

NH1 Royston and Villages Children's Centre

c/o Roman Way First School, Burns Road, Royston, SG8 5EQ

Inspection dates	3–4 March 2015
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a good centre

- The centre is very much at the heart of the community and the majority of children and families use its good quality services. Holiday activities including the 'Fun with Food' event, holiday play schemes and successful swimming programme enhance the centre's well-balanced programme.
- The large majority of children and families from priority groups attend the popular baby and toddler activities and many have taken part in parenting classes, which improve the quality of family life.
- Strong partnerships with health professionals help to identify early signs of disability, special educational needs or development delay. These children benefit from early interventions and focused support including speech and language therapy and the 'Sunchild' and 'Angels' groups.
- Nearly all two-year-olds who are entitled to free early education are placed with good quality nurseries and childminders and receive a good start to their education.
- Getting children ready for school is a key strength as a result of the good links with pre-school settings and local schools.
- Leadership and management are good. Staff are highly motivated, run the centre smoothly and provide a warm and friendly welcome for parents who say they feel safe and well looked after. Leaders demonstrate good capacity to improve the centre further.
- The advisory board has benefited from recent training from the local authority and governance is good. The centre manages a tight budget well and provides good value for money.

It is not outstanding because:

- Not enough parents are accessing courses to gain qualifications in education and other vocational skills. Parents do not always receive enough help to improve their chances of getting jobs.
- Children's activities are not planned to take account of the prime areas of learning. As a result, their progress is sometimes difficult for centre staff to assess.
- The collection, analysis and use of information arising from monitoring activities is not systematic enough to fully measure the performance of the centre, the impact of services or to plan further improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Provide more opportunities for parents who lack qualifications and those seeking employment to access appropriate services that help them prepare for work by:
 - increasing participation rates in adult learning programmes, especially basic literacy, numeracy computing courses and suitable vocational courses
 - working with local adult learning providers and employment organisations to help parents seek careers advice, sign up for courses and look for employment
 - tracking those parents who are signposted to training programmes at other children's centres, local colleges and community learning centres to ensure their readiness for work is improving.
- Enhance the planning of activities to make sure that the prime areas for learning and development are key focal points and that children's progress is consistently tracked from their starting points.
- Make effective use of all available information to measure the centre's performance, keep track of what impact activities have on fully meeting the needs of all priority groups and to inform improvement planning.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by three Additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives from the local authority, the lead agency Roman Way First School, health partners, other schools and pre-school settings, adult learning and training services groups, children's centre staff, parents and members of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited a range of activities such as the baby clinic, 'Stay and Sing' session and the Barkway Playgroup. Senior centre staff and the lead agency attended all team meetings.

The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the self-evaluation form, service plans, a sample of case files, parents' satisfaction surveys, safeguarding practice, policies and procedures and a variety of files on the range of activities delivered.

Inspection team

Catherine Stormonth, Lead Inspector	Additional inspector
Sandra Teacher	Additional inspector
Lesley Talbot-Strettle	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Royston and Villages Children's Centre was opened in 2010. It operates from a purpose-built premise on the same site as Roman Way First School (URN 117332) and Roysia Middle School (URN 137657) both of which are subject to separate inspection arrangements. Their reports can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>. Hertfordshire County Council has commissioned Roman Way First School as the lead agency responsible for the centre's management.

The centre serves the families living in Royston and the villages of Barkway, Therfield, Barley, Nuthampstead and Reed. It is governed by an advisory board of key partners and a parent. The headteacher from Roman Way First School oversees the work of the centre manager and small staff team. The centre provides early education, childcare and health services, family support and adult learning courses.

There are 1,047 children under five years of age living in the area served by the centre. The majority of families are White British with others from Eastern European, Asian, Black African and Caribbean heritages. Many of the minority ethnic families are from professional backgrounds with good spoken English. The area is very mixed socially and economically and there are pockets of deprivation. For example, the Burns Road area in Royston is amongst the most deprived area in the region. Most children enter early education with skills that are broadly at those expected for their age.

The centre's key priority groups are children living in poverty, vulnerable children including those with additional needs or a disability; families experiencing mental health issues; substance misuse or suffering domestic violence and lone parents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- In the last year, staff have taken very effective action to increase significantly the number of children and families registered with the centre and using its services. As a result, the engagement levels of children and families from different ethnic backgrounds and key priority groups have improved markedly.
- The large majority of children most in need including those living in poverty, families dependent on benefits or experiencing domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse, mental illness or a disability and lone parents are in regular contact with the centre.
- Strong partnerships with health professionals help to support all local pregnant teenagers and many other mothers-to-be to attend both pre-natal and post-natal clinics and associated classes. When new mothers realise how many good quality activities for babies such as the '1st Baby Group', 'Baby Massage' and the breastfeeding drop-ins in high numbers. Parents told inspectors that the centre offers them a 'lifeline' and chances to make friends and seek the support they need as they embark on parenthood and all the challenges this brings.
- Outreach work, which includes home visits, is highly effective in establishing and maintaining contact with families in most need, including those living in the most deprived community in Burns Road. The centre's good work also ensures that families living in isolated rural locations, many of whom are less likely to use the centre because of limited transport, engage well in appropriate services.

- Development checks for two-year-old children are effective in identifying children in need of early help. More than sixty children have been referred to the centre's speech and language drop-ins and other clinics with good results. Nearly all two year-olds and three to four year-olds who are entitled to free early education have taken up their places in high quality settings and are making good progress.
- A 'Foster Carer's Group' provides for high numbers of looked after children in the reach area and they meet fortnightly at the centre.
- Links with the Ridgeway Housing Association are good and a joint initiative helps to support homeless parents with young children who live in temporary accommodation until they can re-housed safely.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- There is a good range of both targeted and universal services, which are well matched to meeting identified needs in the local area.
- Support for individual families is a real strength. Case file records show good progress and good impact on improving children and families' well-being. The centre provides a welcoming environment for many families in times of crises. 'This is the only place where I feel really safe' and 'I can put my troubles behind me and concentrate making a better life when I'm here' were typical comments shared by parents.
- The centre arranged for large numbers of local practitioners to undergo speech, language and communication needs training and this has had a very positive impact on the quality of support childminders and pre-school settings provide for children. The centre has also trained practitioners who support young children with English as an Additional Language to improve their spoken English language. These approaches are helping to reduce inequalities across the reach area.
- Overall, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception is above levels seen nationally. However, the gap in achievement between boys and girls and those from the least advantaged backgrounds has been recognised as a key area for further development.
- High numbers of parents attend the parenting and healthy living classes. There have been seventeen completely full paediatric first aid classes in the last year and the outstandingly positive feedback from parents confirms how much they have benefited. The 'Protective Behaviours' and 'Enough Abuse' programmes were well attended and are proving very useful.
- Families are successfully encouraged to have a healthy diet and the centre's pro-active work to assist this is supported with sponsorship from a local supermarket. The effectiveness of the centre's approach is reflected positively in the lower than average childhood obesity rates.
- Parents are sign posted to a number of local adult learning providers. The number of parents taking up these opportunities however is low. There are not enough courses in basic literacy, numeracy, computing courses and suitable vocational courses being provided. Working with employment organisations to help parents seek careers advice, sign up for courses and look for work is at an early stage. The centre also lacks a robust way of checking on how well parents are progressing in their adult learning or training and to ensure their chances of getting a job are improving.
- The use of volunteers in the centre is good and improving. Several parents help and support activities and in so doing gain useful work experience. Most have been able to move into employment following their volunteering experience.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**Good**

- Leaders and managers drive centre improvements well as seen in the high levels of children and families from priority groups regularly using services. Effective policies, practice and procedures promoted by the lead agency are used consistently and contribute well to the good management of the centre.
- The centre runs smoothly under the energetic and well organised leadership of the centre manager. Highly skilled and knowledgeable staff form a strong team devoted to helping children and families in most need. Staff are suitably qualified to deliver the range of activities and services and the arrangements for their continuous professional development are outstanding.
- Resources are used well to meet the needs of children and families. Community venues are used imaginatively and provide good access to activities and services, particularly for families living in the most isolated villages.
- The advisory board is made up of a parent and wide range of partners and local community groups with a broad range of skills and talents. After some useful recent training, members now know how to hold the centre fully to account and move improvements forward. Financial management within the limited budget is efficient and effective.
- Support and challenge provided by the local authority is good. However, although most activities are evaluated for their quality there is no systematic approach to gathering the information to measure impact and using it to inform future planning.
- The safety and welfare of families underpin the centre's work and staff have a good understanding about how to protect children. Staff help to reduce harm to children, particularly those that are subject to child protection plans and those deemed to be in need. Links with all relevant agencies are good and 'Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences' are attended for effectively supporting those families most at risk and looked after children. All statutory safeguarding requirements are met well.
- Families identify that the centre offers a warm and friendly welcome. They feel that their voice is effectively heard in helping shape centre services through the 'Parents Forum' meetings, survey responses and through their parent representative serving on the advisory board.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and, as a result, inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Children's centre details

Unique reference number	22140
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	454035
Managed by	Roman Way Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,047
Centre leader	Heather Gay
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	01763 243338
Email address	childrenscentre@romanway.herts.sch.uk

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