

Thornton Heath Children's Centre

Nursery Road, Thornton Heath, Croydon, CR7 8RF

Inspection dates 3–4 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Teaching has not been challenging enough to ensure consistently good progress for all. The monitoring of teaching has not been sufficiently robust to ensure all practitioners have the skills to move learning on rapidly.
- Nursery improvement plans and lesson planning to extend children's learning and achievement are not sharply focused on learning outcomes.
- Adults do not always use questioning skilfully enough to extend children's thinking. They miss opportunities to build on children's developing range of speaking skills.
- The achievement of children varies too much across the areas of learning they have to follow.
- Leaders have reviewed and improved the arrangements for the supervision of children following a recent incident. These arrangements are relatively new.
- Opportunities are missed, particularly in the outside area, to really stimulate children in developing their skills in the areas of early reading, writing, and mathematics.
- Leaders, including governors, have not always had accurate information on the nursery's finances and children's progress. This has limited their ability to rigorously improve school performance. Staff roles, expectations and accountability are not robust.

The school has the following strengths

- Most children behave well and show good attitudes to learning. They get on well together.
- The outside learning area has been developed well since the previous inspection.
- Leaders are working together to improve the nursery. They are clear about what needs to be done.
- Relationships are good between adults, children and parents. The large majority of parents say that their children are safe and happy.
- Leaders are fully focused on raising children's achievement. Performance information indicates children's achievement is improving, especially in their physical development.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed children in seven different learning sessions across both morning and afternoons. Most of these were jointly observed with the acting headteacher and included when children learnt specific skills in small groups and when children led their own learning.
- The inspector talked with children about what they were learning. She observed children reading books with each other and with adults.
- The inspector held meetings with the assistant headteacher, who is also acting headteacher, the external consultant, the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors. She had a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority. The inspector also met with a group of staff.
- The inspector spoke informally with several parents to get their views about the nursery.
- The inspector looked at the nursery's documentation including for safeguarding, attendance, children's progress, self-evaluation and the nursery's development planning.
- There were insufficient responses available in the on-line questionnaire (Parent View). The inspector took account of the 36 responses to a recent parent survey conducted by the nursery.

Inspection team

Sheila Browning, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The nursery is smaller than average-sized nurseries.
- Provision is offered for up to 52 full-time equivalent places for three- and four-years-olds and 16 full-time places for two-year-olds. Mobility is high, especially amongst children who speak English as an additional language.
- The daycare provision for two-year-olds was not assessed as it is inspected separately.
- Most children access nursery provision for three to five terms before starting school in September of the year in which they are five years old.
- Most children come from a wide range of ethnic heritages. Over half of the children are of Black Caribbean or African heritage, and about a half are from ethnically mixed heritages, White and Asian. Over two thirds have a language other than English as their home language. The main languages spoken by children at an early stage of learning English are Tamil and Urdu.
- An average proportion has a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. A few children are supported through early years action. An average proportion is supported through early years action plus or has a statement of special educational needs.
- There have been several staffing changes, vacancies and long-term illnesses, including at the highest level, over the last eighteen months. The assistant headteacher is currently acting headteacher because of the long term absence of the headteacher.
- The centre is a nursery school and children's centre, providing a wide range of extended services to children and their families. The centre's provision provides care for two- to four-year-olds, before and after-school care, occasional crèche facilities for children from birth to eight years old whose parents attend centre courses and child sessions. Holiday care is across two sites (Thornton Heath Children's Centre and Selhurst Children's Centre). It is registered for 70 children but takes 40 children. Only the nursery was inspected.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching in all areas of learning by ensuring staff:
 - raise their expectations of what children are capable of achieving
 - model language correctly and effectively develop children's vocabulary
 - provide wider opportunities for children to read, write and use their mathematical skills
 - develop children's interests by providing better speaking and listening opportunities to extend their thinking and learning
 - make sure that the learning environment inside and outside has more displays which encourage children to recognise and become familiar with letters and numbers so that they can practise their early reading, writing and number skills.
- Improve behaviour and safety by:
 - ensuring the effectiveness over time of the improved arrangements for children's safety and the continued development of their safety awareness.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring nursery development planning is sharply focused on raising children's achievement
 - robustly monitoring teaching quality and, where it falls short, remedy weaknesses rigorously
 - refining lesson planning, especially by key workers, so that it focuses on the impact teaching has on learning
 - establishing a clear staff structure with clearly defined responsibilities, expectations and accountability.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Children start nursery with lower than expected skills, knowledge and development in communication, language, mathematics, thinking skills and personal, social and emotional development.
- By the time children move to primary school, school-based information on their progress shows that most achieve age appropriate skills. Although attainment is rising, children achieve less well in their communication, early reading, writing and mathematical skills due to weaknesses in teaching over time.
- The focus on developing children's moving and handling skills has resulted in significant progress, especially by boys in their physical development. This is confirmed by inspection evidence and is a direct impact of the much improved outside area, which has particularly benefited these areas of children's learning. Children's health, self-care, confidence and self-esteem also show improvement.
- Children enjoy learning through play to help them to become independent learners. They enjoyed role play as fire officers when they put out an imaginary fire. Children confidently climbed the ropes and climbing wall and squeezed through tunnels in the outside area to enhance their physical development. In some activities led by adults, they looked at snails through magnifiers and talked about habitats, but did not further their investigations by fact finding using simple books or other information sources. Children enjoyed singing familiar songs and rhymes and played musical instruments carefully. Several happily 'fished' for numbers and letters in the water trays or made large scale houses out of cardboard boxes, cutting and joining different materials with some skill.
- Children with special educational needs, some of whom have high complex and physical needs, are well integrated and benefit from close adult support and achieve similarly to those nationally from their starting points.
- School-based information shows that children who speak English as an additional language and those from ethnic minority groups underachieve compared to those nationally. The high mobility of children and their families means that the school has some difficulty in showing sustained achievement and its impact on improving achievement over time, especially for those who speak English as an additional language.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching typically requires improvement. There are missed opportunities to fully stretch children's learning or to challenge them sufficiently in terms of developing their communication and mathematical skills to move their learning on. Adult questioning seldom extends children's thinking or reasoning or widens their vocabulary. Occasionally, adults do not model language correctly.
- Teachers' expectations are not high enough, as too often adults accept short simple responses and do not require children to deepen their thinking. When, for example, preparing fruit snacks with children, opportunities were missed to talk about texture and colour and, when cutting fruit, did not refer to shape, size or use mathematical language such as halves, quarters or segments. Opportunities are missed to explore mathematical language and concepts when completing tasks such as filling and emptying different containers with sand and/or water.
- Planning is reflective, but is not sharply focused on the impact teaching has on children's individual achievement and does not always cater to stretch all children's learning; this is especially true of key worker planning which tends to list activities covered.
- Trained staff and support from the local authority speech and language therapy services provide targeted support for individual children, including those with special educational needs and who speak English as an additional language; this successfully enables them to make gains in their

listening, concentration and speaking skills.

- Staff share their ideas and there is some good practice that could be usefully adopted. For example, on occasion, some adults talked about likes, dislikes and interests with children when tasting mint tea during a 'tea party', whilst others encouraged them to write down the 999 call made to the fire station or write a letter about their ideas to design a new game. Some teaching of early phonics (the sounds that letters make) was conducted effectively. Adults encourage children to be creative and enjoy books. Children recognise that print carries meaning and know to take care of books.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Children generally know what is expected of them in terms of their behaviour, and the vast majority know how to stay safe. Recent work has been undertaken to ensure that there are better arrangements for the supervision of children and that all children are developing a good sense of safety awareness. The recent nature and impact of this work means that behaviour and safety are improving but are not yet good.
- Children typically behave well in this ethnically rich diverse community where they form positive relationships. The promotion of equal opportunities is highly valued, and any discrimination is not tolerated.
- Consistency of care and regular contact with parents encourage trusting relationships between home and school. Parents told the inspector that the staff were friendly, helpful and that they had no concerns.
- Attendance, although not compulsory, is regularly monitored and absence followed up. The nursery has a highly mobile population, with a number of children who visit family abroad. The nursery works closely with these families and tries to keep places open for short periods.
- No child has been excluded and the nursery accepts children that have been moved from other settings and makes sure they feel welcome.
- Adults focus on improving and helping children to learn and manage their own behaviour, especially boys, and although some squabble, finding it hard to share toys and equipment, they quickly learn to take turns. Staff encourage a 'can do' attitude, and this especially works well for children with physical disabilities who appeared fearless in their attempts to get involved and to challenge themselves physically in the outside learning area.
- Children respond well to 'tidy up time', putting away toys and equipment, and are keen to talk with visitors. Those that stay for lunch enjoy eating in a supportive social environment.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The partnership with the children's centre enables shared expertise, a wide range of services for parents and children, and some sharing of staff. However, recent restructuring of the children's centre has deflected leaders' full attention in sustaining the rigour required to optimise the nursery's effectiveness. The assistant headteacher provides strong direction for improvement, has raised expectations and is tackling weaknesses head on.
- The nursery does not have a clearly defined staffing structure, with roles and responsibilities clearly holding staff to account. Turnover of staff is low. The nursery supports students, apprentices and placements to inject new thinking and ideas that can be shared among all staff.
- The long-term absence of key members of staff and vacancies over the past eighteen months have slowed the pace of change. Staff training has focused on organising different learning zones and developing key worker planning, but this is ongoing. Support for key workers and teachers is more closely matched to individual needs, but has yet to show impact in ensuring all staff have the skills and knowledge to extend children's achievement. Monitoring linked to checks on the quality of teaching has been insufficiently robust to secure consistently good teaching.
- The curriculum reflects the revised Early Years Foundation Stage framework. Given the high

mobility of children, it still manages a broadly balanced learning experience, but it is not yet embedded. Adults do not ensure that there are consistent activities that help children to develop fully their early language, reading, writing and mathematical skills.

- Extensive redesigning and landscaping of the outdoor learning environment have provided an excellent area for children's physical and creative development, but it is not as effective in encouraging children to practise their early reading, writing and number skills, which means its huge potential is limited.
- Adults work hard to engage parents and involve them in their child's development and learning, but two workshops and a literacy project have attracted only a few. The recent school survey indicates that parents are happy with the nursery and this was confirmed with those who spoke to the inspector.
- The local authority, following requests from the Chair of the Governing Body, has recently visited the nursery. It has reviewing the nursery's systems to check on children's progress and to enable it to be better placed to implement the revised Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum and raise children's achievement.
- The nursery recently commissioned the local authority to review its safeguarding arrangements and has made them more robust. Consequently, there is improved security at arrival and departure times.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Changes in membership, restructuring of committees and ongoing training mean that governors are now better informed about the nursery's performance. They visit regularly so have first-hand knowledge of teaching quality and its impact, and relate this to performance management and pay. To action their concerns about staffing and the quality of teaching, they appointed an external improvement partner to support the nursery and to provide additional checks on the nursery's performance. Governors are assertive; for example, on finding the quality of services provided for finance and other key information inadequate, they appointed independent advisers and consultants. Led by a strong Chair, and with increased expertise, they challenge leaders and rightly say, 'We are bolder and have a better understanding of our role.' Governors ensure safer recruitment and child protection procedures are effective.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	131723
Local authority	Croydon
Inspection number	402502

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	118
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Caroline Davies
Headteacher	Linda Bellhouse
Date of previous school inspection	9–10 June 2010
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