

Inspection report for Goldington Children's Centre

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| Local authority | Bedford |
| Inspection number | 365484 |
| Inspection dates | 28–29 October 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Nina Bee |

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| Centre governance | Bedford Borough Council |
| Centre leader | Kate Martinow |
| Date of previous inspection | This is the centre's first inspection |
| Centre address | 30 Medway Bedford MK41 9HU |
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| | |
| Telephone number | 01234 341977 |
| Fax number | 01234 353512 |
| Email address | goldingfamilycentre@btinternet.com |

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| Linked school, if applicable | |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | The Goldington Nursery |

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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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 two additional inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with parents, staff, members of the trustees committee and representatives of the local authority. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including evaluations of the impact of their work.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

Goldington Children's Centre was first designated as a children's centre in 2004. It is managed by Goldington Family Centre, a local charity which has been operating in the area for twenty-five years. The centre operates from two semi-detached houses which are rented from the local authority. It is a phase one centre, providing nursery, health and outreach support as well as vulnerable children's services to families and children in the north-east of Bedford. The locality it serves has features of significant deprivation. The area suffers from high unemployment. The large majority of families are White British. A few families are from minority ethnic backgrounds which include Black African, Afro-Caribbean and Eastern European backgrounds. Attainment on entry to early year's provision varies between average and below average.

The centre has developed from the Goldington Family Centre and includes a 61-place nursery which is on site. The Smarteez Neighbourhood Nursery caters for children aged from three months to five years and is open for 51 weeks each year. The nursery was last inspected in December 2005 and the inspection report can be found on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

Goldington Children's Centre is a good centre. The families that live in the centre's target area are well served by the centre. In addition, the centre reaches out to a significant number of families in its surrounding areas and is inclusive and welcoming to all. The range of users reflects the local community well. Minority ethnic groups, including those from Black African, Afro-Caribbean and Eastern Europe backgrounds, are represented in most activities and courses. One of the centre's strengths is the excellent care, guidance and support that is given to all. Staff have a very good knowledge of the area they serve, know who are the most vulnerable groups and so are able to take steps to effectively involve them. As a result, relationships between the centre staff and its users are outstanding. Good quality detailed information is kept on individuals with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Evaluations and discussions indicate that families and other users find the centre very supportive and welcoming. Parents say their children thoroughly enjoy visiting the centre either during drop-in sessions or when they attend the 'Mini Smarteez group', for children aged two and a half to three years. Observations showed happy, relaxed children. Children were seen thoroughly enjoying themselves as they had a snack with others during a drop-in session. Parents said the children liked coming to see their friends. Users say the centre is 'like home' and that staff are 'really helpful and address their individual needs very well'.

A number of adults described how the services offered by the centre have helped them to improve relationships with their children and particularly develop their own self-esteem and general confidence. Courses for adults to learn more about basic literacy and numeracy skills are well established and a new course has recently been organised so that they can now improve their information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

Very secure systems are in place to ensure that all users are safe while using the centre as well as when they go out on visits into the local community. The centre is extremely well signposted to make sure that users are reminded of any potential dangers, for example, to always close the stair gates to stop children going upstairs. Much information is offered to the centre's users to develop an excellent understanding of the need to keep themselves and their families safe.

The director and the family worker manager are inspirational leaders who have high

expectations and a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development and so work effectively with the operational board. Target areas are identified and documentation clearly shows how improvements are to be made. They have a clear understanding of how children's centres operate and value the contributions of all staff. As a result, staff morale is high and all staff play their part showing much skill and enthusiasm. There are very effective links with the health service. Consequently, the centre benefits greatly from regular support from a local health visitor and midwife and other professionals. This ensures that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified early, and pregnant and new mothers are well looked after and offered activities which enable them to develop their parenting skills. There is rigorous monitoring by senior leaders. The way the centre looks at the cycle of interventions around users is impressive and well documented. Good early years provision and excellent links with the on-site nursery prepare children very well for their nursery education. Improvements to the outside area, for example, the newly built hut that is now designated for play therapy, have been an exciting new project. Staff are offered a good selection of training and users are invited to train to become volunteers. These are very effective in making individuals, both staff and users, feel valued members of the community in which they work or live.

The local authority provides detailed data for the centre. At present this is not well collated into a manageable system to clearly show the influence of the services delivered by the centre on its families and users. As a result, the staff, the trustees committee and other partners are not able to derive full benefit from looking at such data. Nevertheless, individual needs are very well catered for in all the centre does. As users take part in activities, staff are quick to assess the next step required, whether it is to develop personal, social or academic skills. These successes show that the centre has a good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

The centre should develop a more manageable system in order to collate data more effectively so that:

- the influence of the services delivered and the impact the centre makes on its families and users are more easily identified
- information can then be shared more effectively with staff, the trustees committee and other partners.

How good are outcomes for users?

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The centre's evaluations of its work clearly show that users' views are sought and services are having a mostly good and sometimes outstanding impact on the lives of its users. Those children who attend courses related to developing early years skills achieve very well in their personal and social development. For example, they play alongside each other or cooperate very amicably within small groups. Similarly, those

who attend the 'Mini-Smarteez group' make excellent gains in their basic literacy and numeracy skills and these enable them to develop positive attitudes to learning for when they go to nursery. Adults who wish to develop their understanding of basic literacy and numeracy skills, and more recently ICT skills, are well supported and make good progress when they take part in regularly run courses. Parents and carers benefit greatly from a wide range of courses which support family health and welfare, for example, as they learn about healthy eating, oral hygiene and the importance of taking regular physical exercise. Pregnant teenagers have very good opportunities to prepare themselves for life with a baby and new mothers learn to bond with their babies as they take part in the very well-established and popular baby massage course.

Few activities were observed because many of them had stopped for half term. Nevertheless, drop-in sessions for families are well attended and are much enjoyed. For example, children happily interact with other children as their parents observe their play and chat together. The children showed obvious enjoyment and behaved well as they learned and played with the adults around them. Several adults were very keen to express their appreciation of the excellent practical support which the centre offers them through periods of crisis.

Staff work in close partnership with the support agencies when making assessments. As a result, vulnerable children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or others requiring child protection plans or who are subject to common assessment framework processes, receive outstanding support. Adults who need additional support are also expertly supported. Regular counselling sessions are available in the centre. All centre documentation is detailed and shows the positive effect its work has had on individual children and their families as well as other users.

The staff of the centre safeguard the children's and other users' welfare extremely well. For example, the liberty group, which is a very well-established group, gives excellent support to women who have recently experienced domestic abuse.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA), which deals with safety in the home, provides an outreach service for, often, vulnerable families. However, the centre has identified that more effective links could be made from these visits.

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| The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them | 1 |
| The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development | 1 |

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| 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 | 2 |

How good is the provision?

2

The centre plans well for a good range of activities that support children's learning and development. Health services are very well integrated into the plan of activities. Access to health visitors and information for pregnant teenagers, new mothers and issues such as breast feeding are readily available. The very well-established partnership with the health service enables the centre to reach out to vulnerable families that they may have previously missed. Centre leaders and partners work hard to make sure families are not missed and are made aware of what is available to them. For example, all new mothers receive a home visit and are informed of the services and activities that the centre runs. The staff at the centre are committed to trying to reach teenage mothers to be, as a result they have an excellent success rate of working with this group in their target area and beyond.

Good partnerships with many other external agencies enable the centre to deliver their wide range of services and activities. The Citizens Advice Bureau and Jobcentre Plus attend the centre regularly to give advice and support to users. Excellent links between the centre and the nursery enable children visiting the centre to use the well-resourced play area and garden which attaches the nursery to the centre. Children quickly get to know the staff who work there. As a result, if children eventually transfer to that nursery, they settle in very happily.

Individual support for children, their families and other users of the centre is key to the outstanding care and guidance provided. Excellent relations with its users make the centre a place where users feel comfortable and relaxed. During discussions, users said they 'loved coming to the centre'. Many said, and written evaluations agreed, that they 'thoroughly enjoyed the courses and activities which helped them improve their personal, social and parenting skills, enabling them to become more confident individuals and better parents'. Others spoke of how they and their children have made new friends.

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| The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users | 1 |
| 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 |

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| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community | 1 |
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How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre is well supported by the operational team along with the trustees committee and the local authority. The trustees committee is generally well informed. Accountability structures are clear and followed within the centre. Day-to-day management is highly effective. The operational team have developed a clear plan which identifies targets for improvements for the current year. Expectations are high and the centre has currently started a new project, 'Working with Partners', which involves tracking individuals over a number of years to see how effectively they are narrowing the gap for the most disadvantaged. The director, the family work manager and staff are extremely responsive to families and other users and there is a strong commitment to supporting welfare and health needs. Equality and diversity are actively promoted. Good attention is paid to community members, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, and the views of teenage mothers, for example, are also respected. As a result, a number of users spoke of how the centre had made a big difference to both themselves and their families, further indicating that the centre provides good value for money.

Keeping children and families safe is at the forefront of the centre's work. The inside and outside environment is extremely safe and secure and meets requirements very fully. Thorough checks have been made on all adults who work as part of the centre and very detailed records are kept to support these checks. Procedures for health and safety checks and risk assessments are completed extremely well. Staff have good opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge through additional training. This increases their awareness and assists them to identify where early support for families, for example, may be needed.

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| 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 | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |

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| The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities | 2 |
| The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |

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 Goldington Children's Centre on 28–29 October 2010. We judged the centre to be good overall. We found that the centre is benefiting from strong leadership from the director and the family work manager. They have between them lots of experience of working in the area and so know local families very well. They are continually working hard to introduce new families into the centre. An effective team of professionals meet regularly to talk about how the centre can support children, families and other users in its area. All staff work very effectively together to plan how they can support all families, but especially those who are having particular difficulties and need the most help. They also have regular meetings where they identify what is going well and where improvements need to be made.

Although it was half term and many activities and courses were not taking place, we managed to speak to a number of parents and other users of the centre. We really appreciated and were delighted to hear their positive comments of how the centre has helped them. We were able to discover that the excellent links between the centre and the nursery mean that children who attend early years provision, in the centre, are very well prepared when they transfer to nursery education. The centre is also very successful at helping children in need to be safe by working with the health service and social services. People who use the centre are now much better at staying safe and healthy and providing for their children. Parents and carers say they feel safe in the centre. They told us how welcoming the centre is and how much they enjoy the activities that are offered to make them better at coping generally with

their families and, if they want to, to develop their literacy, numeracy and computer skills.

Excellent care, guidance and support is given to all centre users. Staff are extremely good at identifying what is needed to improve the lives of families and then making sure they get the correct support, from a number of different services, to achieve this. Parents and carers told us that the centre has enabled them to make new friends and that they do not feel so alone anymore. They really appreciate that there is always someone to listen to them at the centre.

We have asked the centre to do two things to improve the services they offer. We have asked that information collected by the local authority be used more effectively to decide on services and activities offered and identify how these help families and users. We think this information should then be shared with the staff, trustees and the other people who the centre works with.

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