

St Stephen's Children's Centre

St Stephen's Church of England Primary School and Children's Centre, Meadow Place, London, SW8 1YX

Inspection dates	20–21 May 2015
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Outstanding	1
The quality of practice and services		Outstanding	1
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is an outstanding centre.

- Partners share information about the needs of families in the area sensitively so that high quality services are exceptionally well targeted. Take-up of services by families most in need of support is outstanding.
- Leaders, managers, the local authority and partner organisations share the highest possible ambition for improvement in the lives of families in the area. The aspirations of partners and parents, and the challenging views they put forward, are absolutely integral to the centre's sustained high performance.
- Exceptionally high quality services provided by the centre and partners are finely tuned to the needs of individuals and the wider community. Parents make positive changes in their attitudes to parenting. Fathers respond brilliantly in groups designed for them and improvement in their parenting skills is excellent.
- Lively 'Stay and Play' activities and crèche sessions are tailored expertly for different age and language groups, such as the established Portuguese-speaking community. These sessions give valuable early years experience for vulnerable children who are not taking up their early education entitlement. Tracking shows the very good progress children make from their low starting points.
- Life-changing courses for parents and close monitoring of children's well-being by the centre in partnership with other agencies provide excellent safeguarding for children at risk of harm or neglect.
- Links to specialist services provide a seamless early help service for children with speech and communication difficulties or those with more complex developmental needs.
- The links between health services for expectant and new parents are excellent. The centre provides outstanding support to parents to take up child health checks and maintain good health.
- The centre, parent volunteers and partners such as Gasworks arts group and provide truly memorable experiences which help to foster a sense of belonging in a highly diverse community.
- Far-reaching plans are firmly in place to expand the centre's excellent services and to improve well-being for more families, increase uptake of free early education entitlement and close achievement gaps for families further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- To sustain improvement in outcomes for children and families in the area, the centre should work with the local authority and partners to maintain all key services and increase the uptake of free early education rapidly while carrying out plans for expansion from September 2015.

Information about this inspection

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

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with strategic leaders and managers, including the headteacher of the school, health professionals, and representatives of the local authority and partner organisations.

The inspectors spoke to parents, staff and children.

The inspectors visited South Lambeth Road Library and St Stephen's Church of England Primary School.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Christine Davies, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ann Janssen

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

St Stephen's Children's Centre was designated in 2008. It delivers child health services, family and adult learning, communication and play sessions and family support from the main site and at outreach venues in the North Lambeth area. An advisory board comprising key partners and parent representatives is in place. 'Parents' Power Café' meetings provide a parents' forum. The centre's strategic manager is managed by the headteacher of St Stephen's Church of England Primary School and is supported by six staff, including a part-time children's centre teacher.

Consultation has closed and plans are in place for local services, including the centre premises, to be expanded as part of the Lambeth Early Action Partnership (LEAP) from September 2015.

Overall, the area is more deprived than Lambeth as a whole although there are some pockets of affluence. One third of children live in low- or high-rise estates, with a high proportion living in temporary accommodation or overcrowded conditions. Worklessness affects 40% percent of families. The largest groups in the community are of Black African and Caribbean (35%) or of Other White, Portuguese-speaking origin (30%). Children's skills and abilities on entry to early education are well below the levels expected for their age.

The centre has identified the following priority groups: children of Other White ethnicity, especially those speaking Portuguese; Black African and Caribbean children; children and their families known to social care; two-year-olds eligible for funded early education, particularly boys; children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); low income adults (unemployed or on benefits).

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Outstanding

- Outreach strategies have secured exceptionally high levels of centre use among a very mobile population. Centre staff take every opportunity to seek out families in clinics, schools and parks, visit new families and encourage contact with the centre. Almost all families are known and registered and a notably high proportion, 94%, of families had contact with the centre in the last year.
- Working closely with the borough and partner organisations, the centre set challenging targets for take-up of services for their priority groups. Targets are at levels that research shows are most likely to make a difference to children's learning and development. With vigorous follow-up by centre staff, almost all priority families are sustaining the challenging target levels of contact.
- Unique monthly sing-along groups for Portuguese-speaking families are very well attended. A very large majority of children attend at least five sessions a year, which makes a significant improvement in children's communication and language skills. The group acts exceptionally well as a gateway to other services. These families are among the centre's busiest users, averaging 20 contacts in a year.
- Children known to social care, early intervention services and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are almost all registered with the centre. All families referred from children's social care sustain high levels of contact. The large majority of children subject to a Common Assessment Framework plan, 68%, attend regularly so that their well-being is monitored closely.
- A very large majority of children receiving support for their development, particularly for speech and language, attend regularly. Partnerships with health visitors are exceptionally productive so that the proportion of families attending for their children's one- and two-year-old development checks is rising rapidly and is now at a very good level. These assessments give highly integrated access to children and parents' health support services locally.
- A very large majority of children of Black African or Caribbean origin, who are among groups doing

less well in school, exceed the target set for their attendance at stay and play services. However, take-up of free early education among all groups in the area is below the Lambeth average. The centre recognises that uptake of free early education by two-year-olds is very low, as currently only 29% of families take up the entitlement for their children. Wide-ranging partnership plans are currently being implemented to address this by improving parental attitudes to early education and increasing the supply of high quality places.

- Families attending the centre have access to an exceptional range of courses, advice and support to progress on to employment. Stockwell Partnership provides tailored services for speakers of Portuguese and other community languages, who have high rates of success going on into employment. Services commissioned from the independent St Michael's Fellowship to raise the aspiration of expectant fathers are exceptionally welcoming, well targeted and well attended.

The quality of practice and services

Outstanding

- Partners share outstanding expertise in training and family support to help the centre serve groups that have previously not taken up the centre's services. Parents say in feedback to the centre that once they are in contact with any agency, 'a whole world of expertise' opens up to them to help them make lasting changes in their lives.
- The centre works resolutely with the borough's early years advisers to tackle the low levels of learning and development achieved by children in the area by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the low take-up of free early education. The centre leads the way in exemplary tracking for the most vulnerable children with very low starting points. Most children tracked by the centre are better prepared for starting school than others in their age group and they close the gap with others rapidly in their first two years in school.
- Support to private and voluntary sector early years settings and to childminders is bringing steady improvement in the quality of local provision. A significant number of additional high quality places for two-year-olds are planned to be in place across the North Locality of Lambeth from September 2015 to meet the current shortfall. The centre and St Stephen's school provide highly effective 'get ready for nursery' sessions for children who have had little pre-school experience.
- Families on low incomes get outstanding information, advice and guidance to access high quality training and courses. Parents attending Adult Education Services and Morley College courses achieve very high rates of progression on to further training, employment or enterprise. All courses are accredited or certificated to give full value to parents' learning.
- Support to parents to become economically stable is extensive. The availability of high quality crèche places enables parents to take up the courses on offer. Volunteering and enterprising attitudes are strongly supported with excellent, well-targeted 'parent champion' courses. Parents participating in the inspirational Gasworks family arts workshops improve their creativity and develop extraordinary organisational skills that help many into employment. This includes parents from all target and priority groups.
- St Michael's Fellowship programmes strengthen parenting for vulnerable young parents and safeguard their children exceptionally well. The work is extraordinarily powerful in changing young men and women's attitudes to gangs and offending; it improves their relationships and helps them to sustain the care of their children safely.
- Parents completing short 'Parent Gym' sessions and longer parenting courses gain measurably in confidence. Practitioners work with parents to secure social care or early intervention help when needed, for example for families suffering or at risk of domestic violence. High quality family support work, including by Portuguese-speaking staff, is highly effective in reducing risks for children known to social care services.
- For almost all families, the centre's advice and guidance contribute to positive improvement and prevent needs growing out of hand. Families who met the inspectors spoke with passion about the benefits of reduced stress and isolation when new to the area and their appreciation of timely advice to help meet challenges in their lives.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Outstanding

- Leaders, managers, parents and partners share the relentless pursuit of excellence to improve the lives of families in the area. Managers, staff and professionals are steeped in a shared understanding of the challenges faced by families, which has built up over years of exceptionally close partnership working. Parents' views on take up of education, the role of parents in different cultures and different attitudes to childrearing are integral to planning. Services are convenient, attractive, sensitive to needs and include all sectors of the community.
- Highly effective strategic leadership has honed the priorities and targets for the area with precision so that the centre pursues improvement for the most vulnerable families. All partners absolutely agree that the priorities are right. Rigorous monitoring by the local authority keeps the centre focused on the gaps still to be closed, notably in improving access for two-year-olds to their free early education entitlement.
- The local authority supplies increasingly helpful data to the centre to identify families in most need so that outreach is accurate and access to the centre is outstanding. The centre continually improves its own data collection and tracking with partners to evaluate the success of its services. As a result, outcomes for the targeted families using the centre regularly are excellent overall.
- Governance arrangements are highly effective because St Stephen's school leaders fully embrace their role in pursuing the goals of the centre and provide constructive challenge. The advisory board is strongly established, with effective protocols in place to share information, and to monitor and review all services. The advisory board's ambitions to close health and achievement gaps are embedded in the LEAP proposals. All partners give the proposed changes secure support.
- Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is a paramount aim of every service offered. All requirements are met to ensure that the main premises and community venues are safe and secure. Suitable, well-trained and thoroughly vetted staff, volunteers and partners work with children. Excellent partnership work with health and training providers plays a key role in working together to reduce risks to children known to social care or with a Common Assessment Framework plan in place.
- The centre manager's supervision of staff ensures that practitioners have the skills for excellent planning and case management and high quality record keeping. Team work across agencies is exemplary and focuses continually on practitioners sharing knowledge to support families and avoid escalation of needs.
- The centre achieves sustained positive impact for high numbers of families from a small central hub through exceptionally focused partnership work. Co-location with the school has established the centre at the heart of the community. The high number of referrals by word of mouth shows the exceptional regard that families have for the centre.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and, as a result, inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Children's centre details

Unique reference number	22886
Local authority	London Borough of Lambeth
Inspection number	455097
Managed by	The governing body of St Stephen's Church of England Primary School and Children's Centre on behalf of the local authority.
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	950
Centre leader	Androulla Charalambous
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	020 7735 1540
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