



# Enhanced youth inspection report

Barnet Children's Services Authority Area

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**Better  
education  
and care**

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Part A: Summary of the report</b>	
Main findings	2
<b>Part B: The Youth Service's contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Part C: Commentary on the Key Aspects</b>	
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. Barnet Youth and Connexions Service is located within the local authority's education service. The authority operates four youth centres, a specialised substance misuse project, youth theatre and alternative education project, and carries out project work in partnership with a range of voluntary organisations and detached workers. The service has 38 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff comprising four managers, 21 full-time youth workers and 22 part-time youth workers and 5 administrative staff. The service's budget provided by the local authority was £1,500,000 in 2005/06 and £281,659 additional income was raised. Barnet has 27,266 young people aged 13 to 19 with 10.7% of these participating with the service's provision in 2005/06.
2. The Joint Area Review (JAR) was enhanced to enable coverage of the youth service. Inspectors considered the youth service's self assessment and met with officers and a cross section of staff. They reviewed key service documentation and carried out direct observation of a sample of youth work sessions throughout the area.

## Part A: Summary of the report

### Main findings

#### Effectiveness and value for money

3. Overall, the service is adequate and provides satisfactory value for money. The quality of youth work practice is good and there is effective partnership working with the voluntary sector and other organisations. Young people are involved closely in the planning and evaluation of work and they benefit from the integrated approach of Connexions' personal advisors (PAs) and youth workers. A broad range of provision is in place, but there are significant gaps and the low level of funding hinders the development of more work to meet the needs of all young people. Recent improvements in the management and leadership of the service indicate the capacity for further progress is good. Comprehensive quality assurance and management information systems are now in place, but these are only just being implemented and it is too early to judge their impact.

#### Strengths

- Much well-planned and effective youth work practice
- Good personal and skills development in the performing arts.
- Effective partnership working.
- Young people benefit from the successful integration of Connexions and youth work.
- Good involvement of young people in planning and evaluation.

## Areas for development

- The low contact rate with young people.
- Few young people gain formal accreditation for their work.
- The low level of funding that constrains the development of further provision.
- The full implementation of management information and quality assurance systems

## Key aspect inspection grades

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

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

**Grade 4:** A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users:

**Grade 3:** A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users:

**Grade 2:** A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users:

**Grade 1:** 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 a good contribution to the outcomes for young people, although the number of young people benefiting from this work is low. Safeguarding is a key focus for the service and this is manifest in the stringent health and safety procedures that are in place. Effective work raises the awareness of young people to drugs and sexual health issues. Young people derive much enjoyment, and some develop high levels of skill, in sporting activities such as basketball and football, and the performing arts. The opportunity to accredit the work of young people formally is often missed. Young people are strongly encouraged to contribute to the local community, for example by organising community days. Successful work reduces crime and anti-social behaviour. The integrated approach of Connexions and youth work improves the employability skills of young people and good information, advice and guidance is available.

## Part C: Commentary on the key aspects

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

5. A relatively small number of young people achieve highly, but, overall, the standard of young people's achievement is satisfactory. Performing arts are used effectively to develop young people's skills, particularly by the Finchley Youth Theatre. The 'Xpress it FM!' radio project develops technical and personal skills well. The United Youth user-group encourages participants to develop self-confidence and a greater awareness of citizenship. It also provides a means by which young people can express their views. Young people learn to moderate their unacceptable behaviour at the Oasis Alternative Education project and good work by detached workers has reduced anti-social behaviour in some areas. These examples of good practice apply to a small number of young people and highlight the need to extend opportunities. A significant proportion of the service's provision is sports-based, particularly football and basketball, and whilst it provides popular and highly-valued recreational activities, work of this nature fails to capitalise on the educational opportunities presented

6. Managers acknowledge the need to increase the external accreditation gained by young people for their achievements and have appointed a coordinator for this. Recently a licence to deliver the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme was obtained and recruitment to the scheme is buoyant. Young people are able to gain other qualifications including Asdan Youth Activity awards, AQA awards in health and safety and self-defence, and in-house certificates are used to celebrate achievements. However, despite this improving situation, the overall proportion of young people gaining accreditation is currently low.

8. The quality of youth work practice is good. Three-quarters of the sessions observed by inspectors were good or better and none were unsatisfactory. Staff plan and evaluate sessions carefully, often with young people taking the lead. Youth workers challenge inappropriate behaviour effectively and set clear boundaries. Relationships between staff and young people are good. Detached workers are skilled at helping young people set realistic individual targets: this is often done in an unobtrusive way that leaves ownership of the target with the young person. The integrated team approach of Connexions PAs and youth workers has improved the understanding of careers and training opportunities for young people and provides them with good support at times of transition. Staff work well in partnership and are responsive to new ideas.

## Key Aspect 2: Quality of curriculum and resources

9. The quality of curriculum and resources is satisfactory. A broad range of activities takes place covering sports, youth participation events, outreach and detached work, a popular holiday programme, alternative education projects and work targeted at vulnerable young people, which includes residential visits. Current gaps in provision, for example within certain localities and with gay, lesbian and bisexual young people, are acknowledged in the self-evaluation report. Provision for young people belonging to specific ethnic minority groups, such as Jewish, Somali and Afghan, often takes place with voluntary sector organisations. Contacts with young people from other groups, for example Chinese, are not covered adequately. A small amount of work with young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities takes place. Only a limited number of generic youth club sessions occur.

10. A curriculum framework provides helpful information on targets for youth work and sets out clearly the principles, aims and intended outcomes of the provision. The document lacks detail in some areas, for example the outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda. More detailed underpinning information and learning resources are required to enable inexperienced youth workers to be more effective in their work and staff are developing these resources. Staff promote diversity and inclusiveness well in the work that takes place, but overall there is a gender imbalance and far more males participate in the provision.

11. The experience and qualifications of staff are satisfactory and the proportion of staff vacancies is low. The deployment of staff in some sessions observed was inefficient and a high proportion of workers to young people did not significantly add any additional value to the quality of the provision. Staff training is identified well through supervision and performance review and staff value the breadth of opportunities available. Good use is made of the expertise of service staff and those from other organisations when training, but the outcomes of this training is not monitored or evaluated systematically. The sharing of best practice is done well and regularly through staff meetings and training events.

12. The service has reduced its ownership of centres in recent years and the accommodation now in use is generally of good quality. The Finchley Youth Theatre provides an excellent resource for performances. High quality radio broadcasting and music technology equipment are well-used, but new ICT resources are not being fully utilised as a learning tool or by staff for administrative purposes. The overall use of youth centres is low, reflecting the low participation rates, and some are not currently cost-efficient.

### Key Aspect 3: Leadership and management

13. Leadership and management of the service are satisfactory. Local authority officers have a clear idea of the strategic direction for the service. In September 2004, the youth service and Barnet Connexions partnership were integrated into one team. This integration has successfully brought together the best features of Connexions and youth work management practices. Management vacancies delayed the development of the new service but a full management team is now in place. The capacity of the service to improve the quality of provision further is good. Many of the weaknesses reported at the last inspection are no longer issues. The service has travelled a long road of improvement and is well-led by the head of service and management team.

14. The service is funded poorly and funding levels have fallen over the previous three years. To accommodate budget cuts, managers have made efficiency savings, for example by reducing management costs and successfully targeting resources to meeting the needs of vulnerable young people. The service is in contact with a low number of young people, although the trend is upward. Staff fully recognise the need to increase contact and are planning to promote the service more vigorously; for example a new web site is being developed. More universal provision is also planned, although not all centres currently have sufficient budgets to employ enough part-time workers to do this. Local authority officers and members value the work of the service and want to expand provision, but a commitment to increase funding has not yet been given.

15. A wide range of strong partnerships with voluntary and independent organisations lead to successful work. Good support is provided to vulnerable young people, for example those involved with drugs, anti-social behaviour and offending. Staff provide effective general advice and guidance along with specialist help on sexual health and teenage parenting. A limited amount of youth work takes place with schools and there are plans to strengthen these links.

16. Statutory requirements and duties for legislation concerning race relations and the special educational needs and disabilities act are carried out. All youth centres are fully accessible to individuals with restricted mobility. Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out for all staff working directly with young people and child protection training takes place. A safe working environment is ensured and comprehensive risk assessments are undertaken, in many cases with young people playing a part.

17. The involvement of young people in the planning and evaluation of provision is good. Young people feel they have a strong say in the running of their clubs and many projects are developed in consultation with them. Generally, young people do this work without the benefits of being organised into a formal group.

18. Operational management is strong. A comprehensive mapping of the service's work is taking place to highlight gaps in provision and the local assessment of need is often detailed and thorough. A new set of procedures for quality assurance are in place, although only a limited amount of observation of practice has occurred and it is too early to judge any impact this has had on improving the quality of practice. A new management information system is being implemented. The self-evaluation report was realistic in its assessment of the service's shortcomings, although some of the overall grading judgements were over-generous. The new management team work well together and have the support of their staff. The morale of staff is high and there is a feeling throughout the service of a new chapter beginning.