

# Inspection report for Thornton Heath Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Croydon
<b>Inspection number</b>	404433
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Thornton Heath Children's Centre Nursery URN 131723
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Thornton Heath Early Years Centre EY292929

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 representatives from the local authority and partner agencies, parents, literacy champions, staff and centre leaders. They observed the centre's work and visited a number of groups at the centre and at other venues in the community, which included 'Stay and Play' sessions. They also looked at a range of relevant documentation including case studies and the centre's self-evaluation form and action plan.

## Information about the centre

Thornton Heath Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in 2007. Since September 2012, it has been part of a collaboration with two other local children's centres: Winterbourne and Ecclesbourne. The collaboration shares some services and staff work across all of the centres within the locality.

The centre's reach area is culturally and socio-economically mixed, with pockets of high deprivation. There are 968 children under five years living within the reach area. Some 74% live in the 10-30% most deprived areas nationally. Around 72% of children live in households dependant on workless benefits and around 5% of children live in families where adults are on a low income and in receipt of Working Family Tax Credits. The majority of families in the reach area are of Black heritage. Around half of all children are learning to speak English as an additional language. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are below those typically expected for their age, with communication and language being the weakest area.

The centre is open weekdays from 8am to 6pm. During school holidays, the centre offers its timetabled sessions for babies, toddlers and outreach with 'Stay and Play' sessions being extended to cater for families with children up to 11-years-old.

Services offered include child health, family support and adult education, with an integrated care and education facility for the children provided in the linked nursery school, which is subject to a separate inspection. Governance is provided by the nursery school's governing body and the collaboration's advisory group. The staff team are relatively new, with many being redeployed from other roles within the local authority.

## 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

Thornton Heath Children's Centre is making an overall satisfactory contribution to improving outcomes for families. The centre's manager has a clear vision for the development of the centre. Staff are passionate about their work and show great commitment and enthusiasm to improving the lives of families within the reach area. Staff are skilled in building trusting relationships with families, including many who are hard to engage. The care, guidance and support are particular strengths of the centre and one comment from a parent which echoed the views of many was that 'the staff are wonderful'. Satisfaction surveys demonstrate that parents enjoy attending the centre and feel that their children benefit from the services on offer.

Partnership working arrangements are good and the centre has built effective relationships with many partner agencies. The Family Engagement Partnership (FEP), part of an authority-wide early help strategy, involves many agencies and the integrated approach benefits the families who receive the service. Families who have been involved with social care are often referred to the centre for support as their family situations improve.

Satisfactory safeguarding arrangements are supported by appropriate policies and procedures. Staff maintain their knowledge of safeguarding through training and sharing information. Risk assessments are routinely completed and, as a result, parents report feeling safe at the centre.

The centre has increased the range of groups it offers and has an appropriate mix of universal and targeted services. Where groups have clear aims and objectives, the

centre effectively targets those families most in need and there is evidence of improved outcomes. This is not consistently the case and outcomes are not as positive where groups lack clear aims and objectives. Consequently, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Some parents contribute to the work of the centre, including through the satisfactory governance arrangements. Changes to the 'Parent forum' following the establishment of the collaboration mean that fewer parents now attend meetings. Informal arrangements to obtain parents' views are in place. However, systems are not established to effectively engage with or feed back to a wider audience.

The centre has in place self-evaluation and improvement planning documents. The local authority now provides data to the centre which it uses to set centre targets in some areas. The quality of the data is variable, and in recognition of this, the local authority is undertaking work to ensure the robustness of the data, and ensure that it provides the centre with relevant information. Currently, targets for improvement are not always specific or measurable, nor are they regularly reviewed to assess progress and set future targets. This has an impact on the centre's ability to drive improvement, and therefore its capacity to improve is satisfactory.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Strengthen action planning arrangements to drive improvement more rapidly by:
  - setting specific, measurable targets in all areas
  - regularly reviewing progress towards targets and setting new targets when appropriate
  - demonstrating the impact on improving outcomes in all areas.
  
- Review strategies to ensure that parents engage effectively in all areas of the centre and contribute to shaping services, including through effective representation on the Parent Forum.
  
- Work with partners and the local authority to improve the quality and range of data available and use this information across all aspects of the centre's work to ensure that groups are planned to consistently promote good outcomes and to develop services which will improve outcomes for families.

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

<b>3</b>
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Healthy lifestyles are promoted at the centre through the provision of healthy drinks and snacks during 'Stay and Play' sessions. These contribute to families having a satisfactory understanding of keeping healthy. Obesity rates are high but the centre is working effectively with health colleagues to reduce this, including encouraging physical exercise and play in the two outside areas at the centre. A dance teacher provides sessions at the centre, which encourages adults and children to exercise.

The centre is keen to re-establish their 'Cook and Learn' sessions as they promote healthy diets. Breastfeeding rates are low and the centre is working in partnership with health visitors to improve rates. A breastfeeding counsellor runs the 'Baby Explorers' group and provides practical advice and support on feeding.

Staff value the contribution parents make to the life of the centre and encourage them to share their views and ideas informally. Parents contribute formally to centre decision making through representation on the governing body and collaboration advisory group. The recent redesign of the parent forum failed to involve forum members in the process and, because of this, attendance decreased. Leaders recognise the need to review this.

Families engage enthusiastically with the activities at the centre. Children make good progress from their starting points, especially those who access the two-year-old pilot funding. The centre is skilfully tracking children's future achievement and evidence shows that its work is contributing to closing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers. In the Thornton Heath reach area, data show that in 2012 around 87% of children achieved 78+ scale points across the Early Years Foundation Stage profile.

Systems to track adult learning are not yet fully in place. Some families make progress in their educational and personal development. Staff work closely with Croydon Adult Learning and Training (CALAT) and provide numeracy and literacy courses. Adults who volunteer at the centre have access to an effective package of support with some progressing into further training and paid employment; some members of staff have previously been volunteers at the centre.

The centre promotes the safety of families through being vigilant and maintaining good security of the building, and as a result, parents report feeling safe there. The centre works closely with families residing in nearby bed and breakfast accommodation and understands the specific needs of this group, many of whom have no access to public funds as they are awaiting citizenship. The work of the FEP team is effective in engaging and supporting families who may need additional intervention. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used well with the most vulnerable families, including children subject to a child protection plan, ensuring that they receive a comprehensive package of support.

*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?**

<b>3</b>
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Some services are centrally commissioned by the local authority. Services within the collaboration are planned across the collaboration area, which means that services are targeted in the most appropriate locations. This sensibly avoids duplication of services.

Families benefit from integrated working between the children's centre and the nursery, for example the children's hours in the nursery can be adapted so that parents can attend courses run at the centre. Space is used well at the centre and a particular feature is the good-quality outside play area for children. Groups are popular and well attended, and operate from a range of venues within the community so that they are easily accessible to parents. They work most effectively and lead to improved outcomes when aims and objectives are clear. However, this is not consistent across all of the centre's groups.

Parents benefit from the good care, guidance and support provided by the centre. The centre staff understand the potential barriers that some families face and work with them sensitively and supportively to enable them to develop the well-being of their families. One parent commented: 'I was very depressed and staff pulled me through.' The FEP work is embedding, following a successful pilot project at the centre.

The centre promotes purposeful learning through 'Stay and Play' sessions and groups such as baby massage and 'Baby Explorers'. Staff work with parents to develop their knowledge of how children learn and how they can better support their children's learning. Displays around the centre provide parents with useful information about the Early Years Foundation Stage. Courses at the centre are well attended by families, with many from target groups. Systems to track families who may access other adult learning venues are not fully in place. Some parents access courses, although this number is low. Some parents also volunteer at the centre, including being 'Literacy Champions' where they run five-week courses to promote early language for young children. Volunteers receive a comprehensive package of support to help build their skills.

The local authority now provides the centre with a range of data and the centre is using this to ensure that services are targeted at those families most in need. Recent data indicate that the centre is reaching some of its most vulnerable and in-need families. Data show that overall there has been a significant increase in the number of families accessing services, although the take-up rates of some hard-to-reach

groups, such as teenage parents, remain low. The centre and local authority are committed to improving the quality of the data and work is in progress to enable the centre to more effectively target services and demonstrate the impact of its work.

*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>2</b>

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

<b>3</b>
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The centre promotes the inclusion of all families and, as a result, they access its services from a wide range of backgrounds. This was commented on by one parent who told inspectors that 'Staff are not judgemental and they make you feel important.' The centre undertakes some excellent work supporting refugees and asylum-seeking families, including those who do not have UK citizenship. The centre's reach area is culturally diverse, although this diversity is not reflected across all aspects of the centre. Families who speak English as an additional language can access translation services if required. Children with disabilities are encouraged to attend all groups at the centre. There is evidence that the achievement gap is closing.

All staff are committed to improving outcomes for families and are supported and guided by a strong management team. Revised supervision arrangements are in place and staff benefit from personal and clinical supervision. The centre has in place revised management arrangements including performance management procedures which are understood by staff. The school's governing body provides satisfactory governance to the centre. However, its work is sometimes overly focused on the nursery school aspect of the setting.

Safeguarding arrangements are appropriately in place. Policies and procedures to safeguard children cover both the nursery and children's centre, and the centre has adapted them where possible to reflect the work of the different types of provision. Recruitment procedures for staff are robust and follow local authority processes. Checking procedures for volunteers are now completed on a collaboration-wide basis. But these systems are not yet fully embedded and information is not always readily accessible. Training for staff and volunteers provides them with the knowledge to deal with any safeguarding issues. The centre completes risk assessments and these contribute to providing a safe environment for families.

Good partnership working ensures that families are provided with good-quality support from a wide range of services. The FEP meetings provide useful



opportunities for centre staff to share their caseloads and to devise a programme of well-coordinated intervention using knowledge from a range of partner agencies. The centre has built effective links with a wide range of partner agencies and some excellent joint work takes place which is having a positive impact on improving outcomes, for example the work with the breastfeeding counsellor and family learning services. The centre is looking to improve the knowledge of some partner agencies who do not fully understand the purpose of the centre’s work.

The centre’s action plan, a detailed development plan, the needs analysis and self-evaluation documents provide an overall clear picture of the centre and its work. However, the targets set in some areas to bring improvement are not specific enough. This along with a lack of baseline data restricts the centre’s ability to prioritise its work where it will have the most impact in bringing about improved outcomes for families. Procedures to review progress against the action planning documents are not fully in place, which further limits the centre’s ability to drive improvement rapidly.

Resources are deployed effectively. Space is used well at the centre and at the community venues where services run. Families can access much of the space used by the nursery during school holidays. The reception area is open-plan and accessible to all families, including wheelchair users. The entrance to the centre, and reception area, are not particularly attractive and stimulating, which is in stark contrast to the play areas and outside areas.

Parents have some opportunities to contribute to the work of the centre both informally and formally. Recent changes in the structure of the parent forum have had a negative impact on attendance levels. Additionally, systems for obtaining families’ views and ideas to develop the range of provision are not yet fully embedded.

*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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</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>

<p><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></p>	<p><b>2</b></p>
<p><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></p>	<p><b>3</b></p>

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

The inspection findings from the nursery school aspect of the Thornton Heath Early Years Centre that was carried out in June 2010.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected Thornton Heath Children’s Centre on 15–16 January 2013. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The centre provides you with a range of groups that run both at the centre and in buildings in the community. Services are now planned across the collaboration area and this means that services can be provided in those areas where they are most needed. Staff also work across the collaboration area and, as a result, skills and expertise can be more effectively used.

Inspectors saw that you and your children enjoy attending groups. Those of you who attend groups at the centre benefit from the well-resourced outside play areas. Many groups also operate at venues within the local community and the centre has worked hard to establish these groups. We have asked them to sharpen the use of aims and objectives in some groups to ensure outcomes are consistently good. Some of you attend training at the centre and it helps that there is a crèche available for you to leave your children in as you can concentrate on your learning.

The care, guidance and support offered to you and your families are good. Staff work hard to build trusting relationships with you and are very committed to supporting you in improving your lives. Some of you will have benefited from work from the Family Engagement Partnership (FEP), who effectively support you in many areas of your lives. We looked at case studies and spoke to staff, and we could see some of the issues that you have faced. The staff use the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process with those of you who need specific support. Many of you

have 'stepped down' from social care intervention to receiving support from the centre.

You and your children feel safe due to the good security of the building and the vigilance of the staff. Risk assessments reduce any possible hazards to you and your children. Procedures are in place to ensure the suitability of centre staff and volunteers.

The centre is keen to listen to your views and opinions, and many of you will have contributed to the work of the centre by completing satisfaction surveys and talking to staff informally. Some of you sit on the governing body and collaboration advisory group, and others have been members of the parent forum in the past. We have asked the centre to look at how it can improve opportunities for you to contribute to the work of the centre and how you can be more involved in decision making.

The centre produces a range of documents which it uses to evaluate services and to plan to bring about improvements. We feel that the centre should strengthen its plans to improve services by having clearer targets, reviewing progress against the targets more regularly and be able to show the difference that centre services make to your lives. Nevertheless, staff show great commitment to making the centre an even better place for you and your families.

The community the centre serves is very diverse. Staff are aware of the many barriers you may face and work to overcome these. Those of you with children with disabilities are supported by the centre to attend groups. Translation and interpreting services are available to families who need it.

The local authority provides data which the centre uses to assess how well they are doing in certain areas. We have asked the centre, with the local authority and partners, to look at improving the quality of this data.

We would like to thank all of you who spared the time to meet with us and share your experiences of working with the centre. We would particularly like to thank those of you who came in especially to do so. We wish you and your children 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).