

Inspection report for St Stephen's Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Newham
Inspection number	365857
Inspection dates	14-15 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Kath Beck

Centre governance	The governing body of St Stephen's School Federation
Centre leader	Jane Johnson OBE
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	St Stephen's Primary School St Stephen's Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare	St Stephen's Daycare 132386

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and senior management team of the federated schools, children's centre and daycare. They also met with the governance committee for the centre, representatives from the range of services offered, the local authority and parents and carers using the service. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

St Stephen's is a phase one children's centre located in the north-east quadrant of the London Borough of Newham. It serves Green Street East and Boleyn wards, as well as parts of the East Ham North and East Ham Central wards. It was designated as a children's centre in April 2007 as part of a local Sure Start programme. The local authority has delegated responsibility for governance of the centre to the governing body of St Stephen's School Federation. This consists of St Stephen's Primary School, St Stephen's Nursery School, St Stephen's daycare and the children's centre, all of which are on the same site. All provision is under the leadership of the headteacher of the primary school. The centre provides the full core offer including childcare, family support, child and family health services and an employment and training service. It is situated within the 10% most deprived areas in the country. The large majority of families come from diverse minority ethnic groups. Most are from Pakistani, Bengali, Indian, Tamil and East European backgrounds. The area has a mix of housing types, including a significant number of flats. Unemployment rates and the number of workless families on benefits are higher than the national average. The birth rate is exceptionally high. The centre includes a midwifery practice. The maintained nursery admits children from the age of three years. Their development when they first start in the nursery is well below expectations.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

1

Main findings

St Stephen's Children's Centre is outstanding. It is regarded highly within the community. Inspired leadership has implemented very successfully the vision that a local school federation can be the focal point for an exceptionally wide range of education, health and welfare services for the whole community. Innovative approaches have resulted in the provision of a midwifery group practice. This joint initiative with health, the local authority, school and the centre has broken down barriers between health and education. By bringing health and education together the centre provides easy access to services user may not otherwise reach. This, together with excellent care, guidance and support, makes a significant difference to users' lives. All are empowered to change their individual and family circumstances for the better. One said, 'You would not recognise me from the person I was a few years ago. I almost live here. I am no longer isolated. The centre has helped me so much, giving me confidence. I have achieved more than I could ever believe and I am now working.'

Equality and diversity are promoted strongly. Bi-lingual and multi-lingual staff ensure that all have access to the services they need. The partnership with parents and carers is considered a priority. The number of users accessing the centre has increased significantly in the past two years. This is due to approachable staff who provide a warm, friendly, welcoming atmosphere and an excellent environment, where it is fun to play and exciting to learn. It is also due to the excellent range of services, and the very effective partnerships established with family support and outreach workers. Safeguarding of all users, while working in the community, in the home or at the centre is at the heart of its work.

An exceptionally cohesive range of integrated services is reducing the risk of harm to children, enhancing family health and relationships, and developing users' economic stability. Arrangements for the governance committee, that includes users and acts as an advisory board, are very new. This is because there was uncertainty about whether the schools were to federate or amalgamate. The knowledge and understanding of the representatives from across the services of their role on the

committee are secure. There has been insufficient time to develop their skills fully in, for example, participating in decision making, and contributing to the priorities for the centre's development and monitoring the outcomes to challenge performance.

The federation of the schools and centre has been significant in enhancing the effectiveness of the centre in the last two years. Staff attend training together so there is strong teamwork, a very clear sense of shared purpose and community. There is consistency in the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage that enables very young children to develop important skills for the future. Data and users' views are used very effectively to plan courses to meet needs and to check the impact of provision in the short, medium and longer term. The progress of children who have used the centre can now be tracked from birth to the age of eleven. This is reflected in the recent nursery inspection where children were noted as making rapid progress as a result of outstanding provision.

The pursuit of excellence in all of the centre's activities is supported by robust self-evaluation and performance management. As a result, provision and outcomes for users are outstanding. These features, together with a strong track record of development, clear long-term strategic planning, and well-targeted plans for the future, show that the centre has an outstanding capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- In conjunction with the local authority, raise the skills of the governance committee so that its members are involved fully in decision-making processes, including setting and monitoring priorities in the centre action plan.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Questionnaires show that parents and carers feel very safe and secure in the centre. Child safety week, accident prevention classes, first-aid training, visits to individual families to advise on safety in the home, and visits to the centre by the fire service, enable children, parents and carers avoid injury. Parents and carers are involved in devising risk assessments for visits, raising their awareness of keeping safe in the community. Very effective procedures enable staff to identify concerns early and intervene. Every Child Matters meetings with other professionals provide a fully integrated approach to children subject to the Common Assessment Framework or a child protection plan. These close working partnerships between the various professionals enable effective communications and a customised approach to resolving problems. Trusting relationships between families and the centre reduce children's exposure to harm. Sessions for parents and carers of children with disabilities, language delay or behavioural needs build networks of support to enhance safety and ease anxieties.

The midwifery group practice promotes the good health of families very effectively

from an early stage. Ante-natal classes, breast feeding and weaning support groups, as well sessions in the centre on 'Dump the Dummy' and 'Bin the Bottle', are successful in promoting healthy eating for babies and toddlers. Data show that women who met with the maternity dietician several times during their pregnancy had lower infant mortality rates and no low birth weight babies. A paediatric dietician is helping to reduce obesity. She also supports families with children with special educational needs/and or disabilities so that their difficulties are managed more effectively through a specific diet. Parents and carers report that they are changing the eating habits of their families through contact with the dietician, and courses relating to healthy eating. One said, 'Super snackers was a real eye opener to me.' Parents and carers also enjoy helping the children to grow healthy food in the centre's garden. The centre and daycare has been awarded the Three Star Healthy Eating Status, and ensures, through consultation with parents, carers and the federation cook, that all meals and snacks provide the best nutrition. Activities such as 'Strollers and Striders' promote opportunities for families to become physically fit by visiting local parks and places of interest.

Parenting programmes, 'Bedtime Routines', 'Toilet Training', 'Coping with Kids', 'Baby Massage', 'Messy Play' and 'Stay and Play', are very successful in promoting mental health and positive relationships between parent and child. One parent said, 'I don't know where I would have been without the 'Bedtime Routines' course. Bedtime was chaotic, but now I have the evening back and my child is much happier.' Staff support parents and carers after the courses and celebrate successes or direct them to further guidance. Family and outreach workers provide one-to-one tailored support for families in significant need, especially with housing or financial worries. They empower them to become independent and make informed decisions. Confidence building and English for speakers of other languages courses, groups for families with children with special educational needs/and or disabilities, and visits to places of interest reduce users' sense of isolation. Introductions to services that prevent domestic abuse and enable users to reduce their reliance on smoking, drugs and alcohol are managed sensitively.

Users commented that they really value the way they are encouraged to attend the centre and join in the captivating and enjoyable activities provided for their children. They are very proud of the exceptional outdoor areas that allow their children to be curious, to explore and to develop their physical skills. The exceptional range of the activities means children are never bored and always behave really well. 'Every Child a Talker', 'Box Clever', 'Chatterbox', 'Book gifting', 'Sing-a-Long' and the toy and book libraries promote strongly children's early communication and literacy skills. As a result, children have achieved very well in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development national assessments at the age of five. 'Special books' track children's development and show that from their starting points the children achieve very well. The centre extends its influence within the community through regular training and 'drop-in' sessions for childminders. These are helping them to gain awards and enhance their practice.

All adults taking part in numeracy and information and communication technology

courses have been successful in achieving their qualifications. Over two thirds studying English achieved their level 1 qualification. Staff at the centre recognise the skills of individuals and direct them into personal programmes of study. These often lead to further National Vocational Qualifications such as those for teaching assistants or childcare and employment. Adults attending training or returning to work make good use of advice about the childcare options available to them. Users say that the centre has enhanced their social development as they learn alongside, and make new friends from, different cultural backgrounds. Advice from the local authority employment and training adviser, outreach and family support workers enables families to access the benefits to which they are entitled and learn the best way to find work.

Users' views influence provision. They are sought regularly through the Parents' Forum, questionnaires, evaluations of activities and informal discussions. Each suggestion is considered carefully and where possible acted on. For example, the development of a new 'toddler area' incorporated many of the parents' and carers' ideas. Timings of some parenting sessions have been changed to allow working parents and carers to attend.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	1

How good is the provision?

1

Senior staff make very good use of a wide range of data, feedback from parents and carers, local authority and National Health Trust initiatives to plan a superb programme. All the activities that users are engaged in, independently or with their children, provide high-quality information, advice and guidance that are relevant to their daily lives. Effective teamwork among the staff, family support and outreach workers, and other professionals ensure that assessments carried out under the Common Assessment Framework are thorough. Outcomes from regular meetings with multi-agency teams and staff from the centre raise parenting skills. They promote greater safety and emotional well-being for children and their families.

Outcomes are high as programmes are devised to serve the needs of all groups, including families with children with special educational needs/and or disabilities, across the community.

The current programme of excellent practical, informative and adult academic courses is proving very successful, especially in helping parents and carers to understand how their children learn through play in the centre and at home. Users' suggestions for courses are evaluated carefully to ensure there are no gaps and that they continue to meet a broad range of needs or build on what has been learned before. Baby massage and yoga have been introduced recently following a survey of views. On some occasions, sessions are provided for targeted families to increase their confidence and offer intensive support. Data show that as a result of this work the difference in the achievement of the lowest 20% of children in Reception and their peers is narrowing.

Adult achievements and successes are recognised and celebrated with the presentation of certificates. With her confidence boosted one parent said, 'I can't get enough of the courses. As soon as one has finished I want to go on and do another.' Free crèche places and Nursery Education Grant 2 places within day-care support training, education and volunteer opportunities. As a result, users gain further qualifications to work in childcare to enhance their economic viability. Alongside the extensive range of organised activities, the centre provides a range of drop-in sessions that are arranged by appointment. These include opportunities to receive personal financial advice or to use the sensory room.

The quality of care for young children and their parents or carers is excellent throughout all the activities. Attendance at the midwifery practice is high as it gives parents and carers the chance to seek advice from a range of practitioners, including a health visitor. Families finding themselves in difficulties are confident to ask for help. Those spoken to said they do not know what they would have done to resolve their situation if staff at the centre had not been on hand to help. The employment and training officer provides advice about completing applications forms, attending interviews and writing a curriculum vitae to assist people into work.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Leaders and managers are ambitious and communicate high expectations to all staff and users. Morale is extremely high and belief in the centre's success permeates all levels. Staff are held fully accountable for the quality of the service they provide. Day-to-day management systems and professional supervision are understood fully. Frequent informal reviews by staff and the Parents' Forum, as well as robust self-evaluation procedures, contribute very effectively to decisions to make rapid changes that improve outcomes for families. The governance committee is not, at present, playing a significant role in these decision-making processes. Long-term planning, especially with regard to sustainability and the provision of high-quality resources, is a particular strength. A member of staff said, 'Without forward planning and perseverance, the centre would not have all the excellent facilities that it has.' Staff are keen to meet the challenging targets the centre has set itself. They have been very successful in raising the number of fathers and male carers who attend the centre. Strong partnerships with professionals, based in the centre and in the local authority, mean the centre offers a highly cohesive package of integrated services. All children and their families, regardless of background or need, are included fully. Hard-to-reach families are targeted and receive invitations to attend the centre. Language courses, such as English for speakers of other languages and translations by multi-lingual staff enhance users' abilities to communicate efficiently.

Safeguarding procedures are robust, pervade all aspects of the centre's work and represent high-quality practice. Safer recruitment procedures ensure that all staff have been subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check. Those not recruited by the centre are required to produce evidence of their suitability to work with children. Regular training in child protection procedures raises staff skills in recognising symptoms of ill treatment so that they know what to do when child abuse is suspected. Parents and carers are made fully aware of the centre's responsibilities should there be concerns about a child's safety. An open atmosphere and the easy availability of 'well-being books' allow any user to record their unease about a child's emotional health. These are followed up meticulously. Daily informal observations, together with frequent, very well-coordinated meetings with professionals and community services, enable early intervention to protect children's safety and emotional well-being. Local groups, family support and outreach workers work effectively together to reduce domestic violence. Thorough risk assessments, clear policies and procedures support staff working out in the community, so that they are also kept safe.

The centre offers excellent value for money because its resources are used and managed very efficiently to benefit the community. Staff are deployed very effectively across provisions in roles that best suit their skills. The ability to redirect staff on the site provides continuity of service when there are absences. Multi-purpose rooms allow for flexible use of the buildings that are easily accessible to those with disabilities. Facilities are open for forty-eight weeks of the year and are often open at weekends. The high-quality provision found in the recent nursery

inspection is reflected in the centre. One carer, reflecting the views of many, summed up the centre by saying, 'I love it here. I have learned so much. I wish it had been available when my own children were young. I make the most of it now for the children I care for.'

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	1

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The inspection of St Stephen's Nursery School was used to inform the judgements made during this inspection. The nursery was inspected on 13 and 14 June 2011 and its effectiveness was judged outstanding. The primary school and daycare have not been inspected within the 12 months prior to the inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected St Stephen's centre on 14 and 15 June 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Thank you for your help and contribution to the inspection. You told us that you really enjoy attending the centre, and you say that sometimes you do not want to go home as there is so much to interest you and your children. As you know the centre is located on a primary school site where there is also a nursery school and daycare. All the provisions are overseen by the headteacher of the primary school, assisted by her deputies. The leaders and managers work extremely well with a wide range of professionals to provide your community with an exceptionally wide range of education, health and welfare services. They are innovative and forward thinking, having broken down barriers between health and education services. Consequently, you have a midwifery practice in the centre and it is the first time this service has been provided in a school location. You really appreciate having this service, including the dieticians and health visitor on hand.

The centre provides you with excellent care, guidance and support in making a significant difference your lives. The needs of each individual child and their family are of the highest importance to the staff. Family support and outreach workers and the centre's links with other professionals provide you with the knowledge and skills to overcome the challenges you face. One parent told us, 'You would not recognise me from the person I was a few years ago. I almost live here. I am no longer isolated. The centre has helped me so much, giving me confidence. I have achieved more than I could ever believe and I am now working.' The centre does an excellent job in helping you to improve your parenting skills, in assisting you and your children to live healthy lifestyles, to keep safe in the community, and achieve really well academically or return to employment. It takes exceptional care to make sure that the centre is a safe place for you and your children to spend time.

Leaders and managers enable all members of the community to participate whatever their background. Bi-lingual and multi-lingual staff ensure that everyone can access the services they need. You respond really well to the high expectations staff have of you to acquire qualifications and new skills. You will not be surprised to know that the number of users attending the centre has increased significantly in the past two years. This is due to approachable staff, who provide you with a warm, friendly, welcoming atmosphere, and an excellent environment, where it is fun to play and exciting to learn. It is also due to the excellent range of services and the very effective partnerships established between the community and family support and outreach workers.

Leaders and managers, together with the local authority, lead and manage the centre really well. They are ambitious for you to be able to make the decisions to change your lives based on important information. Staff are well trained and use their skills in different elements on the school site to raise the quality of provision. The partnership with you is considered a priority. Staff listen to your views and adapt

the programme so that it meets your needs, especially if you are working. Arrangements for the governance committee, that includes your representatives and contributes to the leadership of the centre, are very new. This is because there was uncertainty about whether the schools were to federate or amalgamate. The knowledge and understanding of the representatives from across the services of their role on the committee are secure. There has been insufficient time to develop their skills fully in, for example, participating in decision making, and contributing to the priorities for the centre's development and monitoring the outcomes, to make the centre even better.

Resources are used very efficiently to meet your community needs. Activities at the weekend are very popular as families can attend together. There is consistency in the implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage across the nursery and centre that enables your children to develop important skills for the future. The centre uses data, alongside your views, very effectively to plan courses to meet your personal and wider community needs. It has well-established procedures to check the impact of provision on your children's progress in the short, medium and longer term. Staff know that children who have used the centre and who have been involved in projects such as 'Every Child a Talker' and 'Box Clever' have achieved very well in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development national assessments at the age of five.

Staff pursue excellence in all of the centre's activities. They are evaluated thoroughly to check if they can be improved further or amended to meet changing needs. The recent inspection of the nursery judged it to be outstanding and found that it gives children a really good start to their learning. The quality of St Stephen's centre is summed up by a carer who says, 'I love it here. I have learned so much. I wish it had been available when my own children were young. I make the most of it now for the children I care for.'

We have asked leaders, managers and local authority to:

- in conjunction with the local authority, raise the skills of the governance committee so that its members are involved fully in decision-making processes, including setting and monitoring priorities in the centre action plan.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.