

Thomas Coram Centre

49 Mecklenburgh Square, London, WC1N 2QA

Inspection dates

5–6 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
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.

- Leadership is outstanding. The headteacher provides highly inspirational leadership and has exceptional understanding of early years practice. She is supported by a group of highly talented leaders who share her ambition for excellence.
- Children's achievement is outstanding. From their very low starting points, particularly in speaking, listening and reading, they make rapid progress. By the time they leave the school, most have exceeded the expectations for their age.
- Teaching is outstanding because adults know the children in their group exceptionally well, having been with them from when they start at the school. They use this knowledge to plan activities that are individual to the child.
- The school promotes children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well through a well-planned curriculum based on a strong understanding of how children learn.
- Leaders, managers and governors have developed an effective system for checking the progress children make and this has had a strong impact on sustaining the improvements from the previous inspection.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Children are confident and enjoy coming to school. This is because they develop trusting relationships with adults and learn within an exciting environment. Children know how to keep themselves safe and are encouraged to explore all parts of the school, during their time at Thomas Coram.
- The school builds on its previous outstanding provision for children and their families. Staff praise the professional development and research opportunities they receive from experts in the field of early years. This helps them to reflect on how they can continue to improve even further.
- Parents are highly positive about the school. They are fully involved in their children's learning and work with the school to identify learning strategies for school and home.
- Governors are highly ambitious. They bring a wealth of experience to their role. This has helped to maintain the outstanding provision at the school. They have very high expectations of the children and are determined that the school builds on its reputation locally to international recognition.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 12 sessions across all areas of the school, of which four were conducted with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. She also observed the children eating lunch, tidying up and taking part in focused language and mathematics support.
- Discussions were held with members of the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority. The inspector took account of 18 staff questionnaires.
- Account was taken of the 36 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online survey. The inspector spoke to parents and carers at the beginning and end of the day.
- The inspector looked at many documents including those relating to safeguarding, the monitoring of teaching and learning, the development plan, the records on the children's attainment and progress, governing body minutes and children's portfolios.

Inspection team

Mirella Lombardo, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Thomas Coram Centre is an average-sized nursery school. The governing body manages a children's centre; however, it did not form part of this inspection.
- The school provides extended day care throughout the year for children from six months to five years, as well as fully funded full-time places for 38 weeks per year for three- and four-year-old children.
- The majority of children are from minority ethnic backgrounds; most are in the early stages of learning to speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled children and those who have special educational needs supported through early actions is high. The proportion supported at early action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is high.
- The school does not use alternative provision to support any of its children and is not eligible to receive pupil premium or sports funding.
- The school is part of the Eleanor Palmer Teaching School Alliance and regularly provides training for early years staff across the local authority. It works closely with the Institute of Education on a range of research projects relating to early years education.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide children with more opportunities to solve problems in mathematics. Ensure adults make better use of models and images to help children develop their understanding of mathematics even further.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Children join the nursery with skill levels which are well below those expected for their age, in particular in speaking, listening and attention and reading. Many are at the early stages of learning English.
- They make outstanding progress so that by the time they leave the nursery they have exceeded the levels of understanding and skills expected for their age, in particular in the areas of speaking, managing feelings and behaviour. This is because adults plan exciting activities that build on children's understanding and interests.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs who are supported through early action make outstanding progress. This is because they are given individual support by a skilled adult who also works closely with their key person. In this way, all adults are aware of what the child needs to do to improve.
- Children who join the school as a baby or toddler do better than those children who start in the nursery with no previous experience at Thomas Coram. This is because there are systems in place to make sure children move confidently through the school and build trusting relationships with their key person.
- Children who speak English as an additional language make rapid progress. This is because there is a sharp focus on developing communication skills from an early age and parents are actively encouraged to help their child learn at home.
- Early reading and writing skills are taught very well because there are daily sessions to develop language skills and many opportunities for children to write both indoors and outdoors. Reading is a priority in the school and a wide range of good quality books is available for children to look at and read.
- More-able children make outstanding progress because they are taught to develop their skills. For example, in the 'Little Readers' session, children were taught to sound out the letters to read words effectively. They were asked questions about the story and spoke about the character's feelings with understanding.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding because adults approach planning for each child's distinct needs and interests. Teachers meet at the end of each day to check on children's learning and plan the next activities based on what they have found out.
- Adults work very well together to improve the quality of teaching and learning. For example, the school is currently involved in a project where adults work together to plan learning. They observe each other teach and then discuss how they can further improve what they do.
- The physical environment is used well to help children learn. Leaders regularly check how the space is being used to promote learning. The outdoor provision is of a very high standard. There are many opportunities for children to grow vegetables and plant flowers.
- Activities planned are purposeful and sustain children's interest. For example, children were excited by the caterpillars growing in their area and made models of them, talking about the features they had noticed such as the number of legs and how they crawl about. In another session children excitedly made the arms of a giant, discussing how all the different parts would eventually fit together.
- Adults provide interesting ways to teach reading. For example, a group of children were encouraged to use a robot voice to help them distinguish between the different sounds in a word.
- Parents and carers are fully involved in the child's learning. They regularly meet with their child's key person to identify their child's next steps in learning.

- Adults have a strong understanding of how children learn. They plan 'what if?' activities to build on the children's interests and encourage children to learn from their interactions with each other. For example, children played with ice outdoors, discovering its properties by using a range of interesting well-chosen objects.
- There are many opportunities for children to learn about number and shape in the activities provided for them and from the learning environment. However, there are fewer opportunities for children to develop problem-solving skills in mathematics. Use of models and images to further improve children's understanding of mathematics is not consistently well developed.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They have very positive attitudes to learning and are eager to take part in the interesting activities planned for them. They are taught to take turns and wait patiently. For example, they waited their turn in an activity where they had to throw a die and count out objects. In another session they took turns in opening their purse to count out how many 'monsters' they had.
- They take pride in their school, for example by making labels for the flowers outdoors to protect them from being picked.
- Staff and children eat lunch together and this helps them to develop good social skills. This is a polite occasion and everyone clearly enjoys eating lunch together.
- Children's independence is developed well. For example, they register themselves in the morning and help themselves to snacks during the day. They clear their own plates at lunchtime. Older children are given responsibility; for example, they help adults to tidy up the dining area after lunch.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. The key-person system ensures that children develop a close relationship with at least one adult they can confide in.
- Children have access to all parts of the nursery through the garden so that they are familiar with the different parts of the school.
- Children spoke confidently about keeping safe outside school by holding hands and stopping at a road. In school they understood well how to respond to behaviour they do not like, one child saying, 'You say I don't like it or tell an adult.'
- The school encourages regular attendance and children attend very well, demonstrating how much they enjoy coming to school. One parent said, 'Even when she is ill she wants to come.'

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The inspirational leadership and management by the headteacher, supported by a committed and talented team of leaders, have ensured that the school has sustained the high levels of achievement and outstanding practice since the previous inspection.
- There are effective systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning that draw on a wide range of evidence, for example the quality of the physical environment. Leaders focus relentlessly on how the children are learning. They use the outcomes of research to make their practice even better.
- The local authority knows the school well and provides light-touch support as part of the general offer made to schools. It uses the school to support others in improving early years practice.
- Parents are highly positive about the school. They say their children are very well looked after and they make excellent progress in their learning, in particular in communication skills and becoming independent.
- Leaders have successfully created a stable staff. They are highly supportive of the school and the opportunities they have to continuously develop their practice and find ways of improving even further. They value the school's role as a centre for professional development in the early

years for adults across the local authority. This includes specialist staff, such as speech and language therapists, who use the school to develop their practice in an innovative and vibrant environment.

- The curriculum prepares children exceptionally well for the next stage of their education. The school uses its local facilities well, for example the Foundling Museum, the British Museum and the adjacent Coram Fields. Transition arrangements are excellent. Leaders make strong links with local schools to find out how well the children from Thomas Coram are doing when they are in the reception class.
- Children’s social, moral, spiritual and culture development is outstanding. There are many activities to develop children’s understanding of different cultures for example, an international day and visual arts day. Governors have set up a music charity to raise funds to buy musical instruments and to regularly invite musicians into school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are highly ambitious for the school. They bring an extensive range of skills and experience to their role. They know the school very well and make sure they are fully informed about children’s achievement so that they can hold leaders to account. They fully understand the quality of teaching and the link between pay and performance. They manage finances efficiently and ensure equality of opportunity, as evidenced by the outcomes of children who attend the school. Governors regularly carry out skills audits so that they can identify their training needs. They make use of the local authority’s training programme and are highly knowledgeable about safeguarding issues and safe recruitment. They have worked with school leaders to develop systems to encourage attendance based on the centre’s 48-week opening. They have been proactive in raising the profile of the school in leading early years practice as part of a local teaching school alliance. They are fully supportive of the school’s involvement in academic research into how children learn so that staff are continually kept abreast of current thinking. Governors ensure that safeguarding requirements are securely met.

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	100005
Local authority	Camden
Inspection number	425578

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	124
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jon Hoare
Headteacher	Bernadette Duffy OBE
Date of previous school inspection	17–18 January 2011
Telephone number	020 7520 0385
Fax number	020 7520 0386
Email address	admin@thomascoram.camden.sch.uk

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