

# Bicester-Brookside Children's Centre

Queens Avenue, Bicester, OX26 2NR

## Inspection date

17–18 July 2013

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 effective in registering most local families. A significant proportion from its priority groups, as well as the large majority of families from the most deprived neighbourhoods, regularly accesses services. Outreach work, including for families in their own home, is a major strength.
- Local needs are very well met by the good range of services open to all, as well as by those which are targeted very sensitively at supporting families who face particular challenges. The support for teenage parents, families experiencing domestic abuse and children with disabilities is exceptional.
- Very successful partnerships between a wide range of professional services, and the centre's work with other local children's centres, result in well coordinated services and efficiently managed resources. The centre maximises the use of available space, and is actively looking at different community venues from which services can be delivered to further extend its reach to more of those who need it most.
- Forward-looking leadership ensures that the centre plans for good and rapidly improving effectiveness. Team spirit is strong and the staff are united in their determination to do their very best for the community. Parents hold the centre in high regard and play a central role in its life and development.
- The head of centre uses available data with increasing confidence to pinpoint emerging trends and inform future practice and services. The partnership group provides both support and challenge, and the local authority regularly checks the centre's ongoing performance. In consequence, there is a very strong drive to make further improvement.

### It is not yet outstanding because:

- There is no specific system in place to check how well children in most need who access services get on in early years settings and later education, or to see the impact of courses to which adults are signposted on their personal goals.
- The centre checks the quality and impact of services and activities, but more work is required to sharpen evaluations so that improvements can be prioritised with even greater precision.

### **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 the head of centre, centre coordinator, family support workers, officers of the local authority, health, social care and education professionals, parents, volunteers and representatives of the partnership group.

A visit was made with the coordinator to a Stay and Play session held at the partner children's centre, a home visit was undertaken with a family support worker, observations of activities were undertaken jointly with senior leaders as well as the analysis of case studies.

Inspectors looked at the centre's self-evaluation, development plan, a sample of case studies, safeguarding procedures, partnership board and parent panel minutes, the annual user and non-user survey responses and a wide range of other relevant documentation.

### **Inspection team**

Christine Field	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Additional Inspector
Pippa Wainwright	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

The centre opened in 2008 as a phase two stand-alone centre and delivers a range of services to meet its core purpose. It is located on a large site comprising a primary school, secondary school and sports/leisure centre. The schools are subject to separate inspections. Opening times are Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 4.30pm and on Fridays 8.30am to 3.00pm. The centre runs a monthly Saturday 'drop in' for fathers and their children and a monthly 'drop in' for all families. Some services and activities are provided jointly by this centre and Glory Farm Children's Centre.

The head of the Bicester Children's Centre oversees the work of this centre and three other children's centres: Glory Farm, Ambrosden and Heyford/Caversfield, which are all subject to separate inspections. Two coordinators oversee the day-to-day operation of the centre jointly and manage a team of staff who work across Brookside and its partner centre, Glory Farm. The centre is managed by the local authority with the partnership group, comprising key partners and shared with Glory Farm Children's Centre, assisting its governance. The local authority is about to embark on a review of children's centres across the county.

There are 1,280 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach area. Children enter early years provision typically at the level expected for their age. The reach area is socially and economically very mixed with three areas being amongst the 30% to 50% most disadvantaged in the county based on the indices of multiple deprivation. Around 10% of families are in receipt of out of work benefits. Most families are of White British heritage, with a small percentage from other ethnic groups. The centre has identified its main priority groups as teenage parents, lone parents, children in workless households, disabled children and fathers.

### What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Establish robust systems to check how well children who most need support and who access services get on in early years settings and to see what impact the courses to which adults are signposted have on their personal goals.
- Ensure that services and activity evaluations demonstrate impact, track outcomes and are used to inform the centre's improvement priorities and development planning.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The proportion of families registering with the centre has increased from 37.7% in 2011 to 95% currently. Leaders use their in-depth local knowledge and that of the centre's partners to ensure services take place at the right time, in the right place and for the right families. This results in 78% of families, including a large majority from priority groups and a rising number of families living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, regularly accessing services.
- The centre's informative web page and developing use of social networking mean that advice and information are readily available and enhance the opportunities for families to find out what services are available. The regular use of surveys keeps staff in touch with why some families are not accessing services.
- The level of engagement with expectant teenagers and young parents is very high. Extremely successful partnership work enables the centre to meet the group's specific needs outstandingly well. The very effective sharing of information between centre staff and specialist partners underpins exemplary work to support sufferers of domestic violence and children with disabilities.
- The centre works effectively with health visitors and other partners to find out about the emerging development needs of two-year-olds. Just over half of eligible disadvantaged two-year-olds access

free education; whilst, at 91.3%, most three- to four-year olds take up their entitlement to free early education. Transition arrangements work exceptionally well in enabling children to make a settled start in their new setting, but there is more limited follow up of their learning and development.

- Adults with young children, including some from workless homes, are enabled to take up further learning opportunities because the centre provides good quality crèche facilities for their children. Partners keep in touch with how well learners do on courses, but are not routinely sharing this information with one another or the centre. This means the centre is unable to have a precise picture of where its support is needed most in ensuring the widest access for priority families when planning future services.
- The centre makes full use of its accommodation and is actively pursuing various opportunities to take services out into the community to further meet the needs of disadvantaged families, including those with drug and alcohol dependencies. The programming of activities across the two partner children's centres is a positive feature in giving families a wider choice of services. Groups such as Caterpillars are specifically for invited priority families, including lone parents, who enjoy attending and identify the expert help they receive as making an immeasurable difference to their lives.

### The quality of practice and services

Good

- The wide range and appropriateness of services offered by the centre result in increasing participation rates and families' enhanced well-being. Open-access Stay and Play sessions are well attended, while targeted activities such as practical parenting courses effectively develop young and lone parents' confidence and behaviour management skills. The monthly Saturdays session for fathers and their children involves various activities that help strengthen family bonds.
- Tailor-made services, including one-to-one counselling, lead to extremely positive outcomes for some priority families. For example, the 'TAP' group, run by midwives, centre staff and professionals from the early integration hub, supports families who require specific additional help. Some fabulously decorated 'belly casts' and creative T-shirt designs showing personal 'birth plans' reflect the innovative approaches taken to encourage the sustained engagement of this priority group.
- Family support work is exceptionally effective in helping families experiencing domestic abuse to build resilience, take control and lead more positive lives. Expert one-to-one support, coupled with specialist programmes such as the Recovery Toolkit, provides exactly the right blend of help in order to reduce risk, particularly when at risk children are involved. The parents of special children (POSCH) group for parents and their children with special needs, including disabilities, is identified as 'a fantastic resource', 'provides simply wonderful support' and 'somewhere for our children to be themselves'.
- The centre places a high priority on overcoming barriers so that families most in need have greater equality. For example, some are helped to claim welfare benefits and manage their debts by economic well-being advisers, or access the local food bank and receive household equipment from the centre's recycling store. A number of exciting visits take place in the school holidays; these are heavily subsidised to encourage the widest involvement of local families.
- Ten active volunteers, from a wide range of backgrounds, have successfully completed the well-established volunteering programme and give invaluable support to service delivery. A clear pathway towards further opportunities enables those who so choose to access further education or paid employment. A current volunteer has been inspired to train as a Homestart worker.
- The centre uses the Family Star tool to assess how much progress is made by families in receipt of the high quality outreach services, and what benefits are accrued from the centre's support. Findings show significant gains in adults' personal development. Staff follow up on users' satisfaction levels after completing a course, such as Return to Work, but there is no systematic evaluation undertaken to check up on their achievement or future needs.

### The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Strategic leadership is well informed, insightful and forward thinking. The needs of the centre are considered as part of the bigger locality picture. Sound use of data and very effective sharing of resources across centres aid efficiency and add value to the quality and range of services. The commissioning of some services further enhances what is on offer, but agreements do not all have clearly defined expectations for outcomes or sharp enough monitoring arrangements.
- The staff are 100% committed to doing their very best for the community. The members are a highly skilled, well trained team who are equally confident in family outreach work, supporting sessions or leading specific programmes. Very strong partnership work ensures that children and families have increased confidence to make choices, extend their knowledge and skills, and lead healthier lives.
- Safeguarding is always given the highest priority and threads through every aspect of centre life. The Common Assessment Framework procedures are used effectively by staff and key partners to ensure that children, including those subject to a child protection plan, are kept free from harm.
- Through their work on the parents' panel and partnership group, parents are very involved in the centre's decision making. The partnership group provides good governance and knows what the centre does well and what requires development. The members are proud of what the centre has achieved in the five years since it opened.
- Senior leaders have been very effective in increasing families' involvement, including that of priority groups, and rightly recognise that they must take services into the community to engage with more of them. Helpful reviews take place as part of wider monitoring activities to inform target setting and development planning. However, some assessments lack precision, particularly in recording what impact services have on improving outcomes for children and parents.
- The local authority has monthly contact with the centre and undertakes a range of checks and balances as part of its quality assurance procedures. Its report on the 'annual conversation', held four months ago, accurately reflects the centre's good effectiveness. With leaders and partners, the local authority is supporting the centre towards even greater success.

**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.

<b>Unique reference number</b>	20290
<b>Local authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	421435
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	1,280
<b>Centre leader</b>	Emily Cox
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	01869 249604
<b>Email address</b>	emily.cox@oxfordhsire.gov.uk

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