

Bedford Borough - Network 2

Goldington Family Centre, 30 Meadway, Bedford, MK41 9HU

Inspection date	8–10 October 2013		
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Inadequate	4
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This children's centre group is inadequate.

- Not enough families make regular use of the centres' services, particularly families of children who have a disability, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who bring up children on their own. This is also the case for families isolated in rural communities.
- Senior leaders do not use enough information to enable them to track the long-term impact of the network's services and activities. There is limited data and analysis of whether parents and carers take up opportunities for training or education and whether they stay on their chosen courses and gain worthwhile qualifications.
- The local authority and senior staff do not evaluate their successes and weaknesses with sufficient accuracy against their priorities and targets, not all of which are clear, challenging or measurable. The advisory board is poorly equipped to challenge and improve the centres' work. The difference the four centres are making to the large majority of children and families' well-being is insufficient or unknown.
- The sharing of information and the direct support provided to families who live in very challenging circumstances, some of whom are known to social care services, are not effective enough. There are risks that children in these families are not accessing the support they need early enough to improve their lives. The outreach team is very new and few families are helped at home.
- Families, especially those from targeted groups and fathers, are not sufficiently involved in developing and running activities and events. Hardly any parents are on the advisory board and the parent forum has only just been started.

This children's centre group has the following strengths:

- Staff, across all centres, are highly committed to improving the lives of families. They know children, parents and carers who attend sessions well. These groups are often vibrant and expertly led.
- The work with families who suffer domestic abuse is good. Parents are helped to regain their confidence and understand the impact of all forms of abuse on the development of their children.
- Some aspects of the work are improving because practitioners are working well with health and school staff. The well-being of children who access services and their readiness for school are getting better. The take-up of free early education places is well managed.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre group was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. The centres that form part of this children's centre group are Bedford Central Children's Centre, Goldington Family Centre, Putnoe Children's Centre and Riversmeet Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centres' director, the family services manager, the children's centres' and outreach coordinators and practitioners, senior leaders in the local authority, health and education professionals, volunteers and representatives from the advisory board. They also spoke to the assistant director for social care services. They met parents and looked at outcomes of satisfaction surveys.

The inspectors visited a range of activities across the four centres that form Network 2.

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

Inspection team

Marianick Ellender-Gelé	Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Susan Crawford		Her Majesty's Inspector
Deavon Baker-Oxley		Her Majesty's Inspector
Deborah Sanders		Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Services for children and families in Bedford Borough are delivered through four networks. The local charity 'Goldington Family Centre (GFC)' manages Network 2 on behalf of the local authority. The four centres in this network share leadership and management. There is one advisory board across the network and a committee of trustees who have a range of professional experience and local knowledge. One centre director and a family services manager have the responsibility for the management of the centres.

Bedford Central and Riversmeet children's centres are located on the sites of two lower schools, Priory Lower School (URN: 109436) and Great Barford Lower School (URN: 109454). The Smarteez Neighbourhood Nursery (URN: 219214) is on the Goldington Family Centre site. The schools and the nursery are subject to separate inspections and their reports can be found on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Network 2 seeks to meet its core purpose through a range of services offered directly at the centres or at community venues across the locality. The network covers a large geographical area and serves a very diverse population. As well as being socially diverse, with pockets of relative affluence and wards in the 30% most deprived nationally, there is a rich mix of ethnic groups and over 25 languages are spoken across the locality. The very large majority of families in the Bedford Central wards are from a Bangladeshi background and, more recently, an increasing number from Pakistan have settled in this particular reach area. There is a home for vulnerable young mothers in the area. North-east of the town, in Goldington and Putnoe, the large majority of families are White British. Across the network the number of families from Eastern Europe is rising. Network 2 expands as far as the Cambridgeshire border. Relatively affluent villages are scattered across this large rural area. Riversmeet Children's Centre serves the villages of Great Barford, Wyboston and Roxton, approximately 8 miles from Bedford.

Over 3200 children under five years old live in the centre's reach area. In the Bedford wards and around Goldington, unemployment is above average. About 1680 children live in households dependent on workless benefits or in families claiming the child element of Working Tax Credit. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to the Reception Year at school are below those expected for their age in the Bedford wards. They match expected levels in the reach area of Riversmeet Children's Centre.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of families accessing services, particularly families of children who have a disability, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, parents who bring up children on their own as well as families living in isolated rural villages.
- Together with the local authority gather a comprehensive and reliable set of data and implement an action plan that includes clear, challenging and measurable targets to improve the network's services and activities.
- Gather reliable information on adults who are in training and education so that:
 - more can be encouraged to participate
 - the progress of those who are on these pathways can be checked
 - and the large majority are encouraged to complete their courses and gain worthwhile qualifications.
- Strengthen the effectiveness of the advisory board so that:
 - self-evaluation gives a reliable picture of performance
 - and board members are better equipped to challenge the network's impact.
- Improve the support for families who live in very challenging circumstances through:
 - early identification and assessment of their needs

- better use of the common assessment framework to agree a holistic plan of support
 - a review of the effectiveness of outreach work
 - and better joint-work with social care services.
- Increase the involvement of families from all key priority groups and fathers, through the advisory board or parent forum, in developing and running activities and events.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- Only a minority of families are actively using services across the network. Families regardless of their background are made very welcomed when they visit the centres. However, numbers from targeted groups regularly engaged are still low.
- Very few parents and carers, including fathers, are involved in designing activities that would stimulate and interest them. This is also the case for families who have children with a disability. A Development Centre in Kempston is specifically designed to provide services for disabled children, but links between Network 2 and the Development Centre are not strong enough.
- There are families isolated in rural areas who do not have sufficient support. The outreach team has only recently been established and its impact is yet unproven. Outreach practitioners are trying hard to develop 'pop-up' provision, using community venues and lending resources to existing groups. This strategy, however, is unlikely to be sufficient to meet the needs of families with very high levels of needs.
- The GFC Network is helping young mothers who live at Charis House and those in a women's refuge to access activities but there is insufficient focus on developing their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Access for families from diverse ethnic groups is uneven. In a few wards, less than a third of families are engaged. Across the whole network less than half are accessing services regularly.
- There are over 200 parents bringing up children on their own across the network. Only a small minority from the most deprived areas are accessing services.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Senior staff do not collate robust information to track the long-term impact of all services, such as when they refer adults to Jobcentre Plus, the citizen's advice bureau and other external organisations. However, there is some effective practice because, when children and families are seen, they receive warm support and helpful advice from committed front-line practitioners.
- Few assessments are completed through the Common Assessment Framework and families who need to access individual targeted support are at risk of not receiving help quickly or early enough. Assessment and recording of the needs of children and parents are inconsistent, ranging from poor to good.
- Joint working with social care professionals is not effective enough to make sure that support for children known to social care services is prompt and progress accurately recorded. Parenting courses for adults were stopped in February 2013 when Network 2 began, although one course was started during the week of this inspection. Some help for families is available through one-to-one intervention.
- Although staff seek parents' feedback, there is insufficient monitoring of the all-round progress children make in their development, communication and language skills.
- Good practice exists in the quality of direct work with children. Across the network, levels of children's development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are improving. Although still below age-expected levels in some areas, communication and language skills are getting better and the gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers is narrowing. An increasing number of children take up their free entitlement to early education.
- Provision requires improvement because too few children benefit from the centres' regular activities,

such as the 'Play Together' and the 'Tiddlywinks' groups. The improved well-being of those who attend can be seen through case-studies, the 'about me' books and other records of achievement such as displays and photographic evidence.

- Joint visits between centre staff and health visitors, including to the maternity ward at the hospital, are developing and help parents understand how to keep their children safe and healthy. Mothers praise, in particular, the quality of the services they receive for breastfeeding and during the drop-ins, baby groups and health clinics.
- A low number of parents and carers are involved in the volunteer programme. One volunteer said 'The centre did so much for me, I want to give back'. The volunteers who have an Eastern European background are running helpful Russian and Polish groups.
- Families who may be subject to domestic violence are supported to make positive changes in their lives. Mothers who are attending special courses said that they now understand their own behaviour, they can talk about their problems and know that staff will help them.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- The network is not improving quickly enough, across all aspects of its work, because planning is weak. Priorities for development are not clear and do not take sufficient account of the diverse needs of the network's population.
- The centres' priorities are not linked closely enough to the local authority targets for improvement. This makes planning ineffective and evaluation unreliable.
- The advisory board is not yet able to challenge leaders to bring about necessary change. This is because board members are not provided with the information they need to hold leaders to account and secure improvement. The self-evaluation is over-optimistic. Board members have not been rigorous enough in checking its accuracy. The advisory board does not include enough parents and carers and a parent forum is only just being formed.
- Evaluation systems to check the impact of services are weak. For example, some parents access courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), as well as other courses, but the centres do not collect information from adult learning providers often enough to measure the effectiveness of this work. There is little monitoring of whether the work of Jobcentre Plus helps parents return to work or whether adults gain qualification as a result of attending a course.
- Information gathered from staff supervision meetings and performance management is not used sufficiently to bring the quality of all case records for children in need and those on a child protection plan to the level of the best and inform the professional development of staff. Management oversight of this work has been insufficient.
- The weekly safeguarding meetings to review the support for vulnerable families are not minuted and do not involve key partners, in particular social care professionals. This reduces the opportunity to compile a rounded picture of each family and respond efficiently to those in greatest need.
- Arrangements to safeguard children, parents and carers attending the centres are in place. Staff have regular training to understand what they must do should they have a concern about a child's welfare. The application and updating of policies, however, must be re-inforced such as parents' use of mobile phones.
- There is a risk that, once more families with high levels of needs are identified, the outreach team may struggle to meet demands for one-to-one support, such as through well-targeted home visits. Senior staff manage current resources effectively but there is limited evidence, in the plans, of more innovative, efficient and genuinely joined-up ways of working to ensure that growing demand is met. The local authority is currently restructuring its social care services to align teams of professionals to the network's localities. This has the potential to increase capacity.

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 Group details

Unique reference number	80030
Local authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	424727
Managed by	The Goldington Family Centre Charity on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3280
Centres' Director	Kate Martinow
Group Manager	Mandy Colon
Telephone number	01234 341977
Email address	kate.martinow@gfc.gb.com

This group consists of the following children's centres:

- URN 20241 Bedford Central Children's Centre
- URN 21267 Goldington Family Centre
- URN 22436 Putnoe Children's Centre (at Putnoe Health Clinic)
- URN 22526 Riversmeet Children's Centre (office only)

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