

Inspection report for St Raphael's Children's Centre

Local authority	Brent
Inspection number	384112
Inspection dates	18–19 August 2011
Reporting inspector	Philip Mann HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Val Joseph
Date of previous inspection	First inspection
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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 one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and other staff, parents and carers, representatives from the local authority, health care professionals, advisers of partner services, and representatives from the locality advisory board.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation information, its plan for improvement, health and safety records, case studies and data about the locality.

Information about the centre

St Raphael's Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre. Its reach area is one of significant deprivation and unemployment within the 30% most disadvantaged areas of Brent. Cases of child poverty and the proportions of families on benefits and/or living in unsuitable or overcrowded housing are high. Most children enter early years provision with a much narrower range of skills and knowledge than is typically expected for their age. The local population is mainly of Black African and Caribbean origin, with a smaller proportion from Asian households. There is a growing population of migrant workers from Eastern Europe, asylum seekers and refugees. The centre has been re-established within an intergenerational community centre and governance is provided by the local authority through a newly formed locality advisory board.

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 users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

2

Main findings

This is an effective children’s centre that is making a positive difference to the lives of many children, parents, vulnerable families and other members of the local community. Performance has been consolidated following a period of significant change in both accommodation and the restructuring of services within the local authority. Good local knowledge about a wide range of users’ needs is used to identify and consolidate further improvements in provision. Good leadership ensures that actions are implemented quickly by an effective team within the centre. The children’s centre demonstrates good capacity to improve further. This is because there is a steady trend of improvement in outcomes for target groups, with nearly all the families within the reach area now registered with the centre since its re-location into the community building.

Outcomes for the users and their families are good overall and particularly those related to the safety of children, the achievement of target groups and the contribution many make to the centre’s success. The vast majority of users feel confident to communicate their views about the services available. Comments such as, ‘I just don’t know what I would have done without the help of the staff at the centre. They are wonderful,’ represents the views of many who spoke to the inspectors.

Provision is good. The wide range of services offered empowers the growing number of parents who attend to improve their family’s well-being and life chances. Staff tailor support services effectively to the needs of individuals. For example, good levels of support are provided for those parents with poor literacy skills and those who speak English as an additional language. This is leading to greater confidence in speaking English and, in some cases, enrolment in further training at a local college. The quality of local child care continues to improve as a result of the effective levels of support and training being provided by staff with early years expertise.

The family support team is highly effective at reaching the most vulnerable families. Staff are very caring and work hard to provide a secure and nurturing environment

within the centre. Support is carefully tailored to meet the needs of users, especially those who are in challenging circumstances or in a period of crisis. Strong multi-agency working provides clear and carefully targeted support and guidance to families, with the result that their well-being is improved.

The centre is inclusive and fully celebrates diversity. Good levels of support are provided for any individuals with a disability and/or significant illness. Assessments of need are thorough and concerns are followed through with diligence by a range of professionals. Regular meetings about vulnerable children ensure that support is effectively targeted to ensure that levels of care within their families improve. This is a growing strength.

Governance is a good, with clear lines of accountability established. The centre manager provides good leadership and responsibilities are effectively delegated to ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the centre. Staff display a strong sense of teamwork. They are highly self-motivated, resourceful and enthusiastic about providing the best possible levels of service and care for users. Safeguarding and risk assessment procedures are applied rigorously to ensure children are safe while at the centre. Senior staff engage well with key stakeholders, other agencies and users in evaluating the centre's provision. The range of data available from the local authority is limited. This restricts the ability of the locality advisory board and senior staff to fully analyse the performance of the centre. However, centre leadership makes very good use of local knowledge and feedback from users of the services offered to support self-evaluation. Action planning appropriately identifies areas for improvement and key responsibilities. However, some targets are not easy to measure and this limits the ability of centre leadership to fully evaluate the performance of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the quality of improvement planning by:
 - working with the local authority to ensure that data about the reach area are readily available to support self-evaluation
 - setting specific targets that can be used to measure performance.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

A determined approach to the promotion of a healthy lifestyle is having a positive impact in the reduction of obesity amongst children and adults within the locality. For instance, children enjoy eating healthy snacks, including fresh fruit and vegetables grown in the small garden, during 'Let's Stay and Play' sessions. Children benefit from exercise both in the outside play areas and during 'bird watching' walks close to the centre. Parents value the nutrition sessions which are actively followed up at home. The number of mothers breastfeeding is improving locally as a result of

the strengthening links with health professionals, interagency working and carefully-targeted individual support at home. The emotional well-being of the most vulnerable adult users is boosted by sensitive levels of care from highly experienced family support workers.

A secure environment, combined with a rigorous approach to safeguarding and risk assessment, ensures that children and adults feel safe when at the centre. Outcomes are good because there are effective assessment systems for identifying children and families who are vulnerable or at risk. Staff effectively build trust with families, assess their needs and give home-based training in safety and minimising risk. Children who attend sessions at the centre are helped to understand about behaving safely and sensibly in a way they understand. For example, they share toys sensibly and are gaining an understanding of being safe through activities related to fire and road safety. A high proportion of parents from target groups have attended first-aid training sessions which are helping them to have confidence in their abilities to cope if there is an accident or illness at home.

The centre prepares children well for the next stage of their learning. The outcomes for children under five are improving locally. Data over the last two years confirm that the vast majority are making good progress from very low starting points, with 5% more children from the centre attaining 78 points or more in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile at the age of 5. Children grow in confidence as a result of attending 'Lets Stay and Play' with either their parent or carer. Early years staff actively involve these adults in planning for the children's learning. The quality of childcare in the locality continues to improve as a result of the strengthened childminder network based at the centre. Courses in parenting skills play an increasing role in supporting vulnerable families, so building confidence in their own abilities. Older children of secondary age achieve well in basic skills through attendance at English and mathematics classes.

Staff ensure all who use the centre feel fully included in its activities. Children play well together and display good relationships with others in all aspects of provision in the activity and outside areas. They take turns and are encouraged to respect each other. The views of parents are valued and used effectively to develop services further. Representation on the advisory management board provides parents with good opportunities to contribute to the centre's future development. There are regular opportunities at the partner centre for them to seek advice from other agencies about legal and employment-related issues, with a 100% increase in the number attending counselling related to financial matters related to debt. The weekly health clinic and back to employment sessions planned to start imminently at the centre are a positive step forward.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

<p>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</p>	<p>3</p>
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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 users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

2

Centre staff and family support workers make very good use of local information to identify specific needs and inform the development and extension of services to the most vulnerable including those with a disability or significant medical condition. The robust application of the Common Assessment Framework procedures and effective inter-agency working impact positively in safeguarding children and supporting vulnerable families. Detailed progress files provide an effective assessment record of children’s development within the Early Years Foundation Stage setting.

Staff provide a wide range of worthwhile services that are highly valued by an increasing number of users. Activities are of good quality and the range of services continues to increase. Relationships between staff and parents are very positive and these build a sense of trust between all parties. Many users express high levels of satisfaction with the services provided and participation rates are growing significantly, such as the course for those who speak English as an additional language. Similarly, teenage parents benefit from good quality support to get them into training or employment. There are good opportunities provided for fathers to interact with their child at the centre and monthly breakfast meetings consolidate their parenting skills further.

Parents benefit greatly from the services being provided. The quality of childminding in the locality is improving due to the effectiveness of the childminder network. Childminders value the input of staff because they feel that ‘the centre provides good resources for children to use and that it has given them good ideas for use in the home’. This achievement is confirmed by an increasing number of local childminders being judged good or better. Outreach work is becoming increasingly cohesive due to effective integration between professionals which ensures well-focused support meets individual families’ needs well. Staff are very caring and work hard to provide a secure and nurturing environment within the centre and in family settings.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance is effective and the centre continues to improve for the benefit of the whole community. The reduction in resources, incurred during a period of local authority restructuring, has been managed well to maintain good value for money. Clear lines of accountability and terms of reference are in place and overseen effectively by the newly-formed locality advisory board. Day-to-day management is clearly understood and responsibilities are well delegated to centre staff. The centre manager has successfully instilled a sense of purpose amongst a dedicated and highly skilled team. Together, they demonstrate the necessary drive and ambition to make improvements within this intergenerational children's centre. Communication amongst all key partners is good.

High expectations are set by the centre manager. Leaders and staff demonstrate good levels of local knowledge about the needs of the community and an accurate view of the centre's overall effectiveness. This knowledge is used well to support self-evaluation and improvement planning. The current centre action plan provides a structured approach to further development in line with the locality strategic plan. Key priorities for improvement have been clearly identified and shared effectively with a range of partners and users. Much has been achieved over the last year, resulting in a significant increase in the number of families registered with the centre and improving outcomes for target groups. Targets are ambitious but not easily measurable because of the limited nature of the data available from the local authority.

The centre environment is welcoming, safe and inclusive. Equality and disability legislation is implemented and policies are fully in place. Diversity is celebrated well with events such as Black History Month and recognition of different religious festivals. Good levels of support are provided for those adults or children with a disability. Access to the centre for users with disabilities is good. The quality and range of resources are good and used effectively for the benefit of all age groups using the centre. Staff are deployed well within the recently reorganised locality structure.

Safeguarding procedures are robust and fully meet requirements. There are rigorous procedures for the employment of staff and for checking the suitability of all adults who work with children. Training of staff in child protection and/or safeguarding is up to date and comprehensive. Clear procedures and protocols exist for monitoring the welfare of children and the sharing of any concerns. These procedures are fully supported through multi-agency working and the building of trust with families. Procedures for risk assessment are clearly understood, applied with rigour and effective.

There is good involvement of parents and members of the local community in the centre's development. Services are becoming more integrated to provide a cohesive range of support for those in most need, such as those with significant illness or out of work. Strengthening partnerships are being developed between the centre and a range of other agencies and support networks within the context of the locality, with the result that the range of services continues to increase.

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	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the St Raphael's Children's Centre on 18 and 19 August 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Many of you told us that staff at the centre are very caring and supportive. We agree with you. We were impressed with the way they work as a team under the good leadership of the centre manager. They all work hard to support both the children's development and your own skills and confidence. They give good guidance on how to be healthy and safe, and how to get extra support for your family and training for work.

This is a secure and safe place for you to bring your child. The entrance area is very welcoming and the rooms and play areas allow your children to play happily while they learn indoors or outside. All of the children are making good progress in many areas of their development.

The centre provides a good place for you to meet other parents and people who can help you and your family. The staff use their knowledge of the local area well to plan activities for you and your children to get involved in. We have asked the centre to work with the local authority to make sure that it has the detailed information it needs to identify what can be done further to improve the opportunities for those families in most need and the local community.

It was good meeting with so many of you during the inspection. We hope that you, your children and even more parents and carers who live within your community continue to benefit from the good services available to you. Thank you for the part you played in the inspection.

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