

Inspection report for Sherington Children's Centre

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Linked school if applicable	Sherington Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Places for Children

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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361

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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 co-located/partner primary school 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 of the primary school and the deputy headteacher, the early years family support worker, members of the governing body and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were also held with a range of health service workers and members of the advisory group. Inspectors talked to parents, carers and other users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation, including evaluations of services, safeguarding policies and procedures, case studies, other records, development plans and the centre's annual review report.

Information about the centre

Sherington Children's Centre forms part of Sherington Primary School. The building stands alone, within the school site. There are three rooms in addition to a kitchen and toilet facilities. The centre has a small library area and a secure outside play space. The centre opened in November 2007 under phase two of the Sure Start programme. Since the end of Sure Start funding, the local authority finances the provision. The centre is open for 51 weeks a year from 7.00am to 6.15pm each day. It is directly linked with the school's Nursery and the privately run provision for children aged from birth to five years of age; this is known as 'Places for Children'. The Nursery was inspected as part of the school's inspection but Places for Children was not part of this inspection.

The centre's governance is delegated by the local authority to the governing body of Sherington Primary School. There is also an advisory group who meet regularly to provide additional direction to the leadership and management of the centre. This

group includes, parent forum representatives, health professionals, childminder and Places for Children representatives.

The children's centre reach area includes roads surrounding the school within Charlton. The population is ethnically and socially very mixed. The largest group is White British, although many other cultural backgrounds are represented including Asian and Black African. An increasing proportion of parents and carers come from White European heritages including those from Eastern European backgrounds and a high proportion speak English as an additional language.

Families from socially advantaged backgrounds use the centre as well those in more challenging circumstances. The reach area has a high proportion of lone parents. Broadly one quarter of all children under five are from workless households. A high proportion of families are identified as being very hard pressed and/or receive child benefit. The centre works with a local refuge where families go for help having faced domestic violence. A few parents are teenagers. One third of the population in the area are identified as having poor health. Just under a quarter of the local community aged 16 or over has no qualifications. Close to a half of the local population lives in local council or housing association accommodation.

Just over 1000 parents and carers are registered with the centre. The management team works with a small cluster of other children's centres in order to target support. The centre meets all elements of the core offer, which include integrated childcare, health services, family support and outreach and activities to promote children's all-round development. Family support, which also links to housing and debt advice, and job seekers' guidance are integrated into the help offered. A range of antenatal and postnatal, including breastfeeding, support and mental health support is provided. Recently, the midwifery team has located in a building on the school's site. When children join the centre it is not unusual for their levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage to be lower than would normally be expected. A low percentage of children have special educational needs and/or disabilities, although their difficulties can often be complex.

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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Sherington Children's Centre is a good and very popular centre that reaches out well to the community that it serves. The centre provides a welcome and stimulating environment for young children and families to come together to share their experiences, to learn from each other and from professionals. Parents and carers spoke with considerable enthusiasm about the work of the centre. As one explained, 'It's a life saver, it's made me more confident as a mother', while another said, 'Everyone is absolutely lovely.' Children clearly enjoy attending. Their enthusiasm is encapsulated in the words of one father, 'As soon as the pram faces towards the centre, my daughter is full of smiles.'

As a result of good leadership, underpinned by the headteacher and deputy headteacher of the school, the early years family support worker and her staff provide a caring ethos. Provision is carefully planned to meet users' needs. Interesting activities lead to good learning, fun and enjoyment for all. Parents and carers value the all-year-round opening but would like more all-age activities in the school holidays. These were reduced considerably this year because the centre had building works to provide a new roof.

As a result of the centre's varied activities and strong links with a wide range of professionals, the outcomes in terms of promoting healthy lifestyles, learning and being safe are all good as they reach the majority of those in the reach area. Parents and carers confirm that the play sessions really help them to understanding more about how their children learn.

There is a strong sense of inclusion for all social and cultural groups. This was very obvious when inspectors spoke to families. Notably, the centre is reaching out well to its most vulnerable groups and does especially well for lone parents. Users who speak English as an additional language are made to feel very welcome. There is, however, a need to provide more information in different languages. The centre identifies and supports vulnerable groups effectively overall. Leaders continue to be focused on including more families from Black African heritages, especially those from Somalia heritages. The centre meets the needs of fathers especially well through the 'Dad's Group'. Childminders gain many new skills and value the network of support.

The centre is well run by the leadership team. The staff and governors have the very specific needs of the families at the heart of their work. Overall, families are helped to cope with the challenges of parenthood, while also gaining life skills, job opportunities, friendship and emotional well-being.

Improvement planning is effective because leaders know the centre's strengths and weaknesses. The impact of this is evident in the changing provision and strong focus on enhancing children's social, communication and creative skills. Development planning fully involves users by regularly researching their opinions. Health professionals and centre staff have some outstanding case study examples that underpin why the impact of their work is good. However, the use of precise local

authority data is not yet as well enough understood as a tool for highly succinct and rigorous self-evaluation. The governing body is effective in ensuring strong provision and outcomes for families. While daily links with health workers are well developed, their involvement on the governing body is underdeveloped. Taking all of the factors into account, the centre has a good capacity to maintain further improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the impact of self-evaluation on users by:
 - strengthening the use of local authority and health service data
 - ensuring that representatives from the health authority are more involved in the governance of the centre.
- Widen opportunities for activities when the school is closed.
- Maintain the focus on including target groups, especially by translating more of the centre's information into different languages and by working to ensure that families from Black African, including Somalian families, are as fully involved as possible.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre's work ensures that over a third of families are engaged in activities at the centre, including adult learning. All target groups are well involved overall, being especially successful in meeting the needs of lone parents.

The centre is effective in helping families and their children to understand how to develop healthy lifestyles. The strong partnerships with midwives, health visitors and mental health support have resulted in a higher than average uptake of breastfeeding. 'Best Beginnings' targets vulnerable families in particular. As one mother explained, 'It's great having breastfeeding advice on site. Because I got plenty of help, I continued. Some mums who did not breastfeed their first child are having a go with their second child.' During the inspection, inspectors looked at data with leaders, which showed compelling evidence of striking impact on the involvement of mothers in workless families, teenage mothers and those who are on pre-birth protection plans. In the last year, the proportion maintaining breastfeeding has increased by 50%.

The centre's work on promoting oral health is especially strong. This has led to a great reduction in sugary juice being drunk and greater awareness about sugar in the diet. Parents and carers know, for example, that raisins provide a good source of vitamins but they can contribute to tooth decay because they stick to the teeth and are very sugary. Workshops provide opportunities for old toothbrushes to be exchanged for new ones free of charge and clear guidance is provided on when to

start young children brushing. A notable consequence of the work of the centre is evident in the fact that this centre has no recent dental referrals for early tooth decay. Case study evidence is very comprehensive. Children commented, 'I do not want brown teeth, just the white ones.' Children enjoy playing at brushing the pretend teeth of soft toys and dolls, which reinforces their learning and understanding well.

The work of the staff, health visitors and the school's behaviour team contributes much to helping parents and carers to improve children's sleeping and behaviour and this is helping families to feel less stressed and in control.

Leaders place a very high priority on providing workshops about being safe. Evidence, as provided by the health service, shows that head injuries, scalds and burn visits to accident and emergency have fallen considerably in recent months.

Outreach teams work directly with families in their homes. Leaders have involved many different ethnic groups well; including those newly arrived from Eastern Europe, where there are several striking examples of families being helped to find work or suitable housing. Leaders remain focused on helping more families from Black African heritages to be even more involved in the life of the centre. This is going well, with such things as African storytelling sessions and heritage awareness projects. However, leaders are keen to ensure that newly arrived families from Somalia are also equally well included.

The safety and protection of families is at the core of the centre's work. All agencies are effectively involved with families as part of the Common Assessment Framework process. High quality case studies feed well into good child protection plans so that child protection is robust. Children on the Child Protection Register are kept a very close eye on, with comprehensive, ongoing assessments and close links with interconnecting agencies. Swift action is taken when any concern is raised.

The centre is doing well to help families to become interested in learning by taking part in a wide range of activities. The focus on children's social and communication skills leads to children quickly making fast progress in these areas. During the inspection, it was easy to see that children and their parents and carers enjoyed the story and music time session with the local librarian. Despite this being longer than three quarters of an hour, the children were absorbed, cooperated and concentrated on being active and creative participants using puppets, pictures and sound effects to accompany many different rhymes.

By the end of the Nursery, the centre has compelling assessment evidence to show that children are doing well in their all-round development. This strong start clearly plays an important part, for those who have attended the centre, in improving attainment, which is often above average, over recent years by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Notable projects, such as 'Dad's do the Talking', involving 12 fathers in recording well-loved stories for children to listen to, positively impact on both boys' and girls' enthusiasm to enjoy books and settle with a purposeful and

happy bedtime routine. Children thoroughly enjoy investigation activities and physical exercise. Activities such as 'Forest Schools' enable them to explore local parkland. As one father explained, 'We love the rough and tumble or clambering over logs and making mud and sharing fun.'

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

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

How good is the provision?

2

Beyond the day-to-day well-being of families, the centre works well to enrich and extend learning and personal development for adults and children. Language and creative development, for example, are well promoted through such things as 'Bouncing Babies' and 'Stay and Play'. During these sessions, different medical and centre staff, including the speech and language therapist, work together with families to demonstrate how to talk to young children.

During the inspection, children enjoyed the messy play session. Parents and carers commented that this has helped them to understand about how children need to do plenty of touching and feeling activities. They greatly value the chance to do such activities at the centre because they do not have the resources at home for this. The provision of a well-used toy library plays a significant part in ensuring that children have new and different learning experiences. Parents and carers say that they feel more confident in how to use the toys to engage in discussions with their children, which has a positive impact on their relationships and children's language and social development. As one carer explained, 'The toy library is brilliant, the toys are good quality and they help with things like counting.'

The home visit programme and close working relationships with the health team contribute much to the strong partnership with all of the users, including those from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. They have been proactive and successful in including newly arrived parents from Eastern Europe. Leaders are hoping to produce more of the centre's information in different languages, so that when they do home

visits, they have readily accessible information available.

Parents and carers are helped to overcome housing and financial difficulties through a good range of advice, including debt management. Use of the school's computers plays a significant part in helping them to produce curriculum vitae, explore job opportunities and fill in application forms. Centre staff are always on hand to help users to find out more about job opportunities. Parents and carers have occasionally set up their own business, while others have been able to return to work. Parents and carers return in the knowledge that their children are cared for by childminders or grandparents who make regular use of the centre. The support for childminders is very good and helps them to gain the confidence and skills to guide and support others. The centre is working to extend links with colleges to further develop courses leading to qualifications. Regular sessions are provided to help those who speak English as an additional language to gain further basic skills, although due to recent financial cut backs, the courses are run less frequently than in the past.

Parents and carers greatly value the opportunity to have free fruit and milk while at the centre. An exciting project is in a very early stage of development to allow all parents and carers to check how well they are promoting healthy eating when moving their children from liquid to solid foods. This is part of the continued focus on reducing obesity. The centre is closing the gap, so that rates of obesity are becoming closer to average. Rates of immunisation have increased well in the last year and continue to be carefully monitored by the centre.

Good use of interesting resources helps to raise awareness about the ingredients of different foods. The centre plans to provide more cookery workshops in the future. Leaders place a very high priority on being safe in the home and in the environment. Visits by police, the fire service and road safety team play an important part in raising awareness about safety. Links with Greenwich Connections enables parents and carers to have free access to safety equipment. Centre staff, including midwives and other health professionals, keenly help parents and carers with safety reviews in their own homes.

Everyone values the good and sometimes outstanding support from the midwives. Some of the case study evidence confirms that the impact of joined-up services, especially on target groups, ensures that children are safeguarded effectively, while parents and carers are given the help that they need to overcome mental health difficulties. Links with the behaviour support team in the school are very effective and play a considerable part in helping families to cope better and this helps homes to be happier and calmer. There is well-targeted support for families looking for work or facing benefit worries. Teenage parents benefit from effective financial support. As a result, they are able to continue their education while learning how to be confident and skilled parents. Lone parents are very well cared for. As one explained, 'I had marriage problems, they really helped me to cope with being a single mum. They got job seeker advice for a group of us as well.'

The support given for children and parents and carers with special educational needs

and/or disabilities is good. For example, the centre can demonstrate that children who attend 'Art for Little Fingers' develop emotionally and increase their ability to communicate, socialise and concentrate. The centre ensures that adults who have any special educational needs and/or disabilities are welcome and supported.

The centre staff have worked to help families to contribute to the community through such projects as the arts 'Heritage week'. Families welcomed the opportunity to set up a 'scrapbook' making group, which provides a social network and records significant family events.

These are the grades for the quality of the provision:

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Good leadership by the headteacher and deputy headteacher, is enhanced further by the effective support of all other staff. As a result, families are made to feel welcomed and valued; they quickly feel that they have trust in the staff and can talk to them openly about their lives. There is a strong sense of inclusion for all whatever their background or need. The recent arrangement to host the local Autistic Spectrum Disorders group reflects leaders' commitment to constantly working to develop good inclusive practices. Any form of discrimination is tackled head on.

Families are safe and well protected because leaders and staff are caring and have established robust safeguarding procedures. Case study evidence points to numerous examples of how early intervention, home visits and opportunities to attend 'drop in' sessions have proven to ensure good care and safeguarding protection for families. Children in danger are quickly identified and families supported. Those who have experienced domestic violence, mental illness or depression are given the guidance needed to overcome their difficulties, while ensuring that children are happy and safe in the care of family members. The centre works very closely with the local refuge to help parents and carers to rebuild their lives. All agencies are effectively involved with families as part of the Common Assessment Framework process. High quality case studies feed well into good child protection plans so that child protection is robust and underpinned by integrated multi-agency work. Staff vetting and recruitment procedures are rigorous. Staff training is regular and comprehensive.

The governing body identifies how to develop the centre well. Financial and human resources are targeted well to aid the good outcomes for users. The centre has improved well since it opened. Realistic targets are grounded in accurate analysis of

families' needs and overall the centre gives good value for money.

Parents and carers have noticed the increased range of activities. They value the way in which their views are taken into account. The advisory group, for example, is well established and this partnership ensures an active role in implementing linked activities with private, voluntary and independent providers. For example, there is close partnership with 'Places for Children' to ensure on-site breakfast and after-school activities for families using the centre. Users have, however, requested that there are more holiday-time activities that include all ages. Leaders have plans to extend these in the future. They have made considerable improvements to the outside play area and have provided a new small library and are working continually to improve the accommodation. Involvement in projects such as 'Every Child a Talker' is helping to improve outcomes for children.

Leaders and parents are delighted that the midwifery service is now working on site. Good links also exist with other health workers. However, the governing body would like health service providers, through the Primary Care Trust, to be higher profile within the governing body. This is because it has a vision to further strengthen the self-evaluation process by making the best possible use of evidence from all support agencies. There is a close working partnership with the local authority. Because of this, they are working to provide more useful data about local and national outcomes for all groups of users. Much of this data are quite newly available, or so prolific in quantity, that the leaders of Sherington are only just beginning to use this alongside other good evidence to strengthen the overall quality of their self-evaluation. They are keen to develop this in the drive to become outstanding in the future.

The governing body, leaders and staff are reaching out to engage with target groups who are not accessing services in order to identify and meet their needs. There has been an increased involvement of all groups. Leaders correctly remain focused on ensuring that even more families from Black African heritages join more sessions. This is underway, with an increase of one third in the last year.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable	2

adults	
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Sherington Children's Centre on 13 and 14 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. We know that you agree that the setting is, in your words, 'very welcoming'. We were also especially impressed by the warmth of support and welcome provided by the early years family support worker, as well as the other staff in the centre. Everyone works together well to make sure that your individual needs are well met. They quickly respond to your comments and ideas by altering services and they know that you would like more activities in school holiday times; plans are underway for this, now that the building works on the roof have finished.

The partnerships with others are well developed. Like you, we agree that it is great having the midwives on site and we can confirm that all of the health team work hard to do the best for you. As a result, you benefit from good care and guidance often when you are most worried or feeling low.

Notably you spoke about having interesting activities to do with your children and plenty of help with child development, home difficulties, financial worries and breastfeeding. We must congratulate you on how well you have taken on board the information about being healthy and safe following recent workshops.

You agree that the centre is helping you to make friends and feel happier about parenthood. You are helped to understand how your children learn and how to be healthy and safe. It was great seeing the stay and play activities, story session and messy play activities. In particular, we were delighted to see how so many different groups are involved in the centre. For example, grandparents and carers from many different cultural backgrounds make very good use of the centre and treat it as a life line. Equally, several of you explained how as lone parents you feel so well

supported. It was a pleasure to meet with the childminders and 'Dad's Group'. Both of these groups are very active and make very good use of the centre. Notably, many of you greatly value the opportunity to find out how to return to work. Staff work hard to assess your individual needs. If they are unable to help you themselves they put you in touch with other agencies or organisations close by.

Your children do well here, making good progress in their learning and development. Like many of you, they grow in confidence and skills. For example, they learn to socialise, communicate and concentrate well. You benefit from the support of staff at the school who are professional in their understanding about improving behaviour. This helps you to feel more in control and happier with your children.

Leaders are always looking at ways to improve. They are endeavouring to make better use of data as this becomes available from the health service (Primary Care Trust (PCT)) or the local authority. However, there is still more to do on this, especially in evaluating as precisely as possible how well the centre is doing by comparing its work very carefully with national data. The health workers have some superb examples of the work that they do with you. However, they are not involved enough in the governance of the centre to help make their work as outstanding as possible.

The centre helps many of you who are newly arrived in the United Kingdom; this includes working with you to access housing and benefits support as well as support with your English speaking skills. Leaders are constantly looking at ways to involve even more of you, for example the centre is already reaching out successfully to those from Eastern European heritages. It was marvellous to hold conversations with some of you from Chinese heritages, through an interpreter. Leaders, correctly, want to ensure that more information is available in different languages. The centre is working to involve more families from Black African heritages. It was great to hear about the African storytelling sessions and opportunities for 'Arts Week' heritage activities. If you know anyone who would benefit from meeting others with children, especially those from different cultural heritages, then please do what you usually do so well and use 'word of mouth' to invite them along.

Staff really help you to learn how to play with your children and engage in purposeful discussions with them. You commented that the work of the centre reduces depression and isolation because it helps you to make new friends and have fun. The centre provides good opportunities for you to further your own education and staff are constantly seeking way to make links with colleges to extend this. Lone and teenage parents benefit considerably from the support of the centre.

Your contributions to the inspection were greatly appreciated and we would like to thank those of you who took the time to meet with us and share your thoughts about the centre. Thank you for your willingness to talk with us about some of your personal experiences.

Best wishes to you and your families.

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