

Oliver Thomas Children's Centre

Matthews Avenue, London, E6 6BU

Inspection date 4–5 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- A significant minority of families in the area are not yet benefiting from the services and support of the centre, particularly fathers and those from the growing population of families of Eastern European and African heritage.
- The protocols for the sharing of information with social services about the most vulnerable children in the area have not been fully established by the local authority and social care. As a result, the centre is unable to contribute to supporting some of these vulnerable families to help keep their children safe.
- Parents undertaking adult learning through the centre are not always provided with the opportunity to gain the relevant accreditation or to benefit from professional advice and guidance about career paths.
- The impact of the plans of leaders and managers to improve the lives of families has not had time to be fully established. Moreover, there are to be significant changes to the leadership team who has driven improvement since the previous inspection.

This centre has the following strengths:

- The number of parents attending the centre's activities and being supported to improve their family's well-being and economic security in other ways has risen considerably in the past year, particularly those with the youngest children.
- Leadership and management, including the advisory board, have improved significantly since the previous inspection. Leaders are using data about the families in the area much more effectively to ensure that services are increasingly meeting the diverse needs.
- With its key partners, the centre provides a range of good quality activities and outreach work to help parents who attend to support their children's learning and development and to enable them to lead safe and healthy lives.
- The centre is at the heart of the community and is warm and welcoming to the families benefiting from its services. As a result, it is held in high regard by users of the centre.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and children's centre leader, other members of staff, parents and representatives of the local authority, advisory board and key partners in health, adult education and from the attached nursery school.

The inspectors visited a number of activities, all of which took place on site. One of these was observed jointly with centre staff.

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

Inspection team

Graham Lee	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Sarah McDermott	Additional Inspector
Marinette Bazan	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Oliver Thomas Children's Centre is a phase two centre which opened in 2008. It meets its core purpose by providing early education, family support and outreach work, help to enter training and employment including adult learning, child and family health services, benefits advice and parent information services. The centre also provides additional support for childcare through its network of childminders.

The centre is co-located with Oliver Thomas Nursery School which is subject to a separate inspection. The report can be found on www.ofsted.gov.uk. The governing body, through its advisory board, and headteacher of the school have responsibility for the leadership and management of the centre on behalf of the local authority. On a day-to-day basis, the centre is managed by the centre leader. Over recent years there has been significant disruption to staffing.

The centre is situated in East Ham which is in the south east of the London Borough of Newham. It draws families from five local wards and the latest information indicates that there are 1,462 families in the area with children less than five years of age. About nine out of ten families are from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The largest of these groups are of Sri Lankan, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian and, increasingly, East European and African Nigerian and Somali heritage. There are considerable levels of deprivation in the area and the proportion of children in workless families is significantly higher than that found nationally.

Children's knowledge, skills and understanding are well below expectations when the children enter early years education, with many speaking little or no English.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of families in the area benefiting from the services and support of the centre, particularly fathers and families from East European and African backgrounds.
- Work with social services and local authority to ensure that they share the information about the most vulnerable children in the area quickly so that the centre can work with the families to help keep their children safe.
- Improve the economic well-being of families by increasing the employability and skills of parents, particularly those from Eastern European and African backgrounds, through better access to accreditation and professional advice and guidance.
- The advisory board should ensure that the long term arrangements for the management of the centre are clear and enable the centre to continue to improve.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- A significant minority of families with children under five in the area do not yet benefit from the services provided by the centre or other centres in the area. However, the engagement of families has increased significantly in the past year through better tracking and sharing of information. As a result, it is now clear that a majority of families in the area are benefiting from services provided through the centre or by key partners.
- A key focus for the centre has been to provide early support for pregnant mothers and families with children under the age of one. Very good partnerships with health and a much slicker registration system, together with activities such as 'baby club' and associated 'baby yoga', have ensured that contacts with this group have improved dramatically and continue to rise.
- Families from a variety of Asian backgrounds continue to be very well represented in its activities.
- The centre has identified that the increasing numbers of families from Eastern European and African backgrounds are not readily engaging with its services. It has focused on improving contacts with

these groups. This has been successful in increasing the involvement of Eastern European families quite considerably, although the latest information suggest that less than half are registered. The progress with the African families has been slower and contacts remain relatively low. Consequently, the centre's commitment to equality for all is not yet fully realised in practice.

- After being hampered by staffing difficulties for some time, the centre is now using its outreach work well to reach out to families who find it more difficult to take part in its services. This work has met with some success, but has not yet resulted in high levels of engagement with families from the full range of backgrounds represented in the area.
- The centre works effectively with a number of families with vulnerable children to improve parenting skills and to help them keep their children safe. However, they do not know the identities of all of these children because the information has not been shared by social services in spite of requests from the centre.
- It is clear that the majority of families in the area take up their free entitlement to early education. However, the registration system has become centralised in the borough and is not routinely shared with the centre, making it difficult for them to identify and follow up those families not taking advantage of this entitlement.

The quality and impact of practice and services

Requires improvement

- Not enough families from the community are benefiting from the services offered by the centre to improve the lives of their families. In particular, fathers and parents from Eastern European and African backgrounds are under represented in its activities.
- The centre provides effective support for those families where children are identified as being at risk of harm to help them improve their lives. The centre also provides good support for families in crisis, helping them to get access to the services they need, for example in relation to housing and benefits. A particular success has been the 'baby bank' which provides clothing and enables the centre to encourage parents to take part in other services.
- The close working relationship with the nursery school ensures that good quality services, such as the popular parent and toddler group, are provided to support children's learning and development. It is evident that children who have been through the children's centre are much better prepared for school than others. Local schools report a similar picture. By the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage many children are achieving a good level of development and the most disadvantaged children are catching up with their peers.
- The strong partnerships with the health services and other centres provide a wide range of support to families to improve the health and well-being of their families. Activities such as the healthy eating workshop and 'cook and eat' sessions are helping parents to provide healthy meals for their children.
- The centre, in conjunction with its partner health professionals, is also having an impact on improving other health outcomes for children and their families. For example, figures for initiating and sustaining breastfeeding are improving and there is evidence of improved oral hygiene.
- The childcare courses offered by the centre are of good quality and retention and success rates are high. Evaluations show that these courses improve the employability and confidence of the participants. A number of the parents who successfully complete these courses go on to volunteer both at Oliver Thomas and in other settings.
- Through its partnership with adult education, the centre signposts parents to training and offers English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). The coordination of these courses is not as effective as it could be. Some parents who complete the course do not have the opportunity to gain the relevant accreditation and participants are not provided routinely with professional advice and support to consider further possibilities for employment to improve the economic stability of their families.
- The centre provides a range of effective activities to promote parents' understanding of how to keep their children safe in a variety of situations.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The headteacher and centre leader have driven the significant improvements since the previous inspection; however, they are not yet in a position to demonstrate that the impact of their work on the lives of families is sustained, especially for those groups it has identified as being less likely to come to the centre. With their imminent departure, the advisory board must ensure that the trajectory of improvement is continued under their well-considered plans for the future.
- Leaders and managers know how well the centre is performing and set clear targets for improvement, based on a thorough analysis of the needs of the community. Some of these targets, in relation to families from African and Eastern European backgrounds for example, are relatively new and the engagement of these groups is not yet as high as the centre would like.
- Staff and partners share a clear sense of direction and a wide range of data is now being used effectively to increase the number of families engaging with the centre, to shape services and to identify those groups who are not benefiting fully from the services it offers.
- The advisory board has been considerably strengthened since the previous inspection and is widely representative of professional expertise and families using the centre. It offers a good range of challenge and support to the leaders and local authority.
- Staff are appropriately trained to deliver a good range of services. Systems for monitoring and the supervision and performance management of staff are clear and, allied to training, lead to the continuous improvement of services.
- Generally, the centre forges effective partnerships with other organisations to support the needs of the community, for example with the attached nursery, other local school, the association of childminders and health providers.
- The centre is well resourced and provides economy of scale by working with other centres to deliver services to avoid duplication.
- The centre uses innovative approaches to gather the view of parents about their needs. For example, a formal parents' forum had failed to attract many parents so their views about the centre are now gathered regularly at the end of activities. The centre also assesses the impact of its specific services through regular 'before and after' surveys, when parents self-evaluate the impact of services on their families.
- Arrangements for the safeguarding of children and their families are a high priority for all and evident in the everyday life in the centre. Robust policies and procedures are in place to ensure that children remain safe, although important information is not clearly available in community languages. .

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Select details

Unique reference number	22260
Local authority	London Borough of Newham
Inspection number	409930
Managed by	The local authority
Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,462
Centre leader	Taz Waqas
Date of previous inspection	27–28 November 2012
Telephone number	020 8552 1177
Email address	info@oliverthomas.newham.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

(Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013

