

# Inspection report for Thornton Primary School and Children's Centre

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Local authority	Bradford
Inspection number	384178
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Centre leader	Mrs Julie Tolley
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Thornton Primary School 107223
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, centre staff, parents, representatives from the governing body of the school linked to the centre, members of the advisory board, staff from the local authority and from partner organisations.

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

## Information about the centre

Thornton Children's Centre is a phase two centre in Bradford that was established in 2008. The centre shares its site with Thornton Primary School. The centre is managed by the governing body of the school on behalf of the local authority. The reach area is socially diverse. Deprivation levels vary across the two villages and the hamlet served by the centre. Around 14.6% of children live in income-deprived households. This is much lower than the average for Bradford, which is around 35.1%. Levels of worklessness and the proportion of families on benefits are unknown. There are approximately 687 children under five living in the reach area. The majority of families are of White British heritage.

Family support, early years activities, adult learning education, outreach and access to advice and guidance services are offered at the centre or at other locations within the reach area. Children's levels on entry to early years provision are below that expected for their age.

Responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the centre lies with the centre manager who reports both to the governing body of the school and to the centre's advisory board.

## 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

The overall effectiveness of Thornton Children’s Centre is good. It offers good provision for families. ‘Everything about this place, I would recommend to other parents who are in my position as a single parent’ is a comment from one parent who, like many others, is a strong advocate for the centre. Centre staff are highly competent and passionate about improving the lives of families in the community. They know the reach area well and understand the diverse needs of their key target groups, which include lone parents, young parents and the most vulnerable families. The centre actively promotes inclusion and equality and staff work hard to remove barriers that could prevent families from accessing services.

The centre’s analysis and interrogation of data about the reach area and participation data are good and used to identify strengths and areas for improvement. To ensure the centre can accurately measure its performance against targets, staff are challenged and encouraged to be diligent in recording the impact of their work. The self-evaluation process, the annual conversation with local authority managers and the performance management cycle are well-linked. This results in a development plan that is informed by local priorities. The quality of leadership and management is also good which is demonstrated by the good outcomes for users and the successful increase in registration and participation rates. As a result, the centre’s capacity to improve is good.

The governing body for the school has overall management responsibility for the centre and fulfils its duties well. Arrangements to ensure the centre is held accountable for its performance are secure. However, although the representation of a wide range of partners on the advisory board has been secured, their attendance at advisory board meetings is irregular. The centre values the contribution of parents and they are represented on the advisory board and in other less formal ways. They actively contribute to decision-making. A new parents’ group has been formed but is still establishing its role and its relationship with the advisory board.

Outcomes for families are good as a result of the close alignment between community needs and services. The centre uses its partnership arrangements productively to ensure that a wide range of services can be offered to families and the wider community. For example, in response to higher than average teenage pregnancy rates, the centre works in partnership with a local high school to provide support and counselling to teenagers about sexual health. The centre also works well with local schools and early years providers. This partnership work is contributing to the improved profile scores of children across the Early Years Foundation Stage and also their good transition to school.

'It felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulder' is the way one parent described the impact of the centre's support on his life. The quality of care and support for families is indeed excellent. Testimonies and case studies from families demonstrate the effectiveness of the work of centre staff to support families, particularly those who are living with complex problems. The quality of care for families is enhanced by the exemplary way that support for families is planned, tracked and recorded. Safeguarding is a priority at the centre and arrangements to secure the safety of families and also the staff whilst they work out in the community are good.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Explore ways to secure greater representation and involvement of partners on the advisory board.
- Support and develop the capacity of the parents' group to ensure that members can make an effective contribution to governance.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

**2**

Outcomes for families are good. In order to tackle high obesity rates, the centre has organised a range of activities and guidance, which contribute well to parents living healthier lifestyles. The impact of the centre's work is seen in 'recorded impacts' data. These show that parents' understanding of how to improve their health has increased as a result of their participation in activities such as 'Baby Ballet' and 'Cook and Eat' sessions. Breastfeeding is strongly promoted and although breastfeeding clinics are not offered at the centre, families are signposted to appropriate health agencies for breastfeeding guidance. Breastfeeding rates at birth are much higher than for the rest of Bradford.

This comment from a parent 'they organised safety checks which resulted in us using safety gates, fire guards and getting locks for cupboards' is typical of many and reflects the centre's success in promoting safety. As part of the initial assessment of newly-registered families' needs, centre staff routinely assess and record any risks to safety in their homes. Subsequently, they offer advice and resources as appropriate to ensure homes are safe. Although the number of looked-after children and those on child protection plans is low, the

centre works effectively with social care teams to respond to the needs of any families with identified safeguarding concerns. Staff also make good use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to assess families' needs and to produce an action plan to support them.

The most recent data for 2011 show that at 57.6%, the number of children who achieve 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage profile has improved significantly in recent years and is higher than the average for Bradford. Good partnership work with early years professionals ensures that learning activities are well-planned to promote the development of children's learning and skills. The centre has also been successful in helping children to make a good transition to school. Personal development of parents is also good, particularly in relation to gains in confidence. Some have benefited from completing computer, literacy and numeracy courses. 'Before, I couldn't cut and paste on the computer but now I can and I can also help my child with her homework' is the comment from a parent who completed a computer course.

'I made friends with people I wouldn't normally have mixed with' said one parent who greatly values the centre's contribution to the community. Other comments from partners and parents demonstrate the centre's success in establishing its role within the community. Staff promote and model positive behaviour and children behave well in the centre. Through their volunteering roles, parents make a positive contribution to the centre and the community. One parent said about volunteering 'I feel like I'm giving something back.' Parents contribute well to decision-making by suggesting ideas for centre activities or groups. Their views are also heard through their representation on the advisory board. However, the parents' group is only newly-established and has not yet had an input into governance.

Parents' strong testimonies and case studies demonstrate that the centre is effective in promoting the economic independence and social well-being of families. 'The staff opened my eyes to job opportunities in schools' said one parent who, after being advised by Jobcentre Plus staff at the centre, found employment at a local school. Through this partnership work with Jobcentre Plus and other agencies, parents are able to obtain good-quality advice and guidance about employment, benefits, 'better off calculations' and training. As a result, a significant number of parents have progressed to volunteering, further training or have increased their employability skills.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>

<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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.</b>	<b>2</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

<b>2</b>
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The centre uses data, local intelligence and information from partners to assess needs accurately and to provide services that match those needs. The range of activities and their location is diverse and planned to meet the needs of a reach area that includes some communities that are rural and somewhat isolated from the city. Activities are planned to promote participation of different target groups and to reflect their different needs and interests. Outreach work is also used well to identify the most vulnerable families and to help them progress from using targeted to more universal provision. Working in liaison with a local family centre, centre staff regularly review their work to ensure they maximise the opportunities they have to make a positive difference to the lives of families whilst working in an integrated way with other agencies.

Opportunities for parents and children to develop their learning are good. The centre works well with Early Years professionals, local schools and Early Years providers to promote the achievement of outcomes in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage. Sessions for children take account of their interests, but also respond to identified local needs in relation to areas such as communication, language and literacy. The centre encourages parents to develop their knowledge and skills so that they can become active participants in their children's development. Personal development of parents is strongly and successfully promoted. The progression of some parents to volunteering and employment demonstrates the centre's success in raising the aspirations of adults.

'If it wasn't for the centre, I wouldn't have got out of the house' said one parent. Another said 'the support they give me is just what I need.' These comments reflect the views of many parents who have received excellent care and guidance from the centre. Support and care for parents is exceptionally well-organised but also very well-recorded. Action plans are used to provide a structure to the support for families and to ensure that the respective responsibilities of parents and of the centre are clear. The centre works in a highly-effective way with numerous agencies to ensure that families receive the most appropriate support and guidance. 'No amount of money could pay for what the centre has done for me' is a comment from a parent which summarises well the outstanding quality of care it provides.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.</b>	<b>1</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

Leadership and management arrangements are effective and lead to a good pace of improvement. The local authority sets ambitious but realistic improvement targets for the centre. Effective target-setting has led to the centre's success in increasing both registration and participation rates over the last year. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and well-understood. Although a core group of partners regularly attend advisory board meetings, attendance from all board members is infrequent.

Performance management is effective as are arrangements for supervision. Both the advisory board and the governing body, which has overall management responsibility for the centre, use the regular reports from the centre manager to monitor the centre's effectiveness. Self-evaluation is a rigorous process, which is well-informed by meticulous data about the reach area and also by evaluations from families. The self-evaluation report is also well-linked to the centre's development plan.

The centre manager ensures good value for money by regularly monitoring participation data, attendance rates, 'recorded impacts' of services and cost of services. Careful planning ensures that services are not duplicated if they are available elsewhere in the community. Partnership arrangements are good and contribute well to the centre's core purpose. Effective links with partners from the statutory, voluntary and private sectors also enable the centre to widen the scope of activities it offers to families and ensure that specialist support is available for families.

Inclusion for all families is actively promoted and diversity celebrated. Although the reach area is not diverse in relation to ethnicity, resources such as toys and books reflect the wider world in relation to different cultures and languages. The centre uses data and information about disabled children and children with special educational needs to ensure that they have equal opportunities to access services. The centre has been successful in engaging fathers in activities. Data show that the percentage of male parents seen by the centre is higher than the average for Bradford. Although reach area data are not available, data for Bradford show that in relation to achievement of the 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage profile, the gap between the lowest-achieving 20% of children and the rest is narrowing well.

The centre meets its statutory safeguarding duties well. Recruitment checks, Criminal Record Bureau checks and vetting of staff and volunteers are carried out as required. Staff have a good understanding of what action to take when safeguarding issues arise and provide early intervention to prevent problems from escalating. They are well-trained in a wide range of safeguarding issues such as child accident prevention and substance misuse. They also use their links with specialist agencies to ensure that women who are victims of domestic violence receive good support through partnership work. The centre values the views of parents and they actively contribute to the operation of the centre. Parents are regularly consulted and their ideas are sought. As a result, satisfaction rates are high and parents feel confident to make suggestions to centre staff. Nonetheless, the influence of the parents' group within the centre's governance is currently limited. Outreach provision is successful in engaging families who have not previously accessed centre services.

These are the grades for leadership and management:

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secures improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>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.</b>	<b>2</b>

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

The findings from Thornton Primary School inspection were used.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Thornton Primary School and Children's Centre on 9 February 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Many thanks to those of you who took the time to speak to us during the inspection. We really appreciated your honesty in sharing your stories with us and telling us about the work of the centre. Like you, we found the centre to be a very welcoming place. We also found that the outstanding strength of the centre is the way it cares for and supports families. We know some of you have been through some very difficult times, but we were pleased to hear how the centre is able to provide you with the support and help you needed, just when you needed it the most.

Your centre is a real hub in the community and is making a positive difference to the lives of many families. From the evidence we gathered, we can see that children are making good progress at the centre and are well-prepared for school. You also told us how the centre helps you as parents to make good progress. We were impressed to hear how so many of you are involved in volunteering or have been volunteers and then, as a result, found jobs.

We know that the centre serves a wide area but staff do well to bring services out into communities and in some cases directly into homes. This means that so many more families can benefit from the good services that the centre has to offer. Looking at some statistics for the centre, we can see that the number of families who now use the centre has increased significantly over the past year or so. This is as a result of the good-quality management of the centre and also the fact that staff are totally committed to improving the lives of families and improving outcomes for them. From talking to some of you and also reading some of your evaluations, we can see how you are benefiting from the work the centre does to promote good health in the community.

We want the centre to continue to make good progress and we think that if those of you who are involved in the parents' group receive more support, you will be able to make a better contribution to the work of the advisory board. That is why we have asked the centre to look at ways of strengthening the role of the parents' group. We have also asked the centre to explore ways of increasing the attendance of some partners at advisory board meetings as their contribution will enhance the work of the advisory board.

Once again, many thanks for talking to us during the inspection. We wish you and your families all the very best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).