

Bedford Borough - Network 2

30 Meadway, Bedford, MK41 9HU

Inspection dates	14–16 October 2014
Previous inspection date	8 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
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 group of centres is good.

- Enthusiastic and committed leaders, at all levels of management and governance have ensured that the group has improved quickly since the last inspection.
- There has been a significant increase in the number of families who use the centre, particularly those from the most disadvantaged areas and those who need the most help accessing services.
- Partnerships with midwives and health visitors are strong. Well attended health clinics ensure families have access to a good range of advice and guidance. As a result, the number of families with a child aged under a year registering with the group has increased.
- With a 43% increase, most two-year-olds are taking up their free education place in good or better settings.
- Safeguarding is seen as a high priority. Staff work closely with key partners to keep children and families safe. The well-developed referral system ensure families, including those at risk from domestic abuse receive the help and support they need in a timely way.
- Families highly value the individual support they receive, which helps to build their confidence and motivates them to make positive changes in their lives.

It is not outstanding because:

- Systems to track, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the centres' work are not fully established. As a result, leaders and managers find it difficult to measure the full extent to which the group's work is making a difference to children and families' lives.
- Not all partners share information about children and families who live in the area or access services. This includes live birth data and the outcome for families accessing Job Centre Plus.
- The partnership with speech and language therapists to support the early identification of children's communication and language delay are at an early stage.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Leaders, managers and those in governance should ensure that systems to track, monitor and evaluate the work of the centre are fully embedded and show more precisely the full impact of the centres' work by:
 - implementing a robust monitoring system to measure the effectiveness of the services provided across the group
 - analysing and making the best use of data, including information held by key partners
 - keeping a close check on how well children from target groups achieve relative to their peers by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Enhance partnership working with speech and language therapists to increase the services available to support the early identification of language and communication delay.
- The local authority should work at a strategic level to develop systems for sharing information with key partners, so the group receives the information they need to reach more families from their identified target groups and to measure the impact of their work, including:
 - live birth data from health partners
 - monitoring and tracking information from Job Centre Plus.

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 two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre director, the family services manager, the children's centre and outreach coordinators and practitioners, representatives from the local authority, health visitors, midwives, early years providers, head teachers, representatives from a range of partner agencies, volunteers, children and families and representatives from the advisory board and trustees.

The inspectors visited a range of activities and sessions held at the two centres, Great Barford Hall and Miracle Church. Visits were undertaken with the children's centre coordinator and the family service manager. The family service manager and the centre director attended team meetings. Inspectors looked at the centre's self-evaluation documents, action plan following the last inspection, case files, safeguarding procedures, project plans and a range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Wendy Ratcliff, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Joy Law	Her Majesty's Inspector
Christine Blowman	Additional inspector
Lesley Talbot-Strettle	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, which includes parents and a committee of trustees who have a range of professional experience and local knowledge. The centre director and the family services manager have the responsibility for the management of the network services.

Bedford Central is located on the same site as Priory Lower School (URN: 109436), Riversmeet Children's Centres is on the same site as 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 provides a range of services offered directly at Goldington and Bedford Central Children's Centres and from a range of community venues across the locality. All the services for Putnoe and Riversmeet Children's Centres are run from community venues. 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 27 languages are spoken across the locality. Around 36% of children in the area are from minority ethnic groups, but Goldington and Castle wards are more ethnically diverse. Almost 60% of children are from minority ethnic groups. Across the network the number of families from Eastern Europe is rising. There is a home for vulnerable young mothers in the area. 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 eight miles from Bedford.

There are 3280 children under five years old living in the centre's reach area. In the Bedford wards and around Goldington, unemployment is above average. Around 19% of children are living in households where no one is working. Children's skills, knowledge and ability on entry to early education vary across the reach area, with communication and language being the weakest area.

Target groups include: children living in the most disadvantaged communities; children living in low income and workless households; lone parents, including teen and young parents; families who experience domestic abuse; children with additional needs; families from minority ethnic groups, particularly Bengali and Eastern European families and other vulnerable families, including those who are at risk of rural isolation.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families **Good**

- The centre staff and the outreach team has worked successfully over the last 12 months to significantly increase the number of children and families from its target groups who are registered with and use the centre. As a result, the large majority of children under five years are registered and the number of families from target groups regularly using the centre is increasing at a fast pace. This includes 86% of children from the most disadvantaged areas in the community, as well as a considerable increase in the number of lone parents, children with additional needs and children from Bengali and Eastern European families, engaging in services.
- Effective partnerships with health professionals at a local level means that many parents-to-be, new parents, including teenage parents are known to the centre. Centre staff regularly attend baby clinics held across the area to make early contact with these families. The well-attended clinics means families can access help, advice and support such as on breastfeeding and emotional well-being as well as reducing the risk of social isolation.
- The centre has increased its focus on helping families in most need of help through effective partnership working. The weekly early intervention and safeguarding meeting that includes partners from social care and health is effectively identifying the specific needs of individual families who experience challenges in their lives. This proactive approach results in families receiving support early often preventing intervention of more intense measures, such as social care involvement.
- Most eligible two-year-olds and almost all three- and four-year-olds are taking up their free education. This includes 'Little Smarteez' the centre's own two-year-old provision where the large majority of children who attend are from workless households. Effective support is given to the very few settings that are judged less than good.
- Not all key partners are providing information to enable the centre to find and engage all families who would benefit from what the centre has to offer or provide details of the outcome for families who attend some services. This includes live birth data and Job Centre Plus does not provide information to help the centre track the impact services have on families' lives.

The quality of practice and services **Good**

- Several families were keen to tell inspectors their personal stories about how the group has helped them to make positive changes in their lives. Staff skilfully gain families' trust and create an environment where families feel confident to provide sensitive information and seek the help they need. One parent told inspectors, 'the children's centre made my life, I couldn't have done it without them'.
- There is effective support for families who have experienced domestic abuse. GfC has good experience in providing group and one to one sessions for families. In the last six months more families identified as needing such support are successfully accessing services.

- There is a good range of adult education courses to help families build their confidence, gain skills and prepare for employment. A total of 79 families are currently accessing courses such as, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), literacy, mathematics, volunteer and business administration courses. Five parents have entered paid employment and 11 volunteers are working in services across the area.
- There is a range of opportunities for adults to improve their personal and parenting skills. Parenting courses and tailored one to one support is helping parents to manage their children's behaviour in safe ways and provide consistent boundaries. This results in reducing risks for children and for some families no longer requiring social care intervention.
- Activity sessions, such as the teen and tots programme and baby massage help young parents to bond more successfully with their baby, gain an increased awareness of healthy eating on a budget and safety in the kitchen.
- Sessions for children are well planned and staff are good role models. Good use is made of the outside area during 'Little Explorers' as children and parents enjoy playing together and 'bake cakes' in the mud kitchen. Parents value the range of sessions offered across the area and recognise how such opportunities help their children gain the skills they need as they prepare for nursery. However, systems to track the progress target children make compared to their peers is relatively new and not embedded in daily work.
- Some children, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, receive focussed support in helping to prepare for starting school. For example, Bengali speaking families benefit from the 'Shikoh ebong Khelo' (learn through play) sessions, where families start to engage in conversations mainly in English and children learn to share and sing.
- The centre has recently made links with speech and language therapists as they recognise communication and language is a weaker aspect of children's learning and development and are looking at ways to support the early identification of delay.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- Senior leaders are well supported by a qualified and loyal staff team and dedicated partners. All have worked closely together following the last inspection to ensure improvements were quickly implemented so more families receive help and support. This is reflected in the increasing registration and engagement figures for families from target groups.
- Regular meetings led by the local authority keep a close check on how well the group is doing and provides challenge to ensure continuous improvement. A new electronic system to record and monitor the group's performance is underway, including providing a more accurate record of the number of families from workless households who use what the group has to offer.
- The centre has developed improved systems to plan, evaluate and monitor the impact of the centre's work and staff are being supported to embed these systems. The centre collects and receives a range of information about the services children and families use.

However, information is not always analysed by leaders and managers precisely enough to show the full impact of the group's work.

- Arrangements in place to safeguard children and their families, including those with social care involvement, are effective. All staff and volunteers have received training and understand their roles and responsibilities well. Stronger links with social care colleagues means staff are invited to child protection conferences and plans include appropriate use of centre services.
- GfC has appointed a new Common Assessment Framework (CAF) champion as a result of a low number of CAFs initiated last year. Early years settings receive initial support to set up a CAF, which is improving partnership working and the early identification of need for children and families.
- The advisory board is strengthening well. Members are clear on their roles and responsibilities in supporting and challenging the centre to improve at a fast pace. They are in the process of implementing a 'monitoring tool' to further measure the centre's performance.
- Parent focus meetings, user satisfaction surveys and 'have your say' ensure the views of families are heard, responded to and used to shape future services, for example, by adjusting the times of sessions and topics covered in sessions. Children also share their views, for example, 'I like coming to the singing shop'.
- Resources are used well to meet the needs of children and families. Staff work in close partnership with key agencies to maximise the use of the centre facilities and community venues to ensure services are accessible for all families.

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.

Group details

Unique reference number	80030
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	452956
Managed by	The Goldington Family Centre Charity on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	3280
Centre leader	Kate Martinow
Date of previous inspection	8 October 2013
Telephone number	01234 341977
Email address	kmartinow@btinternet.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 (no building)
- URN 22526 Riversmeet Children's Centre (office only)

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