

# Inspection report for Oliver Thomas Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	London Borough of Newham
<b>Inspection number</b>	409930
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 November 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Kath Beck

<b>Centre leader</b>	Taz Waqas
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Oliver Thomas Nursery School URN 102706
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, the headteacher of the nursery school, the Chair of the Governing Body, the children's centre teacher, outreach officers, and parents using the service. They also met with representatives of the local authority, the advisory board, the adult learning service and key partners. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Oliver Thomas Children's Centre is a phase two centre that opened in 2008. It meets its core purpose and provides family support, adult learning, health and benefits advice, and childcare during activities. Further childcare is provided through the centre's network of childminders.

The local authority delegated responsibility for the leadership and management of the centre to the governing body of the co-located nursery school which is subject to a separate inspection. Since 2011 there have been changes in the membership of the governing body and a new headteacher has recently taken up the post. The manager of the centre was on maternity leave between August 2011 and June 2012 and another key member of staff is currently on long-term absence. There have also been many changes of staff at the local authority that contributes to the governance of the centre. There is an advisory body and parents' forum.

The centre serves the ward of East Ham South, with approximately 1,750 children aged under five years. The largest groups living in the area are from Sri Lankan Tamil, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian and Eastern European backgrounds. The centre serves an area which is in the 30% most deprived in the country. However, the number of lone and workless families on benefits is lower than the national average.

Children's knowledge, skills and understanding when they enter early years provision are below the expectations for their age.

## 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**

**4**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**4**

## Main findings

Throughout a period of major disruption to leadership, management and staffing, the centre has maintained satisfactory outcomes by providing a wide range of enjoyable, well-attended activities that have supported families in making a difference to their lives. The centre has been unable to maximise its impact within the community because of inadequate leadership and governance. There is a lack of clarity about the specific roles and responsibilities of those involved in the governance, accountability and day-to-day management of the centre.

The local authority has not set demanding targets for the centre to achieve in order to improve the satisfactory outcomes and extend the number of families in its reach. The data it has provided have not been used by the centre to set its own ambitious targets or to inform development planning. Self-evaluation processes are weak because, with the exception of parents, they do not draw sufficiently on the views of others involved in the work of the centre. Staff lack the skills to evaluate critically or to use data to ensure they are meeting the needs of all target groups and are able to judge the impact of their work over time. This means they do not identify accurately the centre's strengths and areas for development. Consequently, the current development plan lacks a sharp focus on what needs to be done to improve, and how progress towards the objectives it contains are to be measured. The centre's capacity for sustained improvement is, therefore, inadequate.

Families praise the staff for the warm welcome and support they receive, especially in time of crisis. The centre's 'Baby Bank' is very successful in supporting new families who are in desperate need of clothing and resources for their young children across Newham. Language courses for those new to speaking English are popular and result in many parents taking further courses that lead to qualifications. An innovative opportunity for parents to work alongside an artist added much to their confidence, learning and enjoyment and their work is on display at The Wallace

Collection for all to see.

There is a suitable range of opportunities for parents to play with their children and have fun together. In the groups observed during the inspection, children made only satisfactory progress. In part this was because staff did not demonstrate to parents well enough, the importance of how children learn through play. In addition, parents were not challenged when they breached the centre's policy for healthy eating and use of mobile phones. Staff do not check rigorously that provision is of sufficiently high quality or assess robustly what needs to be done to bring about better outcomes.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should ensure that the centre:
  - improves outcomes for families from all target groups
  - increases the number of families in its reach.
- The local authority, together with leaders and managers, should make sure that:
  - all involved in the governance, accountability and day-to-day management of the centre are clear about their roles and specific responsibilities
  - staff in the centre have the skills to evaluate critically the impact of their work and, taking into account the views of partners, to identify accurately the centre's key strengths and areas for improvement
  - data are used effectively to set ambitious but realistic targets for the centre to achieve
  - there are systematic checks on the progress towards the well-focused targets set out in the centre's development plan
  - staff can use data to demonstrate the impact of their work over time.
- Leaders and managers in the centre should:
  - monitor rigorously the activities provided, especially those for children and their families when having fun and playing together, so that they are of high quality and raise achievement
  - check that policies, particularly those with regard to healthy eating and the use of mobile phones in the centre, are implemented all of the time.

## How good are outcomes for families?

<b>3</b>
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The centre participates fully in the local authority's multi-agency approach to safeguarding children, which has replaced the Common Assessment Framework processes. Attendance at Every Child Matters meetings by a wide range of professionals, including those from health and social services, ensures that all those responsible are clear about the actions that need to be taken to keep families safe.

The long-term absence of the centre's family support worker and lack of training among other staff to cover this work as effectively as senior leaders require mean that much of the in-depth support for families living within the centre's reach and discussed at these meetings, has had to be delegated to another centre.

Parents feel safe in the centre and when out on their weekly trips to places of interest. Staff carry out regular risk assessments and make parents aware of the possible hazards and how to avoid them. One parent said, 'I love going on the trips and I know that the staff will show me what to do to go on the bus safely.' In the past families received free safety equipment for the home. The funding for this has stopped and advice about safety in the home is provided during parent and toddler sessions. Recently, 18 families received free smoke alarms and advice from the fire service. While the centre has data about the rate of emergency hospital admissions caused by unintentional or deliberate injuries to children and young people, it has insufficient information to show the impact of its work in reducing the number of children admitted.

The centre is successful in promoting and sustaining high rates of breastfeeding so that children make a healthy start to their lives. Despite the centre's interventions to reduce obesity, the level in the area is high. For example, the centre is working closely with the nutrition service to provide 'Cook and Eat' sessions that teach parents how to cook healthy meals. 'Family Gardening' activities enable parents and children to grow vegetables, receive health advice about 'five a day' and benefit from fresh air and exercise. This contributes to the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, but the centre has little information to show how these activities influence families' lives in the longer term. The centre has a policy for healthy eating, but it no longer provides a healthy snack during the parent and toddler playgroup. Some parents bring crisps for their children to eat and staff do not intervene quickly enough to implement the centre's policy on healthy eating.

Many adults from different backgrounds who use the centre achieve well, developing their skills through a wide range of courses and gaining employment. Courses for speakers of languages other than English are popular as are the 'learning sacks' of educational resources that families can borrow and use to talk to their children at home. The number of children gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage with at least six points in each of the scales in communication, language and literacy and personal, social and emotional development has increased from 47% in 2010 to 74% in 2011 and 75% in 2012. The achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest has reduced from 36% to 25% over three years, so that it is now below the national average.

The learning and achievement of parents and young children observed during the inspection was satisfactory. Staff did not show parents how to play well alongside their children and how to make the best of new learning experiences set out for them, such as 'bathing the dolls' or 'painting with hands'. As a result, opportunities within sessions to help parents support children's learning through play and every day experiences were not sufficiently used.

Warm, trusting relationships exist between parents and staff. A parent said, 'I love to come here, everyone is so friendly. My children are too old now, but we still come in the holidays as they want to see the staff.' Those using the centre are sometimes asked for their ideas and this leads to some improvements made in provision. While parents were fully involved in the consultation to withdraw the before- and after-school clubs, they were not asked about the decision to withdraw snack time during the parent and toddler sessions.

Parents wishing to seek advice about the availability of jobs are signposted to a nearby centre. Parents can also meet with a benefits officer in the centre at a specified time. Case studies show that some parents have returned to work with the centre's support and this leads to improved economic stability for some families. However, the centre has too little information to show how well families who are most in need improve their financial independence.

*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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

**3**

The range of services is broad and some, such as adult family learning, exercise and nutrition, are delivered at the centre by other providers. Classes for English for speakers of other languages with 20 places are always full. Achievements are celebrated during awards ceremonies where certificates are presented. Volunteers requiring work placements are accommodated and supported to achieve their relevant qualifications. Twenty seven childminders work with the children's centre coordinator and undergo training. As a result of this work, most childminders have been judged 'good' in their most recent inspection, and one was judged as being 'outstanding'.

The centre adequately promotes purposeful learning. In the spring and summer many families participate in the parent and toddler groups, but attendance drops

away in the winter months. The 'Out and About' sessions, where families visit exciting places and broaden their children's experiences, is extremely popular with 20 places filled. These often include teenage parents who are sometimes reluctant to come into the centre. Those with specific needs are invited to attend different groups, such as craft activities for those with post-natal depression, while their children spend time in the crèche. 'Baby Massage' and early parenting skills sessions are provided in a hostel for teenage parents. Activities in the holidays are well attended, although few fathers join the sessions arranged for them.

While the centre is successful in promoting its activities in the community, it is not using information about the area sufficiently well to ensure that the changing nature of the population is fully reflected within its provision. Too often, organised activities are at the request of parents rather than what families need. Activities in the centre, including the crèche, are not checked to ensure they are of high quality and deliver the expected outcomes. The extent to which the centre can make a discernible difference to some of the families in greatest need in the reach is hampered by long-term staff absence.

Case studies show that families arriving at the centre in desperate need of help receive good quality individual advice and guidance. One parent said, 'Without this centre, I think I would be dead by now.' Outreach officers accompany parents to meetings with the relevant services to gain financial, legal, housing and benefits advice until the families feel confident to cope independently. The officers have been trained to provide advice on smoking cessation, courses in parenting skills, and to manage conflict. Families requiring advice about substance, alcohol or domestic abuse are directed to services nearby. There is little information to show how this advice has been followed up and its impact on family life.

*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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>

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

**4**

Changes in personnel, staffing difficulties and a lack of skills in interpreting and managing data have held back the development of the centre. This is particularly true in increasing the number of families it works with and improving outcomes. New members of the governing body and the advisory board are not yet fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. Reports to the governing body and advisory board are mostly about changes to the activities the centre is providing. Members of the advisory board are unaware of the centre's areas for development and have



insufficient knowledge of its impact on outcomes in order to challenge its effectiveness.

Self-evaluation procedures do not include the analysis of data, rigorous monitoring of the centre's provision or full consultation with other services. Those responsible have an unduly positive picture of the centre's effectiveness. They do not have sufficient information to ask challenging questions or hold the centre to account. Data have not been analysed sufficiently to check the impact of the centre's services and to identify further needs in the area. Too many objectives set out in the centre's development plan lack ambition and are not systematically checked for their effective implementation.

Arrangements to safeguard families are in line with current requirements. All staff have undergone training so that they are fully aware of what to do if they observe symptoms of abuse or neglect. Senior leaders have undertaken a recent review of the centre's safeguarding procedures. However, these policies have not been displayed and implemented appropriately. As a result, the centre's policy for safe mobile phone use is not yet clear to parents and staff. Staff work effectively together with the early intervention team which deals with referrals to protect vulnerable children. Much of the detailed work for children subject to child protection plans has sensibly been delegated to another centre nearby to ensure continuity in the light of recent staff absence.

Staff tackle discrimination robustly. Disabled children and those with special educational needs are included fully in the centre's provision and some are making an important contribution to current research on autism. At the suggestion of parents, staff now help families to learn more about the different faiths and cultures within the community. Parents also have written nursery rhymes from their backgrounds to learn and support communication within the home. Multi-lingual staff explain differences between cultures, such as children who have two parents of the same gender, so that all families are fully included and respected. The accommodation is attractive, welcoming and offers easy access to disabled children and adults.

The centre is developing a strong partnership with childminders and independent providers to extend its provision. The link with a local charity offers further provision for toddlers and their families, as well as access to a secure play area, and the addition of resources for the 'Baby Bank'. Other key partners, such as family learning, who contribute to the centre's provision do not always supply sufficient data quickly to demonstrate the impact of their services on families.

The number of families attending is rising. Resources for young children to play with are of high quality. Staff are deployed appropriately and, in some cases, are shared with the school. The budget is now separate from the school's finances and is monitored carefully. Resources are supporting satisfactory outcomes, despite the inadequacies in leadership and management, and because of this the centre is judged to provide satisfactory value for money.

*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>4</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>4</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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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>3</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 Oliver Thomas Children's Centre on 27 and 28 November 2012. We judged the centre as inadequate overall because of weaknesses in its leadership and management.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us during the inspection, and telling us about how the centre has helped you. Some of you said you did not know which way to turn, but staff at the centre put you in touch with all the right people who are helping you to become independent. Many of you told us how successful the 'Baby Bank' is in providing you and other families in Newham with clothes and equipment you desperately need for your children. You also mentioned that having visited the

centre once you often return as you like all of the activities that it provides for you and your family. Often you have suggested the activities you would like to see in the centre and staff have arranged them for you. Some of you though felt the exercise class was not as good as you had hoped.

As you know there have been many changes at the centre and some staff have been absent for long periods of time. Staff who took over in the meantime kept the things that you like going, listened to your views and brought in activities that you enjoy. Many of you continued to learn English and some went on to gain new qualifications. You especially like the art activities and meeting new friends from all backgrounds while your children are in the crèche. Some of you have taken part in an imaginative activity to work with an artist from The Wallace Collection and your work is on display there. This gave you great confidence and you learned new skills.

The centre manager and staff are making sure that you have the guidance to keep you safe, to find suitable childcare, and to obtain health and benefits advice. Staff are also keeping you safe in the centre and on all the 'Out and About' trips that you enjoy going on. The number of families using the centre is increasing slightly, but the centre is not sure if it is meeting with as many families as it should from all the different backgrounds in the area. The classes to help you to learn English are very popular.

With all the changes of staff in the centre and in the local authority, the centre has not improved sufficiently to help as many people as possible to make a real difference to their lives. Usually the local authority meets with staff at the centre once a year to set demanding targets to make things even better for you. Unfortunately this has not happened because of staff changes so we have asked them to put this right.

When people are new to their job, have had a long time off or have a voluntary role such as being a member of the governing body or advisory board, they need to take on a lot of information in a short time. We have asked that the local authority helps everyone to be clear about their specific responsibilities in running the centre. Staff must also check that the services you are offered, such as the exercise session and parent and toddler groups, are really helping you to change your lives for the best.

Evaluations of the centre's provision must include not only your views, but also the views of other people who work with you to show its strengths and areas for improvement. We have asked staff at the centre to draw up a development plan that has clear objectives. It is important that they check regularly whether the changes they make are helping you to become healthier and safer, to achieve more, to contribute effectively towards decision making and improve the financial well-being of your family.

In addition everyone needs to improve their skills in using numerical information that helps the centre to understand the needs of everyone in the community and how well the centre is doing in improving your lives over a period of time. We noticed while we were at the centre that staff have not made the centre's policies on healthy

eating and the safe use of mobile telephones accessible to you. We have asked the centre's leaders to address this to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all centre users. We wish you 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).