach area population is 413 families, of which there are 750 children aged under five years. The percentage of workless households and those dependent on benefits is 20% above the Oxfordshire average. There are approximately 140 lone parents within the reach area. The large majority of families (66.3%) in the children's centre area are of White British heritage, with the remaining population being from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds.

The centre provides a range of provision, including health and family services, and play and learning experiences for children and adults. The centre has an on-site early years provision which operates each week day, all year round, from 8.00am to

6.00pm. The centre provides crèche provision for pre-nursery children whilst their parents attend courses at the centre.

The centre offers advice and guidance to parents on the daycare and childminding facilities available within the local community. Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are well below those expected for their age.

The centre is governed directly by the local authority. There is a partnership advisory board in place made up of a range of professionals, including representatives from the voluntary sector and parents. The centre manager, appointed in September 2012, is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre. The centre has a parents’ forum.

The centre employs 24 staff. All key personnel hold early years teaching, learning support or social work qualifications at level 3 or above. The centre works in partnership with agencies to deliver a range of integrated services for families and children. The centre has also established working relationships with other professional services to deliver a programme of universal and targeted services to meet the local community’s needs.

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

The Roundabout Children’s Centre is satisfactory overall in its effectiveness in meeting the needs of, and improving outcomes for, the wider community. The centre has been through an extremely difficult period over the past year. There have been major issues regarding the turnover of staff, including no manager being in post during this time. The local authority has endeavoured to maintain the service delivery during this challenging period. These circumstances have had a significant impact on staff morale and their ability to deliver services as effectively as they would have liked. Despite this, staff have continued to maintain a satisfactory level of services. The centre has focused on key areas to improve. Staff have undertaken a range of training to equip them well to deliver services, such as to increase breastfeeding rates, support parents suffering domestic abuse or mental health issues, and reduce

obesity in young children. Greater emphasis has been placed on outreach work and home visiting as a basis for enabling greater access for families who are unlikely to visit the centre.

Leaders acknowledge that some aspects of the centre's work have suffered as a result of the lack of direct leadership. The increase in numbers of families engaging with the centre's services, particularly those whose circumstances make them isolated and vulnerable, has been limited. The centre does not collect enough information about its users and the impact of its work. Consequently, its planning to meet the needs of its users is not based on a sufficiently detailed range of information. Although the majority of partnerships are strong, some partners, particularly midwives and Jobcentre Plus, are not engaging well with the centre..

The recently appointed manager is skilled and knowledgeable. She has a clear vision and commitment to develop the centre's services and has already started to implement new strategies and systems. She is supported by a well-qualified team, many of whom have only been in post for a very short period of time. New systems to assess, track and monitor children's learning and development are at an early stage of development. The centre has prepared clear action plans to address weaknesses in provision. The local authority demonstrates strong commitment to supporting the staff team to ensure the centre's services improve rapidly. Consequently, the centre demonstrates satisfactory capacity for improvement.

The centre is a very safe and secure environment. Staff are vigilant in keeping children safe. Parents say that they feel very safe during sessions and that they trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties. Effective multi-agency working, such as with the health visitor, the social care team, and the economic well-being officer, ensures that these families are given good care and appropriate information and support tailored to their individual needs.

Inclusion is central to the vision of the centre and staff have a commitment to promoting equality and diversity. Staff provide a satisfactory range of activities which are linked to children's interests and support their communication and social skills. 'Stay and Play' sessions are well attended and appreciated by children and parents. Comments from parents, such as, 'It gives me and my child opportunities to play together and meet other people,' and, 'My child has developed in confidence and her speech has come on really well,' are typical. The centre has successfully supported an increased number of the most vulnerable children aged under two years in accessing early education. The majority of these children have been identified as requiring additional support, and have been provided with timely and effective support which meets their individual needs.

The centre works in partnership with a number of local and national organisations to deliver a range of courses. Parents enjoy participating in activities and courses which build their confidence and develop their parenting skills. However, the centre does not have a good enough system to check how many users have benefited from the activities and to evaluate how effective they are.

Engagement with volunteers is a particular strength. Volunteers provide practical support as well as a positive way of connecting with the community's needs and interests. There are currently nine parent volunteers working at the centre and a further eight awaiting induction, following confirmation of suitability checks. Volunteers regularly help out on reception, in the kitchen, in the baby clinic and at 'Stay and Play' sessions. Parents enjoy their involvement and report how much it has developed their self-confidence and enabled many of them to undertake further training and gain qualifications.

Users contribute towards shaping the centre's services through representation on the partnership advisory board, the 'You said – We did' board, course evaluations and talking to staff. Children and parents with communication difficulties are supported to enable them to express their views. For example, sign language is used with the youngest children in the early years provision and in the Down's Syndrome Oxford early development groups. The centre responds to users' requests for services. For example, 'Stay and Play' sessions now take place at the local neighbourhood centre, and there is a drop-in specifically for parents with children aged under one year.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the number of families engaging with the centre's services, particularly those families whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable in the community.
- Work with the local authority to further develop partnerships with health services, particularly midwives, Jobcentre Plus, and other agencies to improve access to services for users.
- Work with the local authority to develop rigorous strategies for involving all leaders, managers, staff and the advisory board in a robust improvement planning process to make the work of the centre as effective as possible in meeting the community's needs by:
 - obtaining thorough, accurate and up-to-date information about the families living in the reach area
 - increasing the robustness of tracking, monitoring and the evaluation of services
 - establishing a clear, systematic and coherent approach to ensuring efficient use of all of the data to plan and shape services effectively.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre works well with the health visitor to help individual families improve their health and well-being. The centre café offers hot lunches three times a week to coincide with drop-in sessions. Parents report positively on how the support from the centre has helped them continue to breastfeed their babies and how it would have

been difficult without the practical and moral support they received. As a result, uptake of mothers breastfeeding their babies is increasing but still lower than national average. Parents have increased their understanding of how to keep their families healthy through cooking programmes. The highly stimulating outdoor area and regular swimming sessions promote children's physical well-being. Comments such as, 'We are now sitting together for meals,' and, 'I am getting my son to bed earlier, exercising more and having breakfast every morning.' As a result, obesity in young children, although still too high, is steadily reducing.

The centre does not receive up-to-date data on all live births; however, the health visitor works closely with the centre and has developed effective procedures using the 'blue slips' which provide details of new births and new families to the area. In addition, the health visitor makes early referrals of vulnerable families. Joint visits are undertaken where families in need of support are identified and effective use is made of the Family Star assessment tool and the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to assess accurately and tailor resources to meet individual needs. The centre works closely with other partners such as the Early Intervention Hub, Oxford Parent Infant Partnership and Family Nurse Partnership Programme to ensure that the most vulnerable groups are supported.

Parents get good support to make their homes safe. They attend training in first aid to help them gain important parenting skills. Children learn about staying safe through the good range of opportunities to allow them to take risks, such as using hammers, scissors and saws.

The centre provides a satisfactory range of activities that support children's social and emotional development, and communications skills. 'Stay and Play' sessions are well attended and appreciated by parents and children, but staff miss opportunities to support parents' understanding of how they can build on their children's learning at home. Assessment of children accessing activities at the centre is insufficiently thorough; systems are not robust enough for regularly recording progress about children's learning and development. The input from the speech and language therapist at sessions such as 'All About Babies', and 'Talking to your Baby', helps parents understand how to support their children's communication skills. Comments such as, 'I will do more singing and nursery rhymes,' and 'I will make more repetitions of simple sounds and words when playing and feeding my baby,' confirm this.

The overall level of skills and abilities of children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has steadily increased in recent years, although it remains below the national average. The gap between the lowest achieving children and others has widened. However, there has been an improvement in the achievement of children in the lowest 20% in their personal, social and emotional development, and communication, language and literacy skills. In addition, the most vulnerable two-year-olds receiving free early education show signs of making good progress in their learning and development.

Some parents have successfully moved on to learning, training and employment. Consequently, families are improving their economic stability and independence and outcomes are satisfactorily improving. However, the centre is unable to confirm how many have accessed these services due to the lack of robust tracking systems.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	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 centre is a welcome and valued provision. However, less than 50% of families in the reach area are registered with the centre. Leaders and staff are very aware that there are some pockets of the community served by the centre that are not yet using services enough, particularly those from minority ethnic groups, disabled children and those with learning difficulties, lone and young parents. The centre does not have an accurate picture of the proportion of families from their specific target groups who are regular users. Evaluations of activities and sessions are undertaken, but these are not consistently used to shape the centre's services. However, there are many examples of how the centre has taken action in response to users' requests or needs, which have had a positive impact on the lives of families. For example, a need for more activities for families with new babies was identified during home visits; a weekly session, 'All about Babies', now operates and is well attended and valued.

Provision to help parents and children learn and develop is satisfactory. Families benefit from attending a range of activities, such as family learning or music for families, providing opportunities for parents with young children to play, learn and have fun together. For example, 'Stay and Play' sessions at Bayards Primary School and Barton Neighbourhood Centre enable families who would not normally access the centre services to benefit from these sessions. The Round-about-Dads group is well attended. Fathers report on how much they enjoy these sessions and appreciate having the time to spend with their children.

The centre provides satisfactory care, guidance and support to families who access the centre. Effective multi-agency working, such as with the health visitor, social care team and economic well-being officers, ensure that families are given appropriate care, information and support tailored to their individual needs. Parents reported how staff support them through difficult times and how their lives would be very difficult without the centre's help.

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

The centre has an established partnership advisory board with members who are highly supportive and have a strong commitment to the centre and to the ongoing development of its role in the community. However, governance overall, has been less effective. The absence of a manager has resulted in there being no systematic approach to the quality assurance of the centre's services ensuring that improvement work is coherent and fully effective across the whole provision. The local authority, managers and advisory board members acknowledge that more work is required to rejuvenate and re-establish strong governance arrangements to ensure that all partners take an active role in promoting a high quality, integrated provision which is highly responsive to the needs of the community.

The centre meets its duty to promote equality and diversity and tackle discrimination. Although there are some pockets of families in the area not yet using the centre's services, a range of backgrounds is represented in families using the centre and also engaged in the parents' forum. The focus of the centre to reduce barriers to access to services is demonstrated in some of the services provided. For example, Down's Syndrome Oxford provides opportunities for a shared lunch for families who have babies and pre-school-aged children who have Down's Syndrome.

Safeguarding arrangements are good and there is high-quality work to protect vulnerable children. The safety of children and their families is embedded in the centre's work. The effective use of the CAF ensures that vulnerable families receive timely and effective support. There is rigorous attention to child protection and recruitment procedures.

Partnership working is strong with most partners, for example, with Bayards Primary

School, to find ways to work together to focus a planned environment in which to support children’s learning and development. For example, the after-school club, summer playschemes and Forest School promote children’s self-confidence. Effective transition arrangements for children moving on to Bayards Primary School enable children to settle well. Partnerships with other primary schools are less well developed.

Leaders acknowledge that they have not been particularly efficient in tracking, monitoring and evaluating services and that more can be done to increase the number of families engaging with the centre. However, the presence of the on-site nursery provision and the use of the centre for family contacts have improved the community’s awareness of the centre’s activities. The crèche facilities increase parents’ participation and accessibility to the centre’s services, and staff make effective use of the local venues to deliver some of their sessions. Consequently, the service currently provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre’s policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the 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

The outcome judgements of the on-site early years provision inspection carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre were taken into consideration for this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

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

We know that your centre has been through an extremely difficult period over the past year. There have been major issues regarding staffing and there has been a long period with no centre manager in post. While the local authority has endeavoured to maintain the service delivery during this difficult period, the staffing changes have had a significant impact on staff morale and their ability to deliver services as effectively as they would have liked.

The centre has focused its efforts on key areas, particularly on keeping you and your children safe and improving your health and well-being. Staff have undertaken a range of training to help them increase breastfeeding rates, support parents suffering domestic abuse or mental health issues, and reduce obesity in young children. Great emphasis has been placed on home visiting to support families who are unlikely to visit the centre. However, the numbers of families engaging with the centre's services, particularly the most isolated and vulnerable families living in the community, have not increased as much as the centre would have liked. We have therefore asked the centre to look at how they can encourage and support more families to attend.

The centre does not collect enough information about its users and the impact of its work, particularly in the way in which it evaluates the difference it is making to you and your children. Consequently, the planning systems to meet the needs of its users are not based on a sufficiently detailed range of evidence. As a result, not all planned activities are as well matched to the needs of users as they could be. Therefore, we have asked the centre to improve its tracking and evaluation systems to clearly show what it is doing well, and what it needs to do to improve. However, the recently appointed manager is skilled and knowledgeable. She demonstrates an excellent understanding of the work of the centre and what it needs to do to improve. She has already started to implement new strategies and systems. She is supported by a well-qualified team who are committed, enthusiastic and want to serve their community well. New systems to assess, track and monitor children's learning and development are at an early stage of development. The centre has prepared clear action plans to address weaknesses in provision.

Although the centre works well with other agencies to support you, some partners, particularly midwives and Jobcentre Plus, are not engaging fully with the centre and this limits the centre's ability to improve services for all families in the area.

Consequently, we have asked the centre to develop stronger working relationships with health services and other partners.

There are good arrangements in place to make sure you and your children are kept safe. The centre is a very safe and secure environment and staff are vigilant in protecting children. You told us that you feel very safe during sessions and that you trust the staff to help you in times of crisis or personal difficulties. Staff ensure that those of you who are in most need of support are given good care and appropriate information and support tailored to your individual needs.

The centre is warm, welcoming and inclusive. Good quality displays promote children's learning. A satisfactory range of activities are provided which are linked to your children's interests and which support their communication and social skills. You enjoy the popular 'Stay and Play' sessions, which you say give you and your children opportunities to play together and meet other people. One parent told us how their child had 'developed in confidence' and how their child's speech had 'come on really well.' We could see how the centre has successfully supported more of the most vulnerable children aged under two years in accessing early education. These children have been provided with timely, effective, tailored support to meet their individual needs.

The centre works in partnership with a number of local and national organisations to deliver a range of courses, including first aid, literacy, numeracy and parenting programmes. You told us how you enjoy participating in activities and courses which build your confidence and develop your parenting and life skills.

Engagement with volunteers is a particular strength. Volunteers provide practical support as well as a positive way of connecting with the community's needs and interests. There are currently nine parent volunteers working at the centre and a further eight awaiting induction, following confirmation of suitability checks. Volunteers regularly help out on reception, in the kitchen, in the baby clinic and at 'Stay and Play' sessions. Many of you told us how much you enjoy being involved and how much your confidence and self-belief has improved as a result. The support from the children's centre has enabled some of you to go on to further training and gain qualifications.

It was good to see how you contribute towards shaping the centre's services through being involved with the partnership advisory board, the 'You said – We did' board, course evaluations and by talking to staff and sharing your views. Those of you with communication difficulties are helped to express your views. For example, sign language is used with the youngest children in the early years provision and in the Down's Syndrome Oxford early development groups. The centre responds to your requests for services. For example, 'Stay and Play' sessions now take place at the local neighbourhood centre, and there is a drop-in specifically for parents with children aged under one year.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak with us. It was a privilege to be able to talk to you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre, and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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