

INSPECTION REPORT

Rebecca Cheetham Nursery Education Centre

Stratford

Local Authority: Newham

Unique reference number: 102702

Head of Centre: Megan Farrow

Reporting Inspector: Linda McGill HMI

Dates of Inspection: 8-10 July 2002

This pilot inspection was carried out at the request of the Department for Education and Skills as part of its evaluation of the first Early Excellence Centres. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools elects that the inspection is deemed a section 10 short inspection and that the report shall be published.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTRE

Type of Centre:	Early Excellence Centre
Age range of children:	2-4 years
Gender of children:	Mixed
Address:	Marcus Street, London E15 3JT
Telephone:	020 8534 3136
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Appropriate authority:	London Borough of Newham
Chair of governing body:	Rebecca Swan
Dates of inspection:	8-10 July 2002
Date of previous inspection: Section 10:	29 April-1 May 1997

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

The purpose of the inspection is to assure government, parents and the public that the Centre's services and provision meet the government's criteria for Early Excellence Centres. Inspection also identifies strengths and weaknesses so that the Centre can improve the quality of care and education provision, and help children to achieve the best they can.

THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	
Linda McGill HMI	Reporting inspector
Susan Gregory HMI	Team inspector
Gillian Broadbent HMI	Team inspector
Jenny Andreae HMI	Team Inspector
Glenda Spencer	Lay Inspector
Vivienne Rose	Child Care Inspector

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Corporate Services Group
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

A copy of the summary report must be made available free of charge to all parents. A full copy of the report may be obtained from the Centre. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for this.

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE INSPECTION REPORT

The Centre was inspected by a team of six inspectors, led by Linda McGill HMI. This is a summary of the inspection report, which is available from the Centre.

FEATURES OF THE CENTRE

Rebecca Cheetham Nursery Education Centre was formerly a nursery school and became an Early Excellence Centre in December 1999. The Centre serves diverse communities, some of which are in areas of social disadvantage. About one third of the children are eligible for free school meals. The Centre offers a range of services. The services inspected include: integrated nursery education and day care for children aged two to four years; 'drop-in' sessions for parents and toddlers; a lending library; 'learning bags' (a lending service from which parents and others from the wider community borrow toys, equipment and materials of interest to their children); and adult services including English classes and training for childminders. Other services offered by the Centre, but which were not inspected include: courses for adults provided by the educational psychology service; the outreach and family support services provided by a social worker; the toy library and the

mathematics library. The Centre also provides advice and information to visitors and other early years workers through occasional meetings and talks.

The nursery and day-care provision has up to sixty-five full-time equivalent places for children aged from two to four years. There are 74 children on roll, 8 of whom are on the Centre's register of special educational needs. Families who use the Centre represent diverse cultural backgrounds and 32 children are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language (EAL). The Centre is open from 8.30 a.m. until 5.30 p.m. There are up to 20 extended-day places for which parents pay a fee, and further places are available for children referred by Social Services.

HOW GOOD THE CENTRE IS

The Centre's provision is sound and, on the evidence available, provides satisfactory value for money. It is highly valued by the local community, and the Centre is well on its way to developing services which successfully meet the needs of both children and adults. The quality of relationships between staff, children, and their parents and carers is a particular strength, and the evident respect that is given and received underpins all of the Centre's work. Parents and carers are very effectively involved in their children's learning through such services as the drop-in sessions and the high-quality 'learning bags'. The nursery education for three and four-year-old children is effective, and overall their progress is good. Children achieve good standards in: their personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; and physical development. In other areas of learning, they achieve sound standards, but there is scope for improvement in helping children to achieve more in their mathematical development. Children learning English as an additional language and those who have special educational needs are given effective support and make good progress. Teaching is good overall, but the ways in which staff assess children's learning and plan what they will do next require further development. The Centre is soundly led and managed by the head of Centre, but the monitoring and evaluation of planning, teaching and learning are unsatisfactory and require improvement.

WHAT THE CENTRE DOES WELL

- All children are well taught and helped to make good progress in their: personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy skills; and their physical development.
- The very good relationships developed by staff enable parents and carers to be successfully involved in their children's learning.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Improvements should include:

- the teaching and planning of mathematical development;
- the assessment of children's progress;
- curriculum planning;
- the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governing body's action plan.

HOW THE CENTRE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The Centre has not previously been inspected. However, the Rebecca Cheetham Nursery School was inspected in April 1997, and the strengths identified have been maintained. The two key issues have been addressed successfully so that provision for the children's spiritual development is satisfactory and the recording of the children's progress is more consistent. Further improvement is needed, though, to ways in which staff assess children's learning.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY THE CHILDREN

When children enter the Foundation Stage at the age of three, the majority have reached the expected levels in the six areas of learning, although there is a wide span of ability. By the time they move to primary school, most do at least as well as children generally of the same age.

Children's progress towards the early learning goals

Area of learning	Comment
Personal, social, and emotional development	Children make good progress and are likely to exceed the early learning goals by the end of the reception year. The children concentrate well, persevere, and grow in confidence to stand up for themselves and their rights.
Communication, language and literacy	The children make good progress overall and are likely to exceed the early learning goals. The children listen well to stories and are confident speakers. They enjoy books. Older children are beginning to write their names and simple words.
Mathematical development	Children make satisfactory progress and are likely to achieve the early learning goals. The children can count accurately to five and know the names of simple shapes. They use mathematical language to compare size and height. Their ability to use numbers to calculate is not as good.

Knowledge and understanding of the World	Overall, the children make satisfactory progress and are likely to achieve the early learning goals. In some aspects they achieve well. For example, their curiosity about living things is well developed, and many are confident on the computer. Their awareness of time and place is not as well developed.
Physical development	The children make good progress and are likely to exceed the early learning goals. Most are physically competent, confident and agile, and can also handle small objects and delicate things carefully and precisely.
Creative development	Overall, the children make satisfactory progress and are likely to achieve the early learning goals. In music and singing, they achieve more highly.

The attitudes of children and adults towards the Centre

Children and adults have positive attitudes to what the Centre has to offer. The adults particularly value the high quality of relationships within the Centre and the range of services that are available to them. The children enjoy coming to the Centre and part happily from their parents. Many of them join the nursery classes having attended the drop-in sessions. Parents greatly appreciate the 'drop-in' service, which has supported them in difficult times and benefited their children.

THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Teaching and learning

Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Nearly two thirds of the teaching seen was good with a small proportion being very good, and the remainder satisfactory. The teaching is not yet monitored rigorously enough to increase the proportion of good and very good teaching.

The high quality of relationships developed by staff, and the very effective way in which they manage children's behaviour, ensures that the children make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. The teaching is also consistently good in the areas of communication, language and literacy and physical development. In these areas, the staff intervene in the children's activities at the right time to present them with further challenges. This good degree of challenge helps children to develop their skills further and make good progress.

The teaching in mathematics is sound, but children do not achieve as highly as they might. There are too few opportunities for children to take part in planned mathematical activities alongside an adult because some staff lack confidence in planning and teaching in this area. As a result, the children could do better, particularly in using numbers to calculate. Teaching to develop children's knowledge and understanding of the world and creativity is

satisfactory overall. Some aspects of teaching in these areas is good, for instance when children are helped to investigate the natural world, and when they are shown how to use their imagination to sing and dance and use musical instruments. In these aspects, staff know what they want the children to learn next and intervene at the right time to help them to think things through for themselves. However, where intervention is less frequent, or where there is a lack of clarity about the purpose of an activity, the teaching consolidates, but does not sufficiently extend, the children's learning.

Other aspects of the nursery education

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Overall, the curriculum is sound. The Centre provides a wide range of learning opportunities both indoors and outside for children in the Foundation Stage. The provision for the two-year-old children is well tailored to their needs. Many well-planned visits and visitors to the Centre enhance the curriculum. The Centre's staff have recently introduced new ways of planning what children should learn. Although satisfactory, these plans do not always show the next small steps for children's learning clearly enough.
Provision for children with special educational needs	The Centre makes good provision for children with special educational needs (SEN). The children's needs are assessed, discussed with parents and steps to help their learning are identified. These, together with good support and teaching from learning support assistants, enable children to make good progress. The Centre makes videos to show the achievements of children with SEN, and the 'passports' developed for individual children are innovative and informative. The Centre works well with a range of outside agencies and is effective in including all children in the daily routines of the nursery class.
Provision for children learning English as an additional language	The Centre's provision is good. From the start, children's levels of fluency are assessed and the next steps of development identified. The Centre's systematic approach to teaching language skills has a positive effect on the confidence of children who are bilingual, in speaking and listening. In addition, carefully planned and targeted story sessions, using a range of visual aids, help them to practise and rehearse English words in a supportive situation.
How well the Centre cares for its children	Children receive good care. The Centre's procedures for Child Protection and checking attendance are good. Key workers know the children well. They ensure that there is a consistent point of contact for parents and that each child's needs are understood and catered for. The children are acknowledged as individuals and given much scope to follow and develop their own interests. However, the assessment of children's learning and progress is not yet systematic enough.

Provision for children's personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The Centre makes good provision for the children's moral and social development. The children know right from wrong and can refer to the Centre's 'five golden rules' for behaviour. Provision for their cultural development is also good. The Centre celebrates a range of festivals and has a good collection of artefacts and resources. Provision for children's spiritual development is sound but opportunities to develop their spirituality are not often planned and tend to arise spontaneously. The children show empathy with others and demonstrate delight for living things.
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PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE NURSERY EDUCATION

What pleases parents and carers most:

- the ways in which staff help children to grow in confidence and self-esteem;
- the quality of relationships throughout the Centre;
- the ways in which they can contribute to their child's learning;
- the very good progress their children make;
- the high expectations of children's behaviour;
- the way the centre is led and managed.

No significant concerns were raised at the parents' meeting or expressed in the responses to the questionnaire. Parents and carers rightly identify important features of the Centre, but some aspects of teaching and the children's learning could be even better.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE CENTRE'S PROVISION

Day care including: <i>Breakfast club</i> <i>Extended-day</i> <i>After-school provision</i>	<p>Good provision is made for the two-year-olds in the nursery classes. When they are taught as a separate group, teaching is effective and their particular needs are attended to. At other times, the children mix freely with the three- and four-year-olds and are appropriately included in the nursery's activities. They relate well to staff and older children, and are confident in their use of the space and equipment.</p> <p>The breakfast club provides a relaxed and sociable start to the day. The extended-day and after-school provision provides a good complement to the busy nursery education sessions.</p>
Parent and toddler drop-in sessions	<p>The drop-in sessions provide a good range of activities for children aged under three. Staff give good guidance to parents and show them how to help their children. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere and the children are content and settled. The concentration, persistence and well-developed social skills of some of the very young children are impressive.</p>

Learning bags <i>-containing toys, books and equipment</i>	This is a valuable service. The learning bags are available for borrowing by any Centre user and members of the wider community. The materials provide new and interesting activities for children. Well-attended play sessions, led by the co-ordinator, effectively show parents how to use the activities, engage the children's interest, and foster their learning.
Lending library	The Centre's lending library is well used and effectively complements the nursery classes' work in communication, language and literacy. Parents receive good guidance about suitable books which promotes their children's early reading skills.
Classes for adults learning English as an additional language	Adults in the early stages of learning English are given sound support. They make steady progress in developing their confidence and skills in using the language. Lessons are geared to the needs of the class and take place in a non-threatening environment. In the past, adults attending the class have gained qualifications in English and have gone on to further education.
Training for childminders within a childminding network	Very good provision and training is offered to child-minders and the children they mind. These sessions are very well planned, organised, taught and evaluated by a consultant trainer. The trainer is also working with the two network co-ordinators to achieve accreditation of the network by the National Childminding Association (NCMA). However, there is still some way to go to achieve this aim. The co-ordinators provide sound leadership and manage the childminding network satisfactorily.
Contribution to the development of good early years practice beyond the Centre	The Centre is beginning to take steps to share good early years practice, for example through the weekly meetings of the childminding network, where participants receive high quality training. Expertise is also shared at meetings for practitioners from within the local area and at lectures and talks given by senior staff. Although the Centre receives many visitors, some of whom are from local schools and nurseries, there is scope for further development in this aspect of its work.

THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

How well the Centre is led and managed

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head of Centre and	Leadership at all levels is sound. The Head of Centre has a clear vision for the direction of the Centre's work and this is well communicated to the staff, parents and governors. Performance management has been satisfactorily established for teachers and nursery officers, and has clear links to the Centre's priorities for

other key staff.	improvement. There is insufficient clarity about the roles of senior staff in monitoring the quality of teaching, and how well the children are doing in all areas of learning. Consequently, monitoring and evaluation systems are not yet rigorous enough for staff to identify areas like mathematical development, where children's progress could be better, and aspects of teaching that should be further improved. The Centre is developing a sound approach to the principles of best value.
How well the governing body fulfils its role in the Centre's evaluation of its performance	The governors' work is sound overall. Governors are supportive and committed to the Centre's success. Governors have a good programme of visits, and a carefully planned system of reporting back. This ensures that they understand the Centre's strengths well. However, governors are less secure in their knowledge of the areas in which there should be further improvement.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE CENTRE DOES WELL

All children are well taught and helped to make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development

By the time children leave the Centre, they have achieved above-average standards in their personal, social and emotional development. Good teaching, in particular the high quality of relationships and respect shown by all adults for the children and their carers, together with the very good management of behaviour, leads to good progress for all children in this area of learning.

The very positive relationships formed by key workers with their children provide security and comfort, and the children part happily and confidently from their parents. There are well-established daily routines, for example for tidying up, which the children clearly understand and take part in willingly. Meal times are used effectively to develop the children's independence and consideration for others. The children are taught good table manners. They pass food politely, take turns, and enjoy each other's company.

The staff provide good role models, showing concern for others and demonstrating mutual respect. Through consistent encouragement the children begin independently and spontaneously to show consideration and to help each other, such as when an older child helped a younger friend to fasten her shoes. They take the initiative, for example, sweeping up spilled sand to prevent others from slipping on it. They also show respect for living things and take particular care of their pets.

The children's behaviour is managed very well. All staff, including students and supply staff, follow the Centre's behaviour management policy consistently and apply sanctions and rewards consistently. They intervene quickly and calmly where necessary. This ensures that the children know what is expected of them, and that they learn how to share, resolve conflict and negotiate with one another. The children are taught to be aware of the feelings of others. When a group of children building with large blocks were unkind to a child who wanted to join them, a member of staff intervened and calmly discussed their actions with them. The children were successfully helped to resolve their problems. They apologised, went away and played happily together. The children are encouraged to stand up for themselves in an assertive, positive manner. They make it clear when they are uncomfortable with a particular situation, saying, "I don't like it", for example, when another child upsets them. Parents report that their children use these techniques at home.

The staff successfully teach the children how to take care of themselves. Children learn to put on raincoats to play in the rain, to wear aprons when painting and to return things to the right place when they are finished. They take care of their own hygiene needs, for example by washing their hands before eating. Adults also help the children to make choices and give them scope to follow through their chosen activities in some depth. Many of the children concentrate well and persevere at their tasks until completed to their satisfaction.

All children are well taught and helped to make good progress in developing their communication, language and literacy skills

The children make good progress in developing their skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing because of the good teaching and the emphasis the Centre gives to the development of oracy and literacy skills.

From the start, high priority is placed on assessing the children's language development with reference to the 'stepping stones'. Children learning English as an additional language are assessed to ascertain their levels of fluency in English. This gives the staff a secure picture of what the children need to learn next. Speaking and listening skills are particularly well taught and fostered at story times. The children are grouped according to their levels of understanding and their ability to concentrate and respond to books. Stories are well chosen, and engage the children's attention. Staff discuss the story with the children, and encourage them to listen to each other's contributions. Older children speak clearly and confidently, and listen attentively.

The staff are good at selecting resources which stimulate and develop children's language. In particular, this enables children learning English as an additional language to make good progress. The effective use of puppets and other visual aids at story time, and the careful choice of books with strong visual and written messages, ensures the children understand and grow in confidence as they extend their vocabulary. Routines using songs to start and

end sessions help the children to join in as part of a group. Sensitive interventions successfully enable children to negotiate with their peers.

The staff use story sessions to engender in the children a love of books and stories. Reading areas in the nursery and the 'Book House' (a wooden hut outside), are attractively laid out with well-presented books. Many children look at books throughout the course of the day. Children know some tales well, and join in enthusiastically with the refrain, retelling the narrative in the correct sequence and using the language of the story. They know that books have authors and illustrators, and can name other books written by the same author. Older children understand that the print carries the meaning, and are beginning to recognise familiar words. Younger children are encouraged to use the pictures to predict what might happen next. The children are taught to recognise the sounds of letters that start and end words, and older ones can supply words that rhyme, having fun in making up nonsense rhymes, too. Staff read books on a one-to-one basis with the older children, and foster the idea of reading as a pleasurable activity. The children are also encouraged to read at home, and share the books they borrow from the library with their parents. The librarian encourages the parents to make written comments on how their child responded to the text. This effectively complements the activities that staff carry out in the nursery sessions.

Early writing skills are taught well. The staff ensure that writing materials are freely available and well organised, and children are encouraged to write for different purposes. Children are systematically taught to recognise and write their names and to identify the initial letter. Some of the older children are beginning to use their phonic knowledge to spell simple words. Many were very proud of their attempts to write a caption underneath their photograph in an alphabet book. They took care to write the letters correctly. Younger children made marks, which they 'read' as their name. The good teaching combines an appropriate level of support with the effective use of praise and encouragement, and this enables the children to achieve well.

All children are well taught and helped to make good progress in their physical development

The provision of a well-planned, stimulating outdoor area and good teaching ensure that the children make good progress in this area of learning. Many demonstrate skills that are above what is expected for their age by the time they leave the Centre. The children are well co-ordinated, confident and agile.

The children clearly enjoy their activities in the outdoor area. The staff have a good understanding of how children develop physically, and they plan activities that encourage children to experiment and further develop their skills. Children eagerly explore the open spaces and experiment with different ways of using the climbing apparatus and other equipment. They are well supervised by the adults who effectively teach them techniques and skills to improve their performance, for example, in climbing or moving across a ladder or in passing the ball when playing football. Consequently, the children run, twist and turn with agility, for instance, to avoid being caught when playing

'tag'. They use wheeled toys skilfully and avoid one another successfully when moving quickly around the grounds.

There is a good balance between supervision, intervention, challenge and support for children as they use the equipment. For example, one member of staff encouraged a girl to take measured risks and developed her confidence as she swung from and moved across a horizontal ladder. The staff are good at providing additional challenge, giving encouragement and teaching the children to persevere and extend their skills. They know the children well, understand when to intervene and are clear about what the next steps in their learning should be. They give appropriate emphasis to health and safety and teach the children how to carry and use equipment safely.

The children are taught how to handle small tools and equipment well. Most children have a good grip when using pencils to write their names, and can manipulate crocodile clips, tacks and other small items. They are taught to use scissors, hammers, and cutlery safely and correctly, and show good control when pouring drinks or scooping cereal at snack time.

The very good relationships developed by staff, enable parents and carers to be successfully involved in their children's learning

The staff quickly establish very effective relationships with parents and carers, and successfully involve them in their children's learning. This aspect of the Centre's work is a particular strength. Almost without exception, the parents and carers who spoke to the inspection team, or who returned questionnaires, were very happy with the range of opportunities offered to them to become involved in their child's learning and development.

For many parents, their first contact with the Centre is through the 'drop-in' sessions. These sessions are extremely popular and are sometimes over-subscribed. The parents and carers are welcomed warmly and the quality of relationships between users of the drop-in sessions is very good. The workers provide a suitable range of activities for babies and toddlers, and encourage the parents to play with their own and other's children. They provide good role models for parents, and the support and unobtrusive guidance they give is well received. The drop-in sessions give the very young children a good start in developing their social skills and confidence in mixing with others. Several of the parents and carers said that the drop-in service had been of great personal benefit to them.

Once introduced to the Centre, parents and carers and other users quickly take advantage of the 'learning bag' scheme. This scheme has grown in size and popularity since it was first set up, and there are now about 200 bags which are available for loan. The bags contain toys and equipment related to a particular topic. They are of good quality and well maintained. They reflect the community's cultural diversity well, including the heritages of refugee families. The co-ordinator is very responsive to requests from users of the service. For example, in response to requests from girls, she created a bag which showed the learning opportunities of a popular small doll. The co-

ordinator organises helpful 'play sessions' at which she plays with a group of children and their parents. She demonstrates how the contents of a bag might be used and shows the parents how to engage their child's interest and develop their skills.

When children enter the nursery classes for three and four year-olds, the parents are encouraged to stay in the classroom as part of the settling in procedures. They value this opportunity to see how the nursery operates and how their children get on. In order to help with their child's learning at home, the parents are encouraged to borrow books and games from the lending libraries. They are given guidance on how to use the materials they borrow and are encouraged to feed back to staff. This contributes to the good levels of achievement in communication, language and literacy. Each term, parents are invited to a meeting with their child's key worker. At this meeting, a target for the child is discussed and agreed for the term. This, together with information about the curriculum posted on the walls, helps the parents know what their child is working towards.

WHAT THE CENTRE COULD IMPROVE

Improvements should include the teaching and planning of mathematical development

Overall, the children make sound progress in mathematical development, but they could do even better. Teaching is satisfactory but some staff lack confidence and knowledge in this area. This means that they do not always make the most of what they provide for the children. In addition, there are insufficient opportunities for the children to take part in planned mathematical activities with adults.

The balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities is not always appropriate and only one adult-initiated, focused activity is planned for mathematics each week. This means that some of the children who do not attend each day may miss what has been planned. On the occasions when adults engage children in focused activities, such as when board games and the story of the 'Hungry Caterpillar' were used to develop the children's understanding of how to put numbers in order, they are challenged to think things through for themselves.

The staff regularly record the children's responses to mathematical activities, but do not use the information consistently to help them plan the next steps in the children's learning. As a result, the objectives for learning in the weekly plans are sometimes too broad and not broken down into specific, manageable steps.

Staff generally take good opportunities to promote counting and they encourage children to count beyond five where appropriate, for example, to see how many scoops of lentils will fill a container. The children are taught to count as they sing rhymes and listen to stories and consequently most of the children can count reliably to five. However, the children's ability to count is not systematically built upon by introducing simple ideas of addition and

subtraction. As a result, the children's skills in this aspect are under-developed.

The staff provide a good range of resources for the children to use freely, and these help them to understand simple mathematical ideas. They talk about and name two-dimensional shapes such as circle and square, and are beginning to recognise symmetry. The children develop an awareness of height, for example, when using the outdoor climbing equipment, and they learn the days of the week through regular routines. However, apart from the good emphasis on counting, the staff do not make as much use as they could of incidental opportunities to develop the children's mathematical understanding. For example, when the children were building with three-dimensional shapes, opportunities were missed to include specific terms such as cube, cylinder, faces and edges.

Improvements should include the assessment of children's progress

The Centre has a sound assessment system. It has strengths, but also areas for improvement. The use of assessments to plan the next steps of learning for children is a particular area for improvement.

Strengths lie in the way that all staff have been taught to make descriptive observations of the children, which are then filed and used as evidence of achievement. Appropriate reference is made to the 'stepping stones' and the Early Learning Goals. Parents are involved in discussions about their child's learning and achievement and help to decide a target for each term. This successfully involves them in their child's learning. The parents also welcome the opportunities they have to look at their child's file to read observations and see examples of their work. Good attention is paid to assessing and meeting the individual needs of children with special educational needs. As a result, staff are able to make clear plans for what they need to learn next.

The assessment system is not yet fully exploited to show how well all the children are doing. A record system has been devised, which takes account of the learning of children under three, as well as those in the Foundation Stage of learning. The staff carry out baseline assessments after the children have attended the nursery for several weeks in three areas: personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; and physical development. This means that they are not sufficiently aware of what the children already know and understand in the other three areas of learning, especially in mathematics, and are not clear about what they need to learn next. Where initial assessments are made, the staff plan the next steps of learning more accurately and the children make better progress.

The staff regularly observe what children do, and record what they see. However, some are not secure in identifying key milestones and significant steps in children's learning, particularly in mathematical development, in aspects of knowledge and understanding of the world and in creative development. These areas of learning tend to have far fewer observations. In particular, the children's skills in calculating are infrequently recorded. There is

also insufficient emphasis on recording the learning that has taken place. This limits the usefulness of observations in helping to determine what the next steps for a child should be. Senior staff do not monitor the records rigorously enough to identify where there are gaps in learning, or to find out how well individuals, groups, and cohorts of children are doing. The Centre has identified this weakness and is taking action to deal with it.

Improvements should include curriculum planning

Overall, the curriculum is sound but the curriculum plans do not always reflect clearly enough what children should learn from the nursery's activities.

An appropriate curriculum is in place for three- and four-year-olds. There are policies for most of the areas of learning and these are reviewed as part of a rolling programme. The nursery classes are well organised into workshop areas that reflect aspects of the areas of learning and the whole curriculum is successfully represented indoors and out. An appropriate curriculum is also in place for the two-year-old children which meets their needs well. There are many worthwhile opportunities for visits to places of interest nearby and further afield, for example to museums, the zoo, the seaside and the local swimming pool. In addition, visitors such as dancers and theatre groups perform for the children. These activities enrich the curriculum well.

The curriculum plan is soundly based on the six areas of learning. The medium term and weekly plans draw from this and aim to help children achieve their 'targets' through focused activities. While this system is sound in its intention, there are drawbacks. Each child has only one target per term and this is insufficient to ensure full coverage of the curriculum.

There are shortcomings in the weekly plans. Objectives for learning are sometimes transferred straight from the medium-term plan, and as such are too broad to indicate precisely what the children are to learn from a particular activity. Other shortcomings in the weekly plans relate to the balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. There are not enough focused activities in mathematics, aspects of knowledge and understanding of the world, and creative development.

Staff evaluate the implementation of the medium-term and weekly plans but the notes they make are not always useful. Many of the comments relate to what has been done, with little mention of the impact on the children's learning. Comments on the weekly plan often refer to the children's responses to an activity, but do not evaluate whether the children learned what was intended. Senior staff check the plans and make helpful comments, but they do not ensure that intentions have been met and that coverage of the curriculum has been thorough

Improvements should include the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning

The head of the Centre and senior staff undertake some monitoring of teaching and learning. However, the rationale for this work is not clear enough. The monitoring role of some senior staff is not sufficiently explicit in their job descriptions. Where it is clear, for example the deputy head's role in relation to communication, language and literacy, teaching and learning are good.

The systems for monitoring teaching and children's achievement do not yet provide senior staff with the management information they need to identify whether the Centre is effective in meeting the children's needs. Teaching and learning are monitored formally through the Centre's involvement in the Effective Early Learning Project (EEL). This ensures that staff receive feedback about their work and that targets are set for them. However, the approach is not rigorous enough to make sure that senior staff are clear about the strengths and weaknesses in their teaching in all the areas of learning because it does not link the quality of teaching with children's achievement. Similarly, the access to a broad and balanced curriculum by individual children is not checked. The senior staff do not yet check the children's records closely enough to ensure that there is a secure view of what children have learned, and the reasons for good, sound or slow progress.

WHAT THE CENTRE SHOULD DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

In order to further improve the standards and provision at the Rebecca Cheetham Nursery Education Centre,

the head of Centre and staff should:

- improve the staff's knowledge of mathematics and how to plan and teach it;
- improve systems for assessment, and ensure that regular evaluations of progress are used in planning the next steps in the children's learning;
- continue to develop the planning of the curriculum, and improve the staff's skills in evaluating the impact of what is planned and taught.

the head of Centre and senior staff should:

- make the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning more rigorous, and focus on the impact of the planning and teaching, on the children's progress.

The governing body is responsible for drawing up an action plan within 40 working days of receipt of this report showing how the key issues detailed above will be addressed. The action plan must be made available to all parents.

AREAS OF LEARNING

[Personal, social and emotional development](#)

Communication, language and literacy

Mathematical development

Physical development

Knowledge and understanding of the world

Overall, knowledge and understanding of the world is satisfactorily taught and the children make sound progress. Their attainment in some aspects, for example, finding out about and identifying features of living things, is good. The staff make effective use of the Centre's garden and the collection of pets to foster the children's curiosity and knowledge about living things. For example, following discussions with an adult about the giant snails, which live in a tank in the classroom, three younger boys hunted for snails in the garden. They picked them up gently and handled them carefully. They set them down on a transparent tray and looked closely at the shape of the shells, saying, "It's a spiral, it goes round and round". The boys showed that they had listened well to the earlier discussion and remembered some key facts.

The staff provide a wealth of resources to encourage the children to investigate their surroundings. There is a good collection of computers with simple programs and CD-ROMs for the children to explore. The children enjoy using the computers and the older ones have been taught how to complete simple programs. They manipulate the mouse carefully and move items successfully around the screen. The range of resources to develop children's understanding of different cultures and beliefs has been well considered. Teaching to develop children's cultural understanding is good. Staff make effective use of the musical resources and the wide range of books showing different cultures, traditions and languages.

In other aspects of this area of learning, the teaching is sound and consolidates the children's learning but does not always extend it enough. For instance, the children select equipment such as batteries, wires and bulbs, and magnets for themselves. One boy successfully made a propeller turn by completing a circuit correctly. Although other children explored the materials the staff missed opportunities to intervene, and on this occasion their learning was not taken any further. The children enjoy using modelling materials and select what they need from the well-resourced craft area. For example, a group of children used scissors to cut masks and a punch to make holes for the string. They persevere in making their models, and use tools and materials competently. The intermittent intervention by some adults in the children's activity is not sufficiently challenging though, and means that the children do not go on to refine what they have made or think about how they might improve it.

Finding out about past and present events is not emphasised enough by staff. Although the children's 'sense of time' is satisfactorily promoted through the regular routines in the nursery classes, it is not as well developed as it might be. During the inspection, the children talked about places in the world as they

used globes and completed puzzles. However, discussion tended to be about how to make the pieces fit together rather than what the emerging picture showed. The children are taken on outings and excursions regularly, visiting places in the local area and further afield. These help children to notice the difference between where they live and other places. One girl spoke at length about a recent visit to Jamaica with her family, and described the weather in some detail.

Creative development

Overall, teaching in this area of learning is satisfactory and children make sound progress. In music, however, the teaching is good and children achieve well.

An exciting range of instruments in the music room is used well by both children and staff. The children enthusiastically explore different sounds. They listened carefully as an adult encouraged them to compare the sound of the 'rainmaker' to the noise made by raindrops falling outside. The children have a good repertoire of songs and rhymes, which they sing tunefully. They dance well in response to music and sounds, and play the instruments enthusiastically.

There is a good range of media for painting and model making, but the purpose of some of the activities is not always explained. For example, when the children were given ready-mixed paint to spread on a flat surface, it was not clear whether they were being encouraged to explore how the paint mixed and changed colour, or to see what patterns and shapes they could make and print.

The role-play areas, both indoors and out, contain stimulating costumes and props which encourage the children to act out familiar experiences from their lives. The children play collaboratively as they build their own house, choose the roles they are to play, and gather the cups and saucers they need for a 'birthday party'. Outdoors, they enjoy being travel agents in the playhouse, or monsters roaming a castle. However, much of the children's role-play is rooted in everyday events, and does not frequently feature fantasy or imagination.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY OF PARENTS AND CARERS

ANNEX 1

Questionnaire return rate		53%			
Number of questionnaires sent out to nursery parents and carers		74			
Number of questionnaires returned		39			
<i>Percentage of responses in each category</i>					
Nursery parents	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know N/A
My child likes nursery.	89	11	0	0	0
My child is making good progress in the Centre.	81	19	0	0	0
Behaviour in the Centre is good.	72	28	0	0	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	47	24	9	0	20
The teaching is good.	84	8	5	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	70	24	3	0	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the Centre with questions or a problem.	70	22	5	0	3
The Centre expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	57	32	0	0	11
The Centre works closely with parents.	73	19	3	0	5
The Centre is well led and managed.	86	11	0	0	3
The Centre is helping my child become mature and responsible.	76	24	0	0	0
The Centre provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	78	22	0	0	0