

# Inspection report for Ramsey Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Cambridgeshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	420139
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 February 2013
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Marianick Ellender-Gelé HMI

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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	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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**Report published: February 2013**



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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, the local authority locality manager, the senior family support manager, employability and housing staff, health professionals, local authority representatives, parents, the chair of the locality advisory board and front-line staff. Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation

## Information about the centre

This is a phase two centre which was designated in 2008. It provides the full core purpose. Ramsey Children's Centre serves the market town of Ramsey and surrounding villages. About 640 children aged under five live in the reach area. Ramsey is the smallest of four market towns in the district of Huntingdonshire. It is a rural area with a mainly White British population. There are very small numbers of migrant workers mainly from Eastern Europe and Portugal. Levels of unemployment are average and the percentage of children living in poverty is low. However, in specific neighbourhoods in Ramsey and in isolated hamlets in the Fens, there are pockets of deprivation and the percentage of children eligible for free school meals is significantly above the average for Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire. Rural isolation and poor transport are issues for some families.

The centre is managed by Cambridgeshire local authority. It shares its advisory board with the Rainbow Children's Centre in Somersham and it recently moved to Ramsey Library which is situated in the centre of the town. The centre manager oversees four children's centres serving a large geographical area. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities are in line with those 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

'The staff are very welcoming; I don't feel judged when I come here'. 'I am doing so much better now and I have met mothers in the same situation as mine'. These comments sum up the views expressed by many parents and help to explain why Ramsey Children's Centre is a good and improving centre. The good quality of the provision is a result of the commitment of the staff and professional partners and the drive of the centre manager. Staff work well together and there is a positive atmosphere in the place. Good partnership work ensures that services are cohesive. Relationships between agencies are effective with good transfer of information to ensure that the needs of families are met quickly, particularly at times of crisis.

There are many opportunities for parents to express their views and they are becoming more effectively involved in making decisions through consultation events, and forum meetings. The advisory board is very open to parents' views and is chaired by a committed parent who has a deep knowledge of the community. There is scope, however, to engage more families, particularly those with high levels of needs, so that they directly influence the development of services. Children are generally healthy and well prepared for school. Transition arrangements with local primary schools work well, but support for parents to help them contribute even more to their children's learning requires improvement. Parents receive good advice to access training courses, secure benefits and embark on qualifications to return to work. However, the centre is making insufficient use of its data to evaluate the effectiveness of its collaboration with adult learning providers and Jobcentre Plus in sustaining families' economic well-being.

Outcomes for children and families are good and improving. The centre is effective in keeping children safe and protected and in developing positive relationships with families most in need of help. High priority is given to safeguarding all children and the quality of care, guidance and support provided is good. As one parent reported, 'When I arrived in Ramsey, I knew no one; through the activities, I now know it's not just me who is finding that bringing up a child on one's own is difficult.' The range of provision on offer meets the needs of families because parents

have equal access to activities and good support regardless of their background or where they live.

Considering that outcomes are good and improving, together with its other strengths, particularly the good partnership working to protect families and keep children safe, the centre has good capacity to improve further.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Increase the engagement of families, particularly those most in need of help.
- Improve parents' understanding of their children's learning so that children's readiness for school becomes outstanding.
- Make better use of data to evaluate the impact of the collaboration with adult learning providers and Jobcentre Plus to increase opportunities for learning and training and improve families' economic well-being.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>2</b>
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Many children start attending the centre with their parents or childminders from the time they are babies. The centre encourages families to participate in a range of health events and many new mothers attend the breastfeeding clinics run in partnership with the health team. As a result, breastfeeding and also immunisation rates are above average. There is good advice on speech and language development to help children develop their talking skills. Good health advice, in collaboration with family support workers, is given to mothers particularly those at risk of isolation. Healthy lifestyles and healthy eating are promoted well and early referral to health professionals ensures that families who may be more vulnerable than others are appropriately supported. Outcomes are generally good. A specific effort is currently being made to reduce obesity because it is still above average. Young toddlers were observed learning to develop their coordination and physical skills; they did this very successfully at the crèche and at the 'Babies Get Together' group. The 'Health Walks' in Ramsey, suitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs, help promote the benefits of outdoor exercise.

The extent to which children engage in safe behaviour and develop positive relationships is good. Toddlers, for example, willingly share toys and older children are calm and well mannered. The centre is effective in ensuring that families and children keep themselves safe and free from harm. Children's safety in the home is promoted effectively and a wide range of preventative measures and advice, such as how to position smoke alarms and the 'Save a Child's Life' course, run at week-ends, ensure that families understand their responsibility for the on-going safety of their children. The centre is a very safe place to be due to the vigilance of all adults. The

Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process and 'Team Around the Child' approach ensure that early help is provided to families before situations reach crisis point. CAF completion is above average. Links with the senior locality social worker, family support workers and housing officers are particularly strong in child protection or child in need cases. Several parents, including those with learning difficulties, commented positively on the good coordination between professionals leading to consistent advice being provided. Centre staff recognise that early help needs to reach even more families to make the centre outstanding.

The stimulating range of learning and play activities ensures that enjoyment is high. Children demonstrate skills that broadly match the expectation for their age, and some have above average levels of understanding. There are good opportunities for parents, childminders and children to play and learn together. Parents, including fathers at the 'Family Fun' day, enjoy opportunities to engage in their children's play, but not all families gain sufficient understanding of how they can support their children's learning. The 'Learning Journals' have been started, but it is too soon to see the difference they have made in improving readiness for school. Last year, 76% of children achieved 78 points or more in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, which was above the Cambridgeshire average, and an improvement of 21% on the the previous three years. Parents said that they feel well prepared to continue the centre's learning activities at home, such as allowing 'Messy Play'. The professionals at the centre have an in-depth knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Activities are planned with children's development and learning in mind, such as the 'Exploring Treasure Baskets' game. There is strong evidence that children are well prepared to settle and develop friendships when they start formal schooling. Managers of local early years settings and schools were very complimentary about the work of the centre. One said, 'We would be struggling without the centre to get the support for children. It has made a big difference to the community.' The work to engage parents who have additional learning needs is well targeted through outreach work or one-to-one support at the centre. One parent told inspectors that the centre helped her a lot and there is always someone she can talk to. A weekly group for disabled children and those who have special educational needs, called 'Jumping Jacks', is soon to be started.

Children and families show high levels of respect, care and concern for others. Parents and childminders have opportunities to express their views, including parents from target groups. These include direct links with the advisory board and regular evaluations of activities. As a result, the centre staff are willing to adapt the sessions on offer to ensure an even better match with the needs of families. This work, however, requires consolidation to increase the engagement of more families, including the few who foster children and those who are very isolated due to transport issues, so as to make Ramsey Children's Centre even better.

The centre helps to promote economic stability, for example, by supporting mothers in attending training courses, securing benefits and managing tight budgets. Through a number of case studies, inspectors saw how specific families, particularly those from Eastern Europe, were helped to access services, such as English for Speakers of

Other Languages (ESOL) courses. There is good access to crèches for mothers who wish to train or study. The local authority, through the work of the centre, ensures that there are sufficient childminders of high quality in the area for parents who wish to return to work. Childcare providers are encouraged to share good practice so that all become good or outstanding. The 'Young Parents' group is particularly effective in signposting young people to further learning opportunities and providing financial advice through the 'meals on a budget' sessions.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

The children's centre provides good quality services with effective care, guidance and support. The use of the Common Assessment Framework is well embedded and strong partnerships with a range of agencies ensure that welfare assessments of children are robust. There are clear programmes in place to promote the health and social well-being of children, including addressing the emotional and mental health needs of families, particularly of very young and new mothers. The centre works well with family support workers, the housing service, health professionals and social workers to support families in receipt of social care services. Parents receive very good advice to focus on the needs of their children when faced with highly challenging trauma, such as domestic violence, alcohol or drug addiction or rent arrears that could potentially lead to eviction.

There are many examples of good quality outreach and support work, including one-to-one bespoke advice for single mothers and parenting guidance where staff provide excellent role models for parents to manage the behaviour of their children and specific advice on how to keep to routines and maintain a clean and safe environment where children can thrive. The centre is very aware of the difficulties faced by some families isolated in rural hamlets. Well-targeted support is offered through outreach work and the centre is doing as much as it can to remove barriers

to access. Parents told inspectors that they feel valued and listened to by everyone they speak to. The effectiveness of the centre in engaging with all the families is not yet outstanding because a minority in the reach area are not yet confident enough to register and join in. Personal development and achievement are celebrated through individual accreditations or specific events, such as the 'Share and Be Aware' event and the 'Saving a Child's Life' course.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

Leadership and management are consistently good. Families, regardless of their background or circumstances, are made aware of what Ramsey Children's Centre has to offer. The central location in the middle of Ramsey provides easy access for all. The staff publicise the work of the centre and specific events bring a large number of families together. However, there is still more to do to increase the reach and this is the reason why the centre is not yet outstanding. One parent told inspectors that outings are 'brilliant' but several young parents find that the availability of transport is a barrier. Staff are currently investigating the possible use of a community bus and they are developing links with partners to improve access for all. Senior leaders of the Ramsey locality have a clear vision for the development of the centre. Governance is effective and challenging targets are set. However, the centre is not making sufficient use of its data to track the impact of its work on developing employability skills, training or further learning of the families in its reach area. The joint leadership of four children's centres and the advisory board overseeing two centres work well and parents said that everything continued to run smoothly during the recent move to the library. Relationships between staff and key agencies are productive and everyone pulls together to improve outcomes for children. The centre focuses on activities that are sustainable and the fact that the centre is regularly reviewing its locality arrangements and accommodation lead to good value for money.

Staff have a good understanding of the strengths in provision and where further improvements can be made. The managers of the locality and of the centre make good use of external evaluation and they check the quality of services to remedy any gaps or weaknesses. Self-evaluation is robust and accurate although there is scope to improve parents' understanding of their children's learning. Staff training and



regular supervision enable good levels of professional expertise. There are good arrangements in place to safeguard children, families and staff. The procedures for vetting staff are robust. Relevant training is up to date, including that related to child protection procedures and the needs of disabled children and those with special educational needs. All staff are highly vigilant in identifying early and responding quickly to any potential dangers that parents, carers and children may encounter. Robust protocols for sharing information with social services, together with effective partnership working, ensure that children and families with high levels of need are prioritised.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

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

Not applicable.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Ramsey Children's Centre on 13–14 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

As part of the inspection, we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation, and talked with a range of children and adults including parents and staff, community representatives, family support workers and health professionals. We were pleased to speak to so many of you about the centre's work and to listen to your views. We really enjoyed talking to you around the centre or in the locality and seeing the various activity sessions you were engaged in. You expressed your views very clearly and we appreciated your straight talking in telling us how things really are. This is what we found out.

First, and most importantly, we are pleased to tell you that the centre provides good support to you and your families. The centre does some things well, such as the way everybody works together to support all families equally and the way you and your children are encouraged to keep safe. You told us that you and your children are well cared for and that you get a lot of support and we agree with you. We were pleased to hear that more of you are coming to the centre, making new friends and getting involved but we have asked the centre to improve this to make sure that more families are willing to use the centre. The staff are like friends to you and we could see that you trust them to look after your children.

The centre works hard with the local early years providers and the local primary schools so that your children are ready to succeed in their educational achievements. Staff are helping to increase your knowledge about play and how children learn through the many stay and play activities and parenting sessions, which you told us are fun and worthwhile. We have asked the centre to do even more work with you on understanding your children's learning so that your children are even better prepared to start school. We know that many of you have learnt about breastfeeding, nutrition and cooking healthy meals through a range of activities and discussions.

We were delighted to see that the centre is making a real difference to improving your welfare and to hear how much more confident you feel as parents when you encounter challenges or difficulties in your lives. The friends you have met through the centre's activities and the range of events and sessions you can enjoy are all positive developments. It was very encouraging to see that so many of you feel less isolated in the community by either having one-to-one support or by coming into the centre and getting involved. We were also very pleased to hear that some of you have been supported in undertaking training which may help you get back into employment. We know that some of you find that transport in the area is poor. The centre is doing as much as it can and managers are investigating possibilities to see how they can help you even more.

It was clear to us that staff are working hard to make the centre as good as it can be. To help them, we have suggested that they support even more families, particularly those who need a lot of help. We have also asked senior staff to look at the centre's work with adult learning and Jobcentre Plus to check what happens to those of you who are on training schemes and taking up learning opportunities or want to gain the skills needed for employment. By doing this, they will be in a

stronger position to show how well they are doing and will be able to plan even better things for you.

Thank you once again for your welcome and your willingness to talk to us. We wish you every success in the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).