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Ms Perina Holness
Headteacher
Thomas Coram Centre
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Dear Ms Holness

Short inspection of Thomas Coram Centre

Following my visit to the school on 6 March 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be outstanding in June 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Leaders are determined and relentless in their pursuit of excellence. Since arriving at the school two years ago, your clarity of vision about how children learn best has brought about significant improvements across the school. Leaders at all levels have an excellent understanding of their roles and provide compelling evidence of the impact of their work.

Leaders are innovative and take measured risks to improve outcomes for the children. Staff are committed to putting children at the heart of what they do. Strong team spirit and focus on learning are palpable. Together with your team, you have developed a curriculum that fosters independence, high aspiration and challenge; this has led to strong outcomes for all children. Although the school has had significant leadership changes since the previous inspection, your actions have consolidated progress in all areas of the school.

Your child-focused curriculum, underpinned by research, ensures that all children make substantial progress from varied starting points. The progress-tracking system complements your curriculum and demonstrates strong progress from starting points for children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Children who are just starting to learn English make very rapid progress and excel at your school. Teachers and team leaders monitor and evaluate actions to maximise outcomes. Your strong links with the Coram Family, the Foundling Museum and other schools have further strengthened the impact of your work in the local community.

Governors are highly skilled and effective. They know the school well and are ambitious for the children. They are aware of the strengths of the school and areas for improvement. They have effective strategic plans of action and they are rigorous in their evaluation. They monitor children's progress rigorously and challenge school leaders. Governors and the local authority have complete confidence in the leadership of the school. Parents are very proud of the nursery; they describe the school as 'caring', 'welcoming' and 'helpful'. They say that children are safe and learn well. One parent said, 'We are lucky to have the school at our doorstep.'

Safeguarding is effective.

The school's safeguarding procedures are effective. There is a culture of vigilance across the school. The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed. Governors routinely check that procedures and practices are effective in securing children's safety.

Governors are fully involved in the oversight of safeguarding across the school. Staff have benefited from appropriate training and understand what to do if a safeguarding concern arises. Leaders and staff deal with safeguarding concerns in a timely and appropriate manner. The school has a culture of care, as seen in the way adults work with and interact with children. You have effective systems in place to improve children's attendance and reduce persistent absence.

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry focused on the impact of leaders' actions in continuing to provide high-quality education for all children at the school. I found that leaders view learning from a research standpoint and strongly believe that creativity fosters better self-esteem, independence and risk-taking. The children are eager problem-solvers and confident communicators as a result of this belief.
- Leaders are committed to the children and community. Your vision for the school is articulated through research-informed approaches. As a result, children are motivated, inspired and challenged to try to think through ideas and use high-quality language to express themselves in most activities. Children persist with activities and are not easily distracted, paying attention to details. For example, in the construction area children initiated activities and maintained focus for a sustained period of time. They interact confidently with adults and children alike.
- Adults at the nursery are great role models for the children; they demonstrate clearly what they expect children to achieve. As a result, children make excellent progress from a wide range of starting points. Children approach obstructions and problems with confidence and develop strategies to resolve any difficulties, both individually and collaboratively. Children enter the nursery from a wide range of starting points. They are given the opportunities to build on skills and knowledge and work speedily towards meeting and exceeding age-expected standards. The language-rich environment enables children to communicate with confidence. They are curious about the world around them, they tackle problems and are always happy to explore.

- My second line of enquiry focused on the impact of leaders' action in providing the outstanding provision and curriculum for the younger children at the school. I found that your curriculum provides extensive opportunities for children to develop and acquire language quickly and build on prior knowledge. This is because staff truly understand how children learn best and, as a result, children are curious and confident learners. They show sustained interest in activities; they are inquisitive and resilient.
- You have a higher-than-average proportion of children with SEND in your under-three provision, but like other children they excel. Your strong links with the local authority and Swiss Cottage Special School mean that staff are highly skilled. Staff use a wide range of resources and skills to communicate with children, including sign language, and visual and pictorial cues. This has led to greater and deeper understanding of ideas and concepts for all children, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and autism spectrum disorder.
- My final key line of enquiry focused on the impact of leaders' action in providing the outstanding provision and curriculum for the older children at the school. I found that teaching ensures accelerated development of speaking, listening, communication and language skills. A high proportion of children make accelerated progress from different starting points; many are working at or beyond 30 to 50 months age bands.
- The school curriculum is broad, balanced and exciting, and incorporates British values. Children explore widely and freely, developing skills in well-crafted activities aimed at developing language and communication skills. Formative assessment is continuously used to check understanding, probe and seek children's opinion. Planned visits to the locality enable opportunities to consolidate learning and gain concrete experiences.
- Cultural understanding is deeply woven into your curriculum and it deepens children's understanding. Leaders promote and celebrate the international cultures and identities of the children. Adults support children to develop curiosity, and a love for books and stories from around the world. You engage with parents and involve them in children's learning. For example, to celebrate World Book Day, parents, including governors, came in to read with children.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to refine the curriculum and share best practice across the setting.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Camden. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Maureen Okoye
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

- We visited most lessons together and I held meetings with you and your deputy headteacher to discuss leaders' work to maintain the outstanding quality of education.
- I held meetings with three governors, including the chair of the governing body and the representative of the local authority.
- We looked at samples of pupils' work. I talked informally to children.
- I reviewed a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's current performance, their plans for further improvement and information on children's progress.
- I considered a number of policy documents and records, including safeguarding.
- The views of parents were considered through the 20 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire (Parent View), including written comments and conversations with 10 parents at the nursery entrance. I considered the 33 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff.