

Inspection report for Thomas Coram Early Childhood Children's Centre

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

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

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

The inspectors held meetings with the head of the children's centre, the children centre's locality manager, the family support manager, employability and housing staff, health workers, a local authority representative, parents and carers, governors and members of the partnership advisory board and front-line staff. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation and talked with children in the nursery provision.

Information about the centre

Thomas Coram Early Childhood Children's Centre is a local authority centre run by Camden Children's Services and comprises a phase one children's centre, registered childcare provision for 0–3 year olds and a maintained nursery school for children aged three to five. The childcare provision and the maintained nursery school was inspected separately in January 2011. The centre is one of three children's centres situated within the Kings Cross and Holborn locality, covering three wards; King's Cross, Holborn and Covent Garden and Bloomsbury Ward. The centre works closely with IA and Corams Fields children's centres to deliver the core offer across the locality.

Governance and management arrangements reflect the locality model. Overall governance lies with the local authority and one advisory board serves all three centres in the locality. The nursery school's governing body oversees the management of the centre.

The centre is jointly managed by the children's centre head who manages the integrated care and education element on site and related services and a children's centre locality manager responsible for ensuring effective delivery of the locality services, either directly, or through partnership or commissioning arrangements with

other statutory and voluntary sector providers. These include drop-in sessions, workshops, family support, outreach, health and employability provision.

The centre is situated in an area of high social and economic inequality. Although the locality the centre serves is within the top 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country with 45% of children living in households dependent on workless benefits, the centre is adjacent to universities, offices, hotels, museums and theatres and expensive private housing. There is a transient population, owing to the significant numbers of students resident in the immediate vicinity. Well over half of the residents in Kings Cross and Holborn locality are from minority ethnic heritages and in particular, from Bangladeshi and Somali communities. Take-up for pre-school provision is high. Most of the children enter the nursery with skills that are in line with or above the expected levels for their ages.

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

Thomas Coram Early Childhood Centre is welcoming and friendly, with good quality resources and provides a good range of services within its locality to meet the diverse needs of its families. It is well regarded by those who attend and those in the wider community. Supportive and integrated multi-agency relationships between the locality partners, centre managers, and the local authority are sustained in the best interests of the families and children. The centre works with a wide range of partners including primary schools, professional health associations, voluntary groups, faith groups, parent forums and the refugee forum.

Children greatly enjoy the broad range of activities on offer, making outstanding progress in the babies and toddlers and nursery provision. In particular, the nursery excels at involving parents and carers in a range of play and toy activities that stimulate children’s imagination and coordination skills. Young children subsequently develop into more confident learners with a higher concentration span and can work well with others at the start of primary school. Key workers build up an extremely close relationship with children and their families, regularly sharing children's

progress as well as being there to support when needed.

The locality and centre's leaders and managers have strong aspirations for the provision in the centre. The leadership and management of the nursery and the centre's activities support children's seamless transition through the provision from their individual starting points. Locality services ensure that families facing challenging circumstances and those at risk receive further support and develop in confidence. As a result, they successfully make the transition from the first contact to fully accessing universal services and stay in employment, education and training, owing to support with childcare provision and funding, while a good number of families are referred to conveniently placed locality services around the borough.

Excellent safeguarding arrangements ensure the health, safety and well-being of all users. Targeted health activities carried out by the locality's health workers have resulted in improving outcomes. Levels of obesity in young children have reduced, more new mothers have chosen breastfeeding for their babies and the rates of immunisation for young children have increased. Centre reviews and workshops have resulted in better awareness of diet, greater dental hygiene and higher numbers of families registering with GPs. Partnership working between staff and parents and carers attending the centre is a demonstrable strength.

The centre is raising the aspirations and confidence of its adult users by helping them to develop their skills for the future. A great number of parents and carers volunteer in the centre, for instance in the crèche, reading with children, and volunteer peers support mothers for breastfeeding within the locality. One reported, 'It is hard to put into words how much volunteering changed my life – one person can bring so much to another's life.'

The governing body responsible for the nursery and the centre's work is supported very well by the locality officer. Her additional role in the advisory board ensures that there is a 'joined-up' working approach and an oversight of both the nursery and the related services for families. All members are enthusiastic and passionate about the work of the centre. The centre head and deputy heads provide excellent leadership of the centre and management of the nursery, rigorously monitoring and evaluating the provision and outcomes for the children. However, the monitoring and tracking of the services used by families based at the centre and by those accessing locality services are insufficiently rigorous. This valuable data about the centre's adult users are not available to the governing body, advisory board, family support advisers, key partners and other staff, in a way that can systematically inform strategic decisions about establishing new courses, measure the success of existing courses or inform the centre whether it is fully meeting the needs of all its priority adult groups. Nevertheless, the centre's self-evaluation and development plans are detailed and rightly evidence strengths and areas of development within its early childhood provision and related services.

The centre knows its families well and is focused on trying to reach groups that are least inclined to make initial contact. However, this has been more successful with

some groups than with others. For instance, the centre's work with children with disabilities and learning difficulties and families in crisis has been highly successful, whereas the centre has had less success with attracting under-represented minority ethnic groups, such as Bangladeshi families. At this stage, the centre has not developed a strategy and action plan of promotion and outreach that would enable it to fully realise this potential.

This harmonious and well-established children's centre is effectively run by the centre manager through strong integrated partnerships within the locality and is successfully meeting the majority of its users' needs from diverse backgrounds. Its many strengths and the concerted effort to meet the challenging targets set by the locality, with some notable successes, place it in a good position to continuously improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen tracking and monitoring of families' participation in and access to the centre's services and those within the locality in relation to the centre's targets, so that staff can more effectively:
 - plan promotional and outreach strategies to target under-represented groups and those not fully accessing the services
 - evaluate existing courses and plan new courses.
- Ensure that the development of adult learning activities takes into account:
 - the diverse needs, prior learning and educational achievements of individuals
 - evaluations of families accessing services, as well as those not engaged.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes for children are excellent. Through a good range of activities in 'babies and toddlers', young children are making good progress in their social and emotional development and in their language, literacy and communication skills. They are well prepared for transition to the outstanding nursery that is on site, or to other nurseries in the community. The Early Years Foundation Stage profile results show children's high levels of achievement during their time at the centre, and the creative links planned between subjects, along with the stimulating play environment, help to challenge children's learning. They are encouraged to contribute to decision making and one said, 'When I asked them to move the books and the box to make more space, they listened.'

Parents and carers receive helpful guidance and advice on promoting their babies' and young children's development through play activities and toys. The popular *Ocean Maths* course helped parents and carers to understand how to develop their

children's number skills. However, the centre's *Crescent Literacy* course, although offering parents and carers much-valued 'quality time' with their children, is less well structured on literacy and reading strategies.

The centre has made a good contribution to its families' mental and physical health. Healthy eating for families is promoted through the Nutritional Review led by fathers. The Red Book promotional campaign has resulted in greater awareness of dental health and ensuring higher rates of immunisation for young children. In addition, a greater number of families registered with their GP. The centre has had less success with cessation of smoking among its users and targeting health needs specific to particular minority ethnic groups.

Safeguarding arrangements are highly rigorous and premises are safe and secure. All who use the centre say that they feel at ease and parents and carers greatly value the high level of trust and respect that is fostered between staff and families. Vulnerable families have their needs identified quickly; referral systems work very well and integrated partnerships are responsive and put in place the necessary support. A high proportion of families participate in the locality's drop-in sessions. The centre staff work exceptionally well with families in crisis providing excellent long-term support, care and guidance and a much needed point of stability for the child.

Common Assessment Framework plans are completed within expected timescales and there is good evidence of improved outcomes for children subject to child protection plans. Recent child protection cases have indicated that children do confide in their key worker. Children with disabilities and learning difficulties receive a very good assessment of their needs and follow up intervention from specialist staff based at the centre.

Parent and carer volunteers working at the centre report huge gains in their learning and skills. In addition, volunteers participate in community based activities, such as the successful redesign of outdoor space, funded by a corporate business. The centre's parents and carers have high levels of involvement in shaping services through their representation on the governing body and advisory board. Each parent and carer was individually consulted upon their desired options in relation to the reduction in nursery placements. The centre effectively seeks families' views and acts upon them, in most cases, to establish further provision or to improve existing courses. However these systems are not consistently in place for those users not accessing the services.

The locality's employability team, welfare rights adviser and family support advisers as well as the centre's own staff evidence some impressive examples of assisting users in navigating their way through services and progressing to further education, training and employment. This is improving economic stability and independence for families. Moreover, the centre's extended offer over a 48 week year enables a good proportion of parents and carers to work or study, as currently nearly half of the children take up extended day places.

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	1
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	1
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

The centre has a good understanding of its families' needs and demonstrates some notable improvement in outcomes for adults and children, in particular for progression to employment and study. The quality of care for babies and toddlers and outdoor play areas is good. The excellent facilities in the nursery, along with the adjacent facilities in the Parents' Centre are used extensively by childminders, parents and carers participating in workshops and other activities.

The range of health services in the locality has had a good impact on families and their children in terms of healthy living and mental health. The multi-disciplinary locality family support team, works effectively with families through individual assessments and interventions. Most groups are benefiting from the centre and locality services ensuring the core offer is being met.

The complexities of the Common Assessment Framework process has resulted in a 'parent-friendly' form which is used in an exemplary way with parents and carers to enable them to assess their own needs and that of their child. The quality of information and guidance for families on accessing support, benefits and seeking work is good. Although family support advisers are used effectively to target a good range of users, promotional strategies have been less well thought out for some groups such as fathers and Bangladeshi families. However, other groups such as families in crisis and parents and carers experiencing domestic abuse and substance misuse are exceptionally well served through the centre and locality facilities. The bespoke support they receive has helped them to resolve problems, and raise their self-esteem and confidence. There is less evidence of the centre supporting smoking cessation. Consequently, the locality is prioritising work to increase the number of individuals accessing its services.

There are some good opportunities for families to have fun, learn new skills and spend quality time together. The childminders' group has benefited from observations of good practice in the centre, in relation to the learning, care and the safety of babies and children. The centre does not run accredited adult courses; nevertheless, a good range of popular workshops and courses such as baby massage, music therapy, a Young Parents Project and a Bangladeshi drop-in session have had an enormous impact on developing social networks and skills for parents and carers. Centre staff are friendly, work in an integrated way and quickly win the trust and confidence of users. Managers are aware that a more systematic approach to gathering precise information about their users would help tailor courses more in line with users' needs and aspirations.

These are the grades for the quality of 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

The leadership is strongly focused on promoting good quality services that reflect the needs of the users within the locality. Links between strategic planning and service provision have had positive outcomes for the majority of families in education, health and care and excellent outcomes for the children in the nursery and babies and toddlers' group.

The governing body and the recently established advisory board represent a diverse range of families, providers of locality services, representatives from social care, voluntary agencies, higher education, the local community, and the centre locality officer. Both the governing body and the advisory board work effectively with the locality's services in meeting users' needs. Professional supervision and management arrangements are firmly in place and communication channels between all are clear. All partners show a good understanding of their roles in supporting and developing integrated services. Locality management meetings evaluate centre performance. Resources are well used to deliver the core offer and the impact on improved outcomes for users is generally good. The leadership and management have maximised the available resources on site, especially in relation to the costs of maintaining nursery, baby and toddler provision.

The locality partners, including health, employment and housing agencies work together cohesively and respond swiftly and appropriately to families' needs. Despite some highly responsive outreach working, the centre recognises that it has further

potential to increase participation by under-represented groups of users through more systematic monitoring of their participation levels and evaluation of their views to inform future priorities for improvement. The centre recognises that its systems are insufficiently refined to maximise effectiveness of monitoring. Therefore, not all ambitious targets agreed by the local authority and the centre are quantified with sufficient precision at centre level. Nevertheless, centre staff work effectively with locality services and the family support team to encourage more families to use and benefit from the services offered. Organisations such as the KIDs are well established and effectively support children and families with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The safety and security of families and staff is a priority and the centre adopts recommended excellent practice across all areas of its work. Rigorous safeguarding checks on all staff, combined with very good working relationships between the centre and its partner agencies, enable effective communication and information-sharing to reduce the risk of harm to children. Notably, children attending the nursery and babies and toddlers group all have opportunities to flourish individually and achieve well, especially those with disabilities and learning difficulties. Although centre staff and locality partners promote community cohesion and equalities well, the monitoring and engagement of priority groups such as Bangladeshi families and fathers are less precise and a minority from under-represented groups reported that they did not feel fully involved in all the services offered within the locality. The vast majority using the centre speak highly of its services and are appreciative of all that it provides within the community.

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	2
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	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which 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

The joint section 5 inspection of the nursery school and the inspection of the childcare provision carried out in January 2011 judged the school and childcare provision as outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Thomas Coram Early Childhood Centre on 22 and 23 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

The centre staff are extremely caring and well-qualified professionals. They provide you with the high-quality resources and services that are designed specially to meet your and your children's needs. Your safety and that of your children is given the highest priority. Some of you told us how marvellous the staff are and how they have helped you out in times of crisis. You also told us how very much your children enjoy coming to the centre for activities, childcare and the nursery. We were pleased to watch them all having fun in activities in the nursery, baby massage and music therapy sessions. In particular, the health activities, together with the workshops at the centre, have meant that more of you are registering with your GP and dentist and are now more aware of dental hygiene. In addition, those of you with young children are making sure they remain healthy through a good diet, exercise and regular immunisations.

Your centre makes sure that you too have a great time when you join your children for sessions, and the centre staff help you to develop your skills as parents and carers really well. The centre staff and those who provide services help you and your children through pooling their skills and offering a good range of courses conveniently located near to you. You receive good support and advice through the family support advisers.

Your children make excellent progress in the centre nursery and move on to primary school with ease. This is because key workers check how well your children are doing as they grow. We were impressed with how well your children behave at the centre and how well you get along with each other and staff. Some of you have been able to stay in education and work because the centre has helped you develop to greater confidence and supported you with the high quality childcare you need. Staff listen to your feedback and a number of you are heavily involved in the centre's activities as volunteers.

We agree with the centre that even more parents and carers could benefit from the services and the learning courses, but as yet, staff do not always get feedback from those families not using the services. So we have asked them to think more about ways of publicising the centre's services more widely and to make sure that learning for adults, in the centre especially, takes greater account of what they want and need.

The centre's managers, the governing body, members of the advisory board, and the local authority officers are committed to achieving the best standards of education, care and services for you.

We would especially like to thank those of you who gave up your time to talk to us and meet with us as it was so important to hear your views. We are confident that your centre will continue to thrive and hope that you will continue to take full advantage of all that it has to offer and contribute as much as you can. We wish you and your families the very best for the future.

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