

# St Thomas Centre Nursery

Bell Barn Road, Lee Bank, Birmingham, B15 2AF

**Inspection dates** 11–12 December 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- Since the last inspection, the headteacher, leaders, managers and governors have maintained the outstanding nature of the nursery extremely well. They have done this by rigorously, and regularly, checking and reviewing the quality of teaching and learning.
- Children make excellent progress during their time at the nursery because teaching is outstanding. Staff are totally committed to ensuring the very best for every child.
- The outside environment is particularly stimulating. It provides excellent opportunities for children to learn about the natural world and to develop their physical and social skills.
- Teachers observe children closely and reflect on their learning very carefully. Teachers use the information that they gain from this to plan tasks that stretch children of all abilities. As a result, all children achieve extremely well.
- The development of language and communication skills is outstanding. As a result, all children benefit and those who are in the very early stages of learning to speak English make rapid and sustained progress.
- Behaviour and safety are excellent. Children are excited about coming to school and develop very positive attitudes to learning because they are provided with interesting opportunities to explore and investigate.
- Children have very positive, warm relationships with all the staff. As a result, they become confident, independent learners who are able to make decisions and choices for themselves.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptionally well promoted.
- The nursery works very closely with the children's centre and other organisations with which it shares the building. This creates a sense of continuity for children and families alike.
- The curriculum is extended by a residential trip, visits to the theatre and many visitors. As a result, it provides rich, powerful experiences for the children.
- The school has recognised that children's mathematical development is lower than other areas on entry to the nursery and it is therefore a focus for improvement.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed seven lessons, two of which were joint observations with the headteacher.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, staff, members of the governing body, and a representative of the local authority. The views of teaching and non-teaching staff expressed in 18 responses to the staff questionnaire were considered.
- The inspectors observed the work of the school and looked at a range of documentation. This included children's learning journals, data on their progress, planning and monitoring documentation and information relating to the safeguarding of children.
- The inspectors considered the 10 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and took into account results from the schools' own questionnaire to parents. They also spoke with parents informally at the start of the school day.

## Inspection team

Christine Merrick, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sheelagh Barnes

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The nursery is larger than average and offers both full-time and part-time places.
- A large proportion of the children are from different minority ethnic backgrounds and a fifth of the children speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of children who are supported at early years action is above average. The proportion of children at early years action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is also above average.
- The headteacher and staff have recently taken part in an international conference on early years' education where they presented their work on learning and assessment.
- The nursery shares a building with a children's centre with which it has a very close working relationship. The headteacher also manages the provision for two year olds and wraparound care. These aspects of provision are inspected separately.

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

- Improve the quality and range of mathematical opportunities by:
  - increasing opportunities for using everyday materials to stimulate children's mathematical development in the outdoor area
  - providing additional problem-solving activities throughout the nursery, both indoors and out.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Children settle quickly and make excellent progress because their needs are very carefully considered and provided for. They are very happy and secure, confident to explore and investigate and eager to benefit from the wonderful range of opportunities provided in the nursery. As a result, they become highly motivated learners.
- Children who have had little or no access to provision before attending nursery generally have starting points that are well below those typical for their age. The attainment of those who have benefited from provision for two year olds is still below expectations when they start at the nursery. Many have very little or no English. Almost all reach the levels expected by the time they move to Reception classes and some achieve above expected levels.
- Children develop speaking and listening skills rapidly so that they are able to communicate their needs very effectively. They are able to negotiate the use of resources without undue conflict and discuss what they are doing. They listen very attentively and contribute to discussions, offering opinions and explanations; for instance, when they talked about the melting ice in the water tray.
- Children are encouraged to develop their reading and writing skills through a range of activities in small groups or individually. One child was observed totally engrossed in a book for a sustained period of time, while others enjoyed recreating the Nativity story, having shared a book with an adult. There are mark-making opportunities both inside and out so that children access these in a range of contexts and can apply their rapidly developing knowledge of letters and the sounds they make.
- Children's physical and creative skills are developed extremely well. The outdoor area offers a wide range of equipment for climbing, and staff provide additional activities such as an obstacle course to challenge children's coordination and balancing skills further. They also have access to role-play resources and musical instruments. They are able to use tools such as scissors with increasing accuracy, such as when they cut and stick pictures and made snowflake patterns.
- Social skills are developed extremely well because staff take time to explain and reinforce high expectations and resources encourage sharing. For instance, ride-on toys are ones mainly designed for use by more than one child. As a result, children learn to wait, be patient, share and take turns. They are able to manage for themselves when getting ready to go outside and they help each other where needed.
- Children who are disabled and those who have special educational needs, and those who speak English as an additional language, have excellent support, closely matched to their needs, so that they make similar progress to other children. More-able children are challenged effectively so that they too make excellent progress. Children from minority ethnic backgrounds make the same outstanding progress as the other children.
- Children are able to count numbers to ten and beyond as they check how many boys and girls are in their group and how many there are altogether. They develop an understanding of shape, space and measures in play-based activities such as in the sand. However, the school has rightly identified mathematical development as an area for improvement as it is not as well developed as other areas when children start in the nursery.

**The quality of teaching is outstanding**

- Teaching is outstanding because staff are constantly reflecting on their practice and looking for ways to improve provision. Teachers and other adults, such as teaching assistants, work extremely well as a team. They all support each other very effectively and provide excellent role models for the children.
- The quality of the learning environment is very high. Excellent use is made of different spaces so that children can take part in a very effective mix of play-based and adult-led activities inside. Meanwhile, the outdoor area, with its greenhouse, raised beds, pond area and landscaped sand area, allows children access to first-hand experiences from growing vegetables to observing frogs.
- Teachers make detailed plans based on their observation of children's interests and curiosities. As a result, work is very closely matched to children's needs and abilities. Teachers make excellent use of small-group work to target specific areas of learning, or to challenge and extend the most able; for instance, when children were given the opportunity to write letters to Santa.
- Interactions and conversations are always of the very highest quality. Teachers challenge children's thinking very effectively, encouraging them to reflect on their ideas and consider multiple possibilities. As a result, children learn to make decisions, choose appropriate resources for the tasks they are given and discuss the results of their efforts.
- Assessment processes are thorough and these are used very successfully to check children's progress. Learning journals contain a range of observations and notes as well as other evidence of learning such as children's drawings. Teachers constantly discuss how to respond to this information, whether to provide additional challenge or support so that progress is maximised.

Teachers make sure that every child is valued. The 'celebration boards' focus on the achievements of individual children. Parents value these. As one parent commented, 'It helps to make my child known to everyone.'

**The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- Children behave exceptionally well. This is because relationships in the nursery are excellent and the atmosphere is very positive. Children see adults who are polite, courteous and caring towards each other and, therefore, learn to behave in this way themselves.
- Children show high levels of care and concern for each other. They play together very well, share resources willingly, and treat each other and adults with respect. They develop very good manners at lunchtime because midday staff demonstrate these as they sit at the tables with the children. Children then enjoy helping to clear away when everyone has finished.
- Attitudes to learning are extremely positive. Children enjoy their experience in the nursery a great deal so they become enthusiastic and eager learners. They are encouraged to be independent and take calculated risks so that they learn to judge what is safe for them as they work and play.
- Children quickly learn to respect each other and enjoy learning about the different backgrounds and cultures in the nursery. They readily take part in a range of different cultural activities such as making divas, drawing mendhi patterns on their hands or performing dragon dances as part

of Chinese New Year.

- Parents were unanimous in their support for the high levels of safety and behaviour in the school. All of those who responded to questionnaires or were spoken to directly felt that their children are very well cared for in the nursery

### **The leadership and management** are outstanding

- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and senior leadership team work closely with the staff to ensure that all children have the same opportunities and there is no discrimination. They are extremely well supported by staff who have responsibilities for particular aspects of the school's work.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate because there are regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning. The rigorous procedures for checking teachers' performance are matched by extensive opportunities for professional development and, as a result, the staff are highly qualified and extremely knowledgeable.
- Records of children's progress are very carefully checked so that the progress of both individuals and groups of children can be monitored. These groups include disabled children and those who have special educational needs, girls and boys, more-able children, children from a range of different minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language. This ensures that all groups of children make similar progress.
- The curriculum has been developed so that it widens children's experiences and reflects the very high expectations communicated by leaders and managers. There are many opportunities to be part of the wider community; for instance, through carol singing at a home for the elderly. In addition, the yearly residential visit to Dodford Farm allows the children to feed and look after animals they would otherwise not encounter and to experience the countryside at first hand.
- Parents and carers are valued and included in many different ways such as their contributions to the 'celebration boards'. Families are extremely well supported and parents acknowledge the welcome that they receive and the wealth of information that they get from the nursery. Parents are highly appreciative of the care and education that their children receive. One parent summed up the nursery as 'brilliant'.
- Links with the children's centre and other organisations that share the building, such as the Centre for Research in Early Childhood, are excellent. The nursery serves as an example of best practice to visitors and benefits from the opportunities to work together and to engage in dialogue with others.

The local authority knows the nursery well. It provides support as and when needed; for instance, by providing an external perspective when the nursery monitors the quality of teaching and learning.

**■ The governance of the school:**

- Governance is strong. Governors know the school extremely well and have a keen sense of its strengths and what it needs to do to improve because they visit regularly and receive good information about the quality of teaching and children’s achievement. Governors are knowledgeable, well organised, and able to question and challenge leaders as well as providing support. They make sure that financial resources are used wisely and that teachers are rewarded appropriately for high-quality teaching. Safeguarding practices are thorough, well monitored and meet statutory requirements.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	103124
<b>Local authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	426919

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Nursery
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–4
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	95
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Sally Andrews
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sue Bennett
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 October 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 4640003
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