

# Inspection report for Thornhill Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Southampton City Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	365750
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	This is the centre's first inspection
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<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents, grandparents, carers including childminders, professional staff working throughout the reach, centre-based staff, and representatives of the local authority. They observed the centre's work in various locations and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The centre was opened in 2007 and achieved full core status in 2009. Using centre staff and currently 15 partner agencies, it delivers services at the centre and at other venues in the reach area. The centre is led by a manager who also manages another children's centre. She works four days a week. The centre is open six days a week.

Governance of the centre is shared between a parents' forum, an agency forum, the East Locality Advisory Board and a borough-wide advisory group composed of representatives from the city's children's centres. These report to the city's Sure Start Strategic Group. All these review the centre's provision, targets, performance and future development. Ultimate decision making rests with the centre leader working in close association with local authority representatives.

The reach area served by the centre has high levels of deprivation and other challenges. Unemployment is considerably higher than the city average and the number of pupils eligible for free school meals is the highest in the city. The percentage of families on benefits is also much higher than the city average. There is a range of housing, mostly social. Nine per cent of the population is under five years of age. The ethnicity of the area is predominantly White British with a small Gypsy, Romany and Traveller community. There are also small numbers of Afghans and Somalis. There is a high proportion of young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Children's attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is below national expectations.

## 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 users and the wider community**

**1**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**1**

## Main findings

Thornhill Children's Centre provides outstanding support for the community it serves. The services it provides, the outcomes for users and the quality of its leadership and management are all outstanding.

There are a number of key reasons for the outstanding judgements. The first is that the centre's collective governance, including the managers and local authority managers, has a very good understanding of the reach area and the wider Southampton community in which it is located. Representatives are very well aware of the extent of available financial, staffing and other resources. They self-evaluate outstandingly well. In consequence, what is provided is closely matched to need and the outcomes for users are impressive. All the adult users spoken to and children observed indicated the success of the centre in helping them considerably. Many examples can be cited of this help but none more so in the outreach arrangements involving different locations where services are provided as well as home visits and other contacts. So, for instance, pre- and postnatal services commissioned by the centre are outstanding; so, too, are services to young teenagers and to the small but growing members of minority ethnic groups. The support for the Gypsy, Romany and Traveller community is innovative and very sensitive to need, and highly indicative of the centre's approach to encouraging respect for equality and diversity. The centre has had good success at attracting fathers and male carers; for example, considerably more are now involved with midwifery and related services alongside their partners. The centre has relevant plans to involve them even more by the provision of new services targeted specifically at fathers and their needs, including the future appointment of a male support worker to whom fathers can refer.

The support provided by the many professionals working in the community is outstanding. Use of procedures such as the pre-Common Assessment Framework meeting ensures joined-up thinking and strategies, and that issues affecting vulnerable families are identified and dealt with before they escalate. Frequent meetings of health and education professionals also ensure highly effective collaborative work leading to referrals to the facilities at the centre as a means of

addressing often difficult parenting and family issues. Safeguarding arrangements are very secure; parents, carers and children in the centre are safe and feel safe. The highly successful outreach work is very well focused on ensuring that children and families understand dangers and how to keep themselves safe. Children with child protection plans are very well looked after with notable success.

Very impressive is the way in which people are helped to an understanding of their problems and themselves, and the opportunity to realise that they can have a better future. A key role of the centre is helping people become better informed of the opportunities that are available. A very good example of this is the way in which mothers, sometimes single with several children, are encouraged to build on their experiences and take courses in parenting and early years education, ultimately leading to roles as volunteers and paid employees.

All the highly positive features, including outstanding governance, leadership and management, self-evaluation, and wise use of resources, support the view that the centre has an outstanding capacity to improve. This judgement is even more secure when the outstanding quality of outcomes for users is also acknowledged.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement:

- Encourage even more fathers and male carers to attend the centre by providing a range of activities clearly focused on their needs and interests. If resources permit, appoint a male support worker to provide a helpful reference person who has the confidence of fathers.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>1</b>
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The extent to which children and their families are developing healthy lifestyles is outstanding. Supporting vulnerable children and families' physical, mental and emotional health is at the heart of what the centre does. One user with complex difficulties, commenting on the support given by community development workers, said, 'I could not have coped without the help I have been given. Staff helped me understand my problems and what to do.' Mothers interviewed in 'Bosom Pals' commented on how useful support has been both before and after birth. Advice given on healthy foods ensured successful weaning. Case studies indicate how the mental and emotional health of vulnerable families is improved. For instance, 'Sure Care' respite provides time for parents to attend parenting and other courses which help them develop more positive attitudes. Pregnant teenagers' confidence and understanding are well supported by the Family Nurse and the associated drop-in.

Children are very safe and extremely well protected. There is outstanding cooperation between all professionals throughout the reach so that problems are

quickly identified and lines of action thoroughly discussed. This is very well illustrated by professionals' use of the 'Team around the Child' (pre-Common Assessment Framework) meetings, the Common Assessment Framework itself, and the monitoring of child protection plans. The support offered varies according to need; for example, helping women to protect themselves against violence or identifying safe places at home where children can be left while parents cook. Parents are very positive about parenting courses such as 'Incredible Years' and the 'Talk and Taste' drop-in, and the improved understanding they provide; for example, how to be good role models and how to control feelings of frustration and anger.

Users enjoy learning and, as a result, achieve outstandingly well in developing understanding and skills that will serve them in the future. This was very clear when inspectors visited activities such as 'Stay 'N' Play' when there was much enthusiasm from children and parents for the range of interesting activities on offer. One mother commented that 'We really like coming here; my son plays happily with the other children and this helps with his speech difficulties.' At a local commissioned nursery, fun and achieving were very much interlinked. A wide range of activities were on offer – some in the rain outside. As a result, children were developing well their communication and social skills. Their behaviour was outstanding. Outcomes for children with special needs and/or disabilities are outstanding. Evidence for this included substantial support for autism, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and mobility, sight, and language problems.

Adults, too, enjoy learning, not only in activities such as parenting sessions but also in more formal learning such as the links with Itchen College. They also achieve outstandingly well. There is a very positive response to the centre's 'Wishes' scheme which helps parents set future objectives which often include training. A number of parents who had had complex problems were very pleased with the support they had been given to re-start their education and go on to qualifications such as NVQ levels 2 and 3 in early years and in childminding. This, in turn, led to regular employment. Others opt to be trained as volunteers, for example, as breast-feeding peers. Fathers and male carers have been helped to find suitable employment, sometimes part time. Outcomes for parents with needs and disabilities are also very successful; for example, helping deaf parents access centre activities to support their own and their children's needs.

Adult users are regularly asked their views on the centre's provision and 16 parents are highly active, questioning members of the parents' forum and attend bi-monthly meetings. Some parents are also members of the East Locality Advisory Board which also evaluates the centre and provides useful information and advice.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
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<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>1</b>

## How good is the provision?

**1**

The centre assesses local needs outstandingly well. The local authority provides extensive, accurate data on the reach area. This data is backed up by well-informed intelligence obtained from professionals working in the community. As a result, the centre is successful in reaching a high proportion of vulnerable families, a proportion which has increased annually since the centre was opened.

At another level, the centre also assesses the progress of children very well. Although the degree of assessment varies between the centre's locations in the reach area, nevertheless, what is done is thorough and is well used to inform children's learning and enjoyment. The introduction of 'Every Child a Talker' and 'Learning Stories', which are linked appropriately to the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning, is working very well, including ensuring effective transition.

The range of courses provided by the centre is very broad and very responsive to need. The current brochure for parents lists 18 activities taking place this quarter at six locations and, over the year, the range increases as many activities run for a quarter and are then replaced by others. All activities are successfully aimed at improving the quality of parenting and the well-being of children. Parents speak enthusiastically about the convenience of locations. One commented that 'It would be difficult to come so often if I had to travel because travel isn't so easy for me.'

Outreach services are very well developed. The quality of midwifery, breast-feeding support, health visiting and family nurse support is outstanding. Particularly outstanding is the way that these services, commissioned by the centre, work closely together to address people's problems. Services linked closely to pre-school education are also of high quality. Considerable effort has been put into attracting groups that are harder to reach with outstanding success. For example, the centre's outreach work with the Gypsy, Romany and Traveller community is very much appreciated by members, leading to their regular use of maternity and other services at a drop-in set up especially for them. Children are now more regular attendees at school and some adults have accessed full-time education. The centre is also developing good links with the small Somali and Afghan communities. The centre has appropriate plans and flexible procedures for responding to the slow but nevertheless

increasing minority ethnic population in the reach area.

The centre has had good success at involving fathers. They are increasingly involved in parenting; for example by accompanying partners to midwives' checks. Some attend courses and many learn from home visits by professionals. Mothers spoken to by inspectors were very positive about the way the centre's staff have encouraged fathers to become involved. Appropriately, the centre is now exploring how to encourage fathers even more through father-specific provision.

Professionals provide all activities with outstanding care and guidance. This is well illustrated by case studies where families have been helped at every level with relationship difficulties, lack of confidence, loneliness, housing, benefits, training and employment. Signposting to different services is very efficient, for example to Jobcentre Plus and the 'Twics' training scheme. Users report that staff 'go out on a limb' to support the whole family. A significant, thoughtful feature which greatly helps parents attend courses is the provision of crèche facilities.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>

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

**1**

Despite the apparent complexity of involving a large number of groups in governance, it works outstandingly well. The involvement of the groups ensures thorough evaluation of what is currently offered by Thornhill in relation to the needs of the reach. The involvement also ensures that evaluation takes place within the context of the needs of the wider Southampton community. As a result, the city's children's centre resources as a whole are very carefully managed, as are Thornhill's. This ensures the excellent outcomes in relation to resource and so, in consequence, Thornhill offers outstanding value for money.

Professional supervision of centre staff and commissioned agencies is outstanding. Partnerships work very well and there is highly integrated provision of services. Day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood by everyone. The centre's administrative staff provide a very helpful and welcoming service.

The excellent outcomes of the centre's work to support equality and diversity can be seen in all activities run by the centre which offer support in order to 'lessen the gap'

by supporting the vulnerable. There are many indicators of success. One is the reduction in second teenage pregnancies which, in the reach area, is now well below national average. Another is the local success in immunisation, which is above the national average. The work with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community is highly successful and the positive support for the local Afghan and Somali community has been enhanced by the use of interpreters provided by the family support team from the city's central area. Work with fathers and male carers has been rewarding with positive plans for further development. The centre's work in relation to cultural diversity is highly successful in that parents and children from very different backgrounds get on very well together; 'respect' and patience are very strong features of relationships. The centre's plans to become even more proactive in addressing cultural diversity are highly appropriate.

Safeguarding arrangements for adults and children are outstanding; children and adults using the centre are extremely safe and well looked after. Relevant policies are in place outlining very clear procedures which are understood and applied in practice by staff. Examples are the policies on risk assessments, supervision, child protection and first aid. Staff have been appropriately trained and the designated person is clear on her role. All required checks have been completed and written assurances have been properly obtained from commissioned agencies and others using the centre that they have undertaken the necessary checks. The centre, in collaboration with the local authority, has taken the lead in developing best practice in record keeping and is successfully sharing this with other centres. In the wider community, there is outstanding cooperation and clear focus by all outreach professionals to ensure that children and their families are safe and understand how to be safe. There are many examples of vulnerable parents becoming more confident in ensuring the safety of their families.

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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</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>1</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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>1</b>

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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Thornhill Children's Centre on 30–31 March 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We spoke with many of you and we would like to thank you for taking the time and trouble to do this. You will see from the report that we make frequent references to what you told us.

You made it very clear how much you appreciate the centre and the support given to you by the staff working there, at other places and in your homes. We carefully looked at the things that the centre does for you and we agree with you that it is very valuable. We enjoyed attending a good range of sessions and we could see that everyone, adults and children, were benefiting from and enjoying all that was going on.

We saw the work of many of the professionals working in the centre and in the community, and we were very impressed by their concern for you and their keenness to provide the right sort of help. We were particularly impressed by the way they cooperate with each other and direct you to different services once they have understood your needs. We were very impressed by your responses to the help offered. It was really good to see how many of you use your experience to help others by becoming volunteers or paid employees after you have been trained.

Another excellent feature is the way that you all get on together, respecting each others' differences. Many of you told us the important role the centre has in helping you meet people and not be isolated. We have been very pleased to see fathers and male carers becoming more involved with young children and the centre but the

centre could do some more to encourage and support them to become more involved. We have therefore asked the centre staff to do some more work on this.

Staff have ensured that the centre is a safe place for adults and children, and all staff have been checked to make sure they are suitable people to be working with children. Professionals working in the community are very conscious to ensure that you are safe in your homes and elsewhere.

The quality of the management of the centre is outstanding. Together with the local authority and all the other partners involved in governance, managers know what services you need and they manage resources very well to see that you get the best that is possible. We were very pleased to see that you often are asked your opinions on what the centre provides and we were very pleased to see that many of you are members of the parents' forum.

Once again, we thank you for your help and would like to convey our best wishes to you and to Thornhill Children's Centre.

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