

Inspection report for Queen's Park Neighbourhood Centre (Bedford Borough)

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| Local authority | Bedford |
| Inspection number | 384059 |
| Inspection dates | 21–22 September 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Maxine Mayer HMI |

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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 Inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with strategic board members, senior leaders and managers, representatives of the local authority, health, social care and education professionals, family visitors, early years professionals, parents, carers and talked to children.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Queen's Park is one of 15 children's centres in the local authority. It is a phase one centre designated in September 2005. Centre services are provided at various sites in the locality. The centre provides integrated services that include health, family support, outreach work and adult training. The head of centre reports to head of the 0-19 year provision in Bedfordshire NHS who manage the children's centre contract on behalf of the local authority. Governance of the centre is provided by the local Strategic Partnership Board.

Statistical data for the area indicates that it is in an area of significant social and economic disadvantage. The percentage of those in employment in Queen's Park is significantly lower than for Bedfordshire and is particularly low for females. The percentage of the population who have no formal qualifications is much higher than the rest of the authority area. The population is culturally diverse with growing numbers from minority ethnic backgrounds particularly Asian and Eastern European which represent about half the community. Whilst many children in the area start their early years education with the skills and knowledge expected of them, there are local variances.

The centre does not directly contract childcare or Early Years' provision.

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

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| 1 |
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Capacity for sustained improvement

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

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Main findings

This outstanding children's centre is providing high quality services, very effectively targeting families who are vulnerable due to their circumstances. Teenage parents, lone parents, families experiencing domestic abuse and parents and carers with learning difficulties and disabilities receive excellent care, guidance and support. The centre has established high levels of mutual trust and respect within its area and provides seamless working with multi agency partners across all services for children and adults. As a result, outcomes for children and families are outstanding and in many cases better than those in other areas of the Borough.

The management, staff and governors of the centre have strong visions and set very high standards. They are very well qualified and experienced. They are well respected in their fields, by their peer groups and are frequently called upon to share their best practice. All staff understand the needs and interests of their community. This enables them to improve life chances by providing excellent access to the outstanding range of services.

Safeguarding arrangements are robust. The centre meets and exceeds legislative requirements and all staff have access to high quality training at advanced levels and easy access to highly trained and experienced advanced safeguarding practitioners. As a result families feel very safe and protected.

The centre embraces and celebrates equality and diversity. The work of the centre is specifically designed to be inclusive and attractive to the multi-cultural society of the area. Speakers of English as a second language are very well supported. The many adults who have not traditionally engaged in formal learning take lots of first steps and many continue to higher levels of learning. As a result they are significantly improving their children's attitudes to learning.

The availability, quality, sharing and use of resources are outstanding. As one partner stated 'resources just fly around the area'. Excellent use is made of the centre by partners to bring additional services to families in the area. Play areas are made readily available to parents and carers and these are well used in order that play-time between adults and children is greatly improved. Staff knowledge and expertise is well shared through the excellent partnership working.

The centre has demonstrated year-on-year improvements leading to high level outcomes relative to parental and child starting points. The centre has an excellent capacity to further improve. It knows its strengths well and bases its improvements on very sound assessment and evaluation. The centre is highly responsive to the views of its users and partner organisations. However, the centre has recognised that it needs to give further attention to the data and information that it collects and is already making improvements to more formally benchmark its provision and set demanding targets when planning service improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendation for further improvement

- Improve the levels and accuracy of completed registrations and the collection of published data in order that the work of the centre can be further improved through even more precise target setting.

How good are outcomes for families?

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Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making outstanding progress. Those that have benefitted from the work of the centre are achieving much higher points scores than those that have not. The scores are higher than the Borough average. Children who access the centre make outstanding progress relative to their starting points. They benefit from exemplar assessment practices, which are well recorded in their high quality family books. This is enabling activities to be closely aligned to both the needs of the children and their families. The very good advice, guidance and opportunities for children and their parents to play together are enabling parents to have a very good understanding of their children's development. This is further enhanced by excellent staff role modelling.

Users of the centre are improving their health each year and key indicators for health in the area are better than the Borough averages. For instance child obesity at reception year is well below Borough averages and there are also significant increases in breast feeding rates. All families are contacted at birth and the centre is used well by specialist practitioners in order to provide immediate and easily accessible health services. The centre has an excellent voucher system which enables it to quickly identify those families that are not accessing services.

The arrangements for families to stay safe are strong and very well promoted. The highly skilled family and parenting support is ensuring that the potential for harm or

injury of children is minimised particularly for families who are considered most vulnerable. Staff have an excellent understanding of the Common Assessment Framework and benefit from the extensive range of high quality training provided by their employer. In 2010-11 a significant number of children came off child protection plans. The needs of the small number of looked after children in the area are well understood and met. Promotion of good home safety practice is provided very well by family workers who frequently conduct home visits.

Parents make a strong contribution to the work and development of the centre, particularly through the frequently held food and conversation meetings. Their views are acted upon and used well to inform the centre development plan. Children's views are identified and recorded in their family books and used well to inform the planning of future activities particularly for those with disabilities. The centre provides excellent opportunities for families to improve their economic well-being. These are provided through a range of services. The very good and highly effective signposting to the local outstanding college of further education ensured that in 2010/11 high numbers of adults in the area are accessing foundation programmes particularly in English for speakers of other languages, literacy and numeracy and information and communication technology courses. The centre offers and hosts a range of accredited and non-accredited courses in childcare in order to promote this as a career, with some courses aimed specifically at Asian women.

Benefit and financial advice is readily available and provided through a particularly imaginative public/private partnership which is further enhanced by frequent visits of Jobcentre Plus staff. The Polish community receives high levels of support from the Polish Integration support workers who attend the centre every week. Children have outstanding opportunities to gain independent learning skills which give them the ability to adopt a positive attitude at an early stage. The local nurseries report that most children attend as a result of advice given by the centre.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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| The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| 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 children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |

How good is the provision?

1

The centre provides an excellent range of services. Families in the area use the services to a high degree and many rely on them. The needs of the area, particularly those in the target groups are very well understood by the highly experienced, well qualified and trained staff. Assessment methods are highly effective and outcomes are well recorded. Outreach work is excellent. It is flexible, highly individualised and promotes independence. This ensures that all family needs are met particularly for those who are most vulnerable and have difficulties in attending the centre. Children's achievements are well recorded in their family books and 'graduation ceremonies' acknowledge the parents achievement and participation in programmes and courses. Prior learning is very well acknowledged and recorded and used well to signpost families to further learning. It is used in conjunction with on-going assessment to further identify purposeful and useful activities and to inform signposting and provision of learning opportunities. School teachers report that those children who attended the centre have much better attendance at school, have higher aspirations and are more able to participate in additional school activities.

The sensitive and highly individualised care, guidance and support provided to families are outstanding. The quality of support for families in crisis is excellent and much preventative work is done to minimise crisis events. One parent described this work as 'enabling parents to move on to the next chapter in their lives'. The links are very strong with the neighbouring outstanding nurseries. The centre offers outstanding crèche facilities for parents and carers attending development sessions. Parents consider that the particularly good access to financial and ethnic support groups is providing them with invaluable specialist support.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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| The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups | 1 |
| The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups | 1 |
| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups | 1 |

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Governance of the centre is strong. The strategic board is highly representative with a good mix of statutory bodies, faith groups, members of the community and the voluntary sector. The recently revised terms of reference are providing a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities and appropriate challenge to the highly effective leadership and management team and providing an excellent platform for agencies to work together. All contracted services have a service level agreement which clearly identifies what is expected of the contractor and what will be provided by the centre.

The self evaluation process is fully inclusive of the views of service users and partners and soundly based on evidence. Published data has historically not been available for the use and analysis of centre management. The centre has identified this as an area requiring improvement and has undertaken some recent good improvements. Particularly and in conjunction with the local authority improving the quality of registration information and the use of benchmarking data. The current report is an accurate account of the performance of the centre. Development planning is outstanding, it is closely linked to self-evaluation and actions are carefully monitored. However, in some instances measureable target setting is not sufficiently precise.

The accessibility of services provided by the centre is given a high priority. The centre is well used by the wide variety of cultural groups represented in the area and the staff and volunteers represent the cultural diversity. Excellent support is provided for those families where English is a second language and participation of people with disabilities is high. All partners consider that community cohesion is strong and that the centre is making a considerable contribution to this and is at the heart of the community. Parents commented that 'Queens Park wouldn't be Queens Park without the centre'. A recent celebrating diversity day held at the centre attracted nearly 1600 local residents. Centre data demonstrates that the achievement gap in Queens Park is narrowing significantly and in some instances demonstrates that the area is achieving better than areas in the Borough with less deprivation.

The arrangements for safeguarding are outstanding and significantly benefit from the contract holder leading the work of the local children's safeguarding board. All legislative requirements are met or exceeded. Staff and volunteers are well trained and have access to frequent high levels of training and support. Strong policies and procedures ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable to work with children and vulnerable adults. The excellent multi-agency working with clear protocols is promoting the swift exchange of information for the most vulnerable children including those with Common Assessment Frameworks and Child Protection Plans. The recording of this information is very robust. Risk assessment procedures are conducted for all activities in the centre and a recently introduced risk assessment procedure for home visits and lone working is an example of good practice.

Resources within the centre are of high quality and represent the cultural diversity with translation services well provided for. They are well used and shared with other professionals in other early years settings. The limited staff resources are used exceptionally well to target services to those at most disadvantage and are supported by imaginative partnership working and the use of volunteers. The sharing of knowledge and expertise both internally and externally is outstanding. Centre staff frequently participate in events to share their good practice and this is highly valued by their partners. Resources are used in a sustainable way with good emphasis placed on the re-cycling of materials. Partnership working in the area is very mature and highly beneficial to all parties and used as an exemplar by the local authority across the Borough. The shared priorities of the professional and voluntary services are providing a seamless service for the benefit of users.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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| The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood | 1 |
| The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes | 1 |
| The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups | 1 |
| The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |
| 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 | 1 |

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Queen's Park Neighbourhood Centre (Bedford Borough) on 21–22 September 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We would like to thank the many of you who spoke to us. You told us that the work of the centre is highly valued, is changing lives and improving the chances of your children and families and we agree with you.

Your children are making outstanding progress relative to their starting points. You receive excellent guidance and support in parenting skills and this is enabling your children to continue to do well when they start school. Children who have attended the children's centre do better at school than those who do not. Their Early Years

Foundation points are higher and in many cases higher than that for the Borough as a whole. One school in your area this year has the highest points score it has ever had.

The centre provides you with very good access to highly specialised services and many of you told us you would not use these services if they were not provided locally at the centre. You highly value and trust the information, advice and guidance that you are receiving particularly those of you who are new to the area and do not speak English as your first language.

You have access to very high quality resources and you use them to the best advantage of your children, the availability of the playroom is one example. The centre staff have excellent knowledge and experiences and they use these to best advantage in order to provide you with the services and activities that you want and need. The centre provides particularly good outreach work and home visiting for those who have difficulty in attending the centre or do not have enough confidence to do so.

Many of you attend the food and conversation sessions and complete family questionnaires. Please continue to do this as it gives the staff at the centre excellent opportunities to hear your views and to make the services even better. Centre users are well represented at the strategic board level who are also making sure that services meet your needs. The centre does very good work with those who wish to volunteer their services. The volunteers receive good training and are very well supported in their duties. The volunteers live in the local community and are doing an excellent job. As a result of volunteering, all volunteers to-date have gone on to employment or significant courses of further education.

The centre is very successful at safeguarding the families who use the centre. Their arrangements for this are strong and their partnership working with other agencies is highly effective at reducing the numbers of children who are at risk of harm in the area. The centre is giving very good advice and guidance to improve safety in the home and improve child safety through improved parenting skills.

We have asked the centre to make an improvement. We have asked the centre to improve the amount of registrations that are actually completed by those that use the centre. This will enable the centre to have better information to further target the services it provides for you. You can help them to achieve this by completing the registration forms if you have not already done so.

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