



Buckinghamshire Youth Service Report

Buckinghamshire Children's Services Authority Area

Publication Type	Published	Reference no.
All	12 December 2006	825

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the local authority or at www.ofsted.gov.uk

Contents

Introduction	2
Part A: Summary of the report	
Main findings	2
Part B: The Youth Service's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes	3
Part C: Commentary on the Key Aspects	
Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice	4
Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources	5
Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management	6

Introduction

1. The Buckinghamshire youth service is part of the Youth and Community Services division within the council's Community Services portfolio. The service is led by the Head of Youth and Community Services who reports to the Strategic Director for Community Services and the Cabinet Member, Community Services. There is a management team of ten, which includes three area operational managers, who oversee teams across the county. It also includes the Youth Support Team manager, who leads the joint project with Connexions to provide integrated support services to young people. Of the 83.2 full-time equivalent youth work posts, 62 are full time. Thirty percent of the 13-19 population is in contact with the service. For 2006-07 the local authority budget for the youth service is £3,136,832, a substantial increase since 2004-05. Partnership working ensures that considerably more resources are dedicated to youth work in the county.

2. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the youth service's self assessment and key service documentation. They met with officers, a cross section of staff, and representatives of the voluntary sector. They carried out direct observation of a sample of youth work sessions across the range of provision. The outdoor education and training centre at Green Park was visited and telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of school managers and teachers.

Part A: Summary of the report

Main findings

Effectiveness and value for money

3. The youth service has made very good progress in addressing the weaknesses identified at the last inspection by Ofsted in 2002. The service is now good in all respects and provides good value for money. The council has invested in the service and has recognised its strong capacity to deliver key strategies. The service has responsibility for several key targets in the local area agreement (LAA) and is well placed for the future integration of wider youth services. Strong partnership working brings further resources that benefit young people. There is an increasing focus on performance management, underpinned by efficient data systems, although their use could be further developed. Provision across the county gains from close liaison with the service's outdoor education team. The service is effective in reaching and benefiting high numbers of young people, well above national benchmarks. However, at some centres, the numbers of young people involved are small and most are male.

Strengths

- Achievement and youth work practice are good.
- Music and outdoor education are strong features of the wide-ranging provision.
- Partnership arrangements are very effective.
- There is a clear commitment to inclusion, equality and diversity.
- Leadership and management is purposeful and shrewd.

Areas for development

- Develop review processes to ensure that provision meets the needs of all young people.
- Strengthen the use of data in performance management processes at all levels.
- Seek ways to involve young people more effectively in the strategic and operational running of the service.

Key aspect inspection grades

Key Aspect		Grade
1	Standards of young people's achievement	3
	Quality of youth work practice	3
2	Quality of curriculum and resources	4
3	Strategic and operational leadership and management	3

The table above shows overall grades about provision. Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale:

Grade 4: Excellent/outstanding: a service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users:

Grade 3: Good: a service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users:

Grade 2: Adequate: a service that delivers only minimum requirements for users:

Grade 1: Inadequate: a service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users.

Part B: The youth service's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes

4. The service makes an excellent contribution across the five outcome areas of Every Child Matters (ECM). The youth service has formed strong strategic links. Some are relatively new, such as those with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), while others are well established. Links with the Connexions partnership are exceptionally close and have been the basis of joint

planning and project work for some time. The service takes a leading role within the council on safeguarding developments. Day-to-day work is planned according to ECM outcomes. Health-related provision is highly evident at all centres. The service coordinates a large, multi-agency Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) programme which is particularly effective in targeting the activities to support vulnerable young people. Specialist workers within the Youth Support Team provide holistic advice and guidance on a range of issues as well as re-integration projects for those not in education, employment or training. The quality and effectiveness of much of the work is good.

Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

Key Aspect 1: Standards of young people's achievements and the quality of youth work practice

5. The standard of young people's achievement in the sample of youth work sessions observed was good, as the service had judged in its self assessment. Accrediting learning has been a key priority and a high proportion of the young people involved in youth activities gain accreditation of some kind. The service is the lead body for the flourishing Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. There is an exceptionally high number of delivery points, well over forty, several of which are in special schools. The Buckinghamshire Youth Award is a well-established scheme. A culture of celebrating achievement is evident, not only at county-wide events but at centre level, such as the music festival at Burnham Youth Centre in June 2006.

6. Personal and social development is also good. This was seen at many centres, on the Regener8 programme, and is a feature of some of the work in schools such as On Target. In many sessions, young people demonstrated confident interaction and engagement, a confidence that had been engendered by the opportunities provided and the supportive ethos. In some sessions, young people were considering their options and making decisions based on the advice and information being provided. Social development was taking place through responsibilities being shared, arrangements being organised and discussions on abstract as well as practical matters. Opportunities for young people to develop their leadership skills and participate in running sessions were available at some centres, but these were generally limited.

7. At a few centres visited, while behaviour and social skills were satisfactory, there was a low level of engagement by young people. Occasionally, there was a lack of challenge and structure; opportunities were presented, but passed over. In these situations, the numbers present were usually low, and made up largely of boys.

8. Youth work practice is good. Workers develop good relations with young people. Part-time staff are enthusiastic and also relate well to young people. Many examples were seen of workers having a strong sense of ownership of their

centres, committed to their development and improvement. They showed flexibility and adaptability to unforeseen circumstances. In many of the sessions seen, effective and focussed planning was evident, with clear expectations of learning. The best workers were leading by example, whether entering fully into the activities and inspiring others to participate, or by their behaviour – acting as role models in showing energy, good humour, respect and empathy for all, in ways that rubbed off on those around them. The leadership of some workers has been put to the test by recent events in High Wycombe, where community tension had risen due to arrests made in connection with an alleged terrorist plot.

9. In a minority of the sessions seen, poor use was made of part-time staff and volunteers. Although their presence was beneficial, their time was not being sufficiently or purposefully used as youth workers, and their potential and skills were not being developed. There was some weak planning and evaluation, and overall an insufficient involvement of young people in the planning and reviewing of the activities.

Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

10. The quality of curriculum and resources is good. The range of activities being provided by the service is excellent. Varied programmes at youth centres are enhanced by the well-established link to Soundstudio and to the Outdoor Education opportunities provided by the Outdoor Education Team. At one centre a mobile climbing wall was used to give youngsters an introduction to rock-climbing; at another, an introduction to fencing was skilfully delivered. There is a good focus on health, such as healthy eating activities and sessions delivered by the drugs prevention team. The PAYP programme funds a large number of trips and residential opportunities. There are international visits and examples of real innovation: the Intergenerational Project brought young people together with elderly war veterans and culminated in a visit to war sites in France.

11. Beyond the opportunities at youth centres, the service has made a strategic priority of developing targeted programmes for specific groups of young people. There is good support for young carers and provision for young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. There is a substantial volume of work provided for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Work with mainstream secondary schools is sporadic but is growing rapidly, is extremely varied in nature (from drugs education to behaviour support and housing advice) and, where appropriate, the provision leads to accredited outcomes for young people. For example, one youth worker took a whole group of disaffected boys in one school through a two year ASDAN programme with excellent results. In conjunction with Connexions, the recently developed Youth Support Team offers integrated specialist support on housing and independent living, substance misuse, and careers advice and guidance. It runs targeted programmes aimed at re-integrating the most disaffected young people into education, employment and training.

12. This range of activities is impressive, both those which are available to all and those which are targeted at vulnerable groups. The supporting principles of inclusion and equality are clear. However, staff are not clear about how the service's priorities link with the overall county strategy and the curriculum policy is in need of updating to reflect new and emerging ECM expectations.

13. The quality of staffing and accommodation is good. The budget increase in 2005-06 led to a significant increase in staffing, with resultant benefits in the breadth and quality of provision. Staff are either fully trained or in appropriate training. Progression routes from volunteer status to full-time worker are established and bearing fruit. Green Park provides the service with a superb training and development centre used effectively. Training is responsive to emerging priorities and is often planned in collaboration with partners. It is accessible to all staff and is beginning to generate income.

14. Resources are very good and allow an extended range of activities. Outdoor education resources are exceptional; lottery funding has been used to develop facilities with a particular emphasis on providing for young people with disabilities. Good equipment for arts and music programmes is available. Most centres have up-to-date IT resources although their integration into learning programmes is under-developed. There are many very good purpose built youth centres. They are bright, welcoming, and well maintained. All centres are compliant with current Special Educational Needs and Disability Act legislation and funding for this purpose has been used to refurbish many of them. Many centres benefit from the shared responsibility for them which is exercised by Local Management Committees.

Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

15. Strategic and operational leadership and management are good. The council monitors the service effectively and supports it well. The council has clear ambitions for young people, demonstrated by the collaboration with partners evident in the 2004-07 Buckinghamshire Youth Strategy. Although the effectiveness of this highly aspirational strategy has so far been limited, it has served to establish the role of the youth service, which now holds key responsibilities for several LAA targets on behalf of the council. The service is consequently very well positioned for the new Children's Trust arrangements. The links between corporate priorities through service plans to activities in youth centres are not, however, sufficiently clear.

16. The service is highly experienced in partnership working and secures substantial additional income through a variety of partnerships. Close strategic links with the local Connexions partnership have led to joint planning and training arrangements, and the joint funding and management of the Youth Support Team. This has improved provision for young people. Widely spread and varied holiday activities for young people are coordinated well by the PAYP programme, with funding secured and managed by the service in partnership with districts, race equality groups, the Youth Offending Service, the police and others. These

types of provision exemplify the commitment of the council and the service to equality, inclusion and diversity. In its management of arrangements with the voluntary sector, the service is shrewdly and sensitively developing its capacity, coherence and accountability.

17. Although a pool of young people has been used effectively over the last two years in the recruitment of staff, there is insufficient participation by young people in the strategic and operational running of the service. Procedures to provide healthy and safe environments are good, with the service playing a leading role in policy developments on safeguarding and safe employment. The day-to-day management of the service is efficient. Communications systems are good and there is a strong sense of shared leadership.

18. Since the last inspection, quality assurance processes have become far more rigorous and coherent and are now good. Performance management through supervision and appraisal, is effective and more consistent. The Youthbase information system works efficiently and further software systems enabling management oversight have been piloted. However, the use of data to inform target setting is under-developed at all levels. Mechanisms to share good practice are satisfactory. Internal inspection visits have recently begun. Staff feel included and welcome what they see as a tighter focus on their work and greater clarity. They feel challenged as well as supported, and morale is good.