Riverside Children's Centre

c/o Riverside Primary School, St Edmund's Way, Rainham, Kent, ME8 8ET

Inspection date		10–11 March 2015	
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's well-targeted actions have increased registration rates and families' access very significantly over the last twelve months. As a result, just over three quarters of children and families living in the local area have on-going contact with Riverside, and regularly use its good quality services.
- Children are given good support to help them prepare for school. Those who frequently use the children's centre achieve well over time. The proportion of Reception-age children reaching a good level of development is above the national average.
- The strong partnership with health professionals has a positive impact on families' health. At 8.7%, childhood obesity is much lower than it was a year ago and is now below the national average.
- Family support work, which includes home visiting, is effective in helping families in greatest need and ensures that children are well protected.
- The high-quality volunteering programme enables parents to gain valuable work experience, build confidence and enhance their personal skills. As a result, some have moved into paid employment.
- Leadership, management and governance are good. The headteacher gives crystal-clear direction to the work of the centre and everyone is on board in taking the centre forward.
- The robust monitoring of the centre's performance, the close account taken of parents' views, accurate self-evaluation and clear development priorities mean that there is strong capacity to build for even better effectiveness.

It is not outstanding because:

- Relatively low numbers of parents from priority groups take up adult learning opportunities, and the progress made by those who do is not being checked closely enough.
- Data show that breastfeeding rates have been stuck at the same level for some time, despite the centre's best endeavours to drive improvement.
- Family support work and the follow-up action to find out children's and parents' views about its impact are not being audited consistently to promote best practice.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of parents from priority groups, and those who are on low incomes or workless, that take up education and training opportunities to enhance their economic well-being. Develop a robust tracking system to show clearly the longer term impact of the centre's and partners' services on meeting individual needs.
- Refine the use of all available data to identify, as accurately as possible, the proportion of mothers living in the area served by the centre who initiate and sustain breastfeeding their babies. Use this information to evaluate the impact of the many actions being taken to increase numbers and to inform the setting of challenging, but realistic, targets.
- Establish a system for auditing the quality of case files so that there is a clear picture of how effective family support is in meeting planned outcomes and to share best practice. Find a way of capturing parents' and children's views consistently about the impact of the support they receive on improving their well-being.
-

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 two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher of Riverside Primary School, the centre coordinator, staff, local authority officers, partners, volunteers, parents and members of the governing body and advisory board.

The inspectors visited activities including a home safety and oral health session, You and your Baby, Trendy Totz, a postnatal group, Toddler Time, and a Stay and Play held at St Margaret's Junior School. The latter was observed jointly with the headteacher.

Inspectors took into account parents' views as expressed directly to them during the inspection, as well as through their recorded evaluations about the centre's work.

Inspectors also looked at a wide range of documentation.

Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead Inspector	Additional Inspector
Joan Lindsay	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The centre opened in 2010 as a stand-alone centre that works in partnership with other local children's centres to serve the Rainham area of Medway. It is managed by the governing body of Riverside Primary School, which is inspected under separate arrangements. An advisory board, comprising parents and partners, assists governance. The headteacher of the school has overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the centre, and oversees the staff team of the full-time coordinator, play worker and administration officer. Services provided include activities to promote early learning, family support, child and family health, careers, adult learning and volunteering.

There are 799 children under the age of five years living in the area served by the centre. Most families are White British. The area is mixed socially and economically, with 10 distinct communities, including the one in which the centre is located, being amongst the 30% most deprived seen nationally. Some 18% of children are living in homes where no one is in paid work. Most children start in early education with skills and knowledge that are typical for their age, except in communication, language and literacy which are below the expected level.

Priority target groups identified by the centre are: two-year-olds eligible for free early education; vulnerable children under the age of one year; and fathers.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families Good

- Access to services is good because all children and families living locally are signed up with the centre and the large majority use its services regularly. There has been a dramatic uplift in both registrations and participation rates due to the very effective drive by the centre manager to make contact with children and families, including those who most need support.
- Prenatal and postnatal groups held at the centre enable staff to get to know parents-to-be and new parents, and to deal with any concerns. For example, a group of new mothers was observed learning about the introduction of solids into their baby's diets; this clearly boosted the mothers' confidence to decide the best time to do this for their own child, even if it might be different from others.
- A well-coordinated programme, known as 'Under Ones Pathway', enables children under one year old to benefit from a range of activities tailored to meet their age and stage of development. Parents, including those who might otherwise be reluctant to use the centre, identify that the wide range and good quality of what is on offer are key reasons for visiting the centre. They have recently flagged that, due to the centre's rising popularity, sometimes groups are too big.
- The large majority of fathers with assessed needs used the centre at least six times in 2014. Free Family Fun sessions held at weekends are well attended, and involve fathers spending quality time with their children and families. The 'Man bag' which is handed out at sessions is viewed positively by fathers, who appreciate the useful information it contains, such as that on family budgeting.
- A range of family learning courses is available, for example baby massage and first aid, which engage parents in supporting their children's health and safety. Other activities promote further learning and employability skills, but the numbers attending from priority groups are relatively low, as are the numbers from low income and workless families.
- Most two- to four-year-olds take up their entitlement to free early education in good or better quality settings. The centre has nurtured very strong links with schools and privately-owned nurseries, and this enables staff to support children's and families' wider needs increasingly effectively.

The quality of practice and services — Good

- The quality, range and relevance of services are good. Some sessions, such as Stay and Play, take place at community venues to ensure that local families can access services on their doorstep. Outreach support, which includes home visiting, is a positive feature in helping families to overcome particular challenges and build confident parenting skills.
- Good quality care, guidance and support help families, some of whom have very complex problems, to get to a better place. Some families benefit from 10 free sessions of counselling as part of their support package. Case files are well maintained and clearly demonstrate the centre's effective work to ensure that children's safety is paramount. Leaders are confident to challenge partners, such as social care professionals, if they feel that any aspect of shared work could be better.
- Through the well-planned and effective Bookstart initiative, early phonics workshops and 'We grow too' sessions, children are given good support to help develop communication skills and prepare well for school. Data show that 74% of children who frequently used the children's centre in 2014 achieved a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is well above the national average for all children and reflects positively on the centre's successful work to reduce inequalities. The centre is rightly prioritising its work with early years partners to reduce the achievement gap further between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest.
- Childhood obesity rates have reduced rapidly because of the centre's highly effective work to raise parents' awareness about the importance of a healthy lifestyle. 'Sticky fingers' family cooking sessions, which take place in the high quality and well-resourced kitchen, are just one example of the good quality services in place to improve children's and their parents' well-being.
- The centre gives high priority to helping new mothers to breastfeed their babies, and runs lots of activities to promote its recognised advantages. For example, a peer mentoring programme is well established and one-to-one sessions take place to respond to individual needs. However, the other information provided about local breastfeeding rates is unreliable, and this limits the centre's ability to measure the impact of its services accurately and to target improvement.
- The high quality volunteering programme enables parents, including those from priority groups, to gain valuable work experience, grow in confidence and enhance personal skills. Some parents are signposted to Jobcentre Plus for specialist help or partners' courses to enhance their education or employability. Parents who take up such opportunities tend to see them through. However, the progress they make is not being checked closely enough.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management — Good

- Since she took up her post 18 months ago, the co-located school's headteacher, who is also the centre manager, has very firmly set the centre on an improving course. Successes are well reflected in the rapidly rising level of engagement, particularly by those in greatest need, and the reducing childhood obesity rates. The well qualified staff are a united team who are clear about their roles and feel well supported as they pursue the shared goal of making the centre the very best it can be.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and informs the well-conceived development plan. A number of visits are made by the headteacher, link governor and advisory board members to check that activities are going to plan and that parents are happy with the services they receive. Feedback is given to staff and reviewed in follow-up visits as part of the effective performance management arrangements, which also take careful account of personal development needs and centre priorities.
- Governance is well embedded, supportive and challenging. The advisory board is well attended by a range of partners and parents, who between them have good insights into community needs and how best to meet them. Together with the local authority, board members ensure that the centre's performance is kept under close review.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding which is well supported by effective policies, procedures and practice. Vetting of staff is rigorous and includes comprehensive 'disqualification by association' checks. Regular meetings with linked health partners help with information sharing and ensure that the referral system is robust. Many different social workers are allocated work in the area served by

the centre, but the manager and staff ensure that all the children that they are involved with, and who are at risk of harm are well protected. This includes those who are looked after, subject to a child protection plan or identified as in need.

- Supervision arrangements work well. A qualified social worker helps staff to manage their complex caseloads. However, no one is currently auditing case files to keep a check on the quality of recording, or to see whether parents and children contribute to assessments of the impact of the support they receive and the 'distance travelled'.
- Resources are used efficiently and effectively, and are enhanced by the six volunteers who currently work alongside staff. Parents hold the centre in high regard. They add value to the planning of services such as the healthy living workshop. They support its life and development as active forum members and by sharing views through the You-said-we did initiative. Children also have their say about services, as shown in the Wizzy Wow wall display.

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	22523
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	454044
Managed by	The governing body of Riverside Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	799
Centre manager	Kim Williams
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01634 338700
Email address	office@riverside.medway.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2015