Inspection of an outstanding school: Thomas Coram Centre

49 Mecklenburgh Square, London WC1N 2NY

Inspection dates: 23 May 2024

Outcome

Thomas Coram Centre continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Children thrive in this haven of green space in the city. They feel safe because they know adults care for them and their well-being. Children learn to be independent and persevere with their learning. They play together and understand the school's routines and expectations. For example, staff introduce activities with songs and rhymes to help children's readiness to focus on the upcoming learning. Children join in with this eagerly. For instance, children sing "Five Little Ducks" and "The Dinosaurs Song" before starting their lessons. This helps to create a joyful and engaging atmosphere.

Children enjoy talking with adults about their activities. Staff use these conversations to develop children's understanding and stretch their interests. For example, during nature walks in the school's woodland learning area, children discuss the different types of leaves that they collect. Staff help them to use new vocabulary and be curious about the natural world.

All staff have high expectations for children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They reflect carefully on children's learning each day. They adapt what is being taught to ensure that children achieve exceptionally well and learn with enthusiasm. Children with SEND fully participate in all aspects of the school day, from listening attentively to stories like 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt", creating recipes in the 'mud kitchen', to collecting favourite stones and leaves in the school's woodland learning area.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Language and communication are at the heart of the school's curriculum. Staff retell stories using objects, pieces of cloth, and toys to bring them alive for children. Children join in excitedly with rhymes and familiar parts of stories and songs. Staff plan carefully how to use stories to support children's understanding of language and how it works, such as learning about plurals and prepositional words like 'behind,' 'on top,' and 'in front.'

As a result, children become confident using a wider range of language in their play and day-to-day discussions. The curriculum also provides many rich opportunities for children to develop their early writing as well as their understanding of numbers and counting. Adults are experts in helping children to work with increasing independence. They foster in children a real interest in communicating their thoughts and feelings to others.

Children with SEND learn and play well here. Staff quickly identify any needs. They work as a team to support children and ensure that they receive what they need to access the curriculum successfully. The school collaborates closely with families and outside agencies to remove barriers to learning. Due to this intensive input, children, including those with SEND, flourish here.

Children's behaviour is excellent. They learn from adults and their peers about how to behave in school. Children develop their confidence and independence through opportunities to take responsibility. For example, they serve themselves and others at lunch, carefully pouring water and being cautious of warm serving dishes.

Staff are highly skilled. They reflect on children's learning daily and adapt teaching to ensure that children are learning the ambitious curriculum well, while keeping their curiosity and enthusiasm alive. The school builds on children's interests and expands these to broaden their understanding. For example, as children explore and play, they learn the language needed to describe shapes. The curriculum also teaches children about cultures and communities worldwide, including learning about different foods and festivals.

The school's promotion of children's wider development is very strong. Children learn about the world around them, such as the work of a local museum, which works closely with the school. Children also learn about growing fruit and vegetables, including chopping and cooking home-grown pumpkins and potatoes. They enjoy being able to make delicious soup and roast vegetables. The school carefully considers how to work with parents and carers, organising 'Friday Family Fun' events to share what the school does. School leaders work closely with families to emphasise the importance of regular attendance and to help everyone understand school routines and expectations around the beginning and end of the day.

Leaders base their decisions on well-researched educational theory. The governing body maintains a keen view of the school and its work. They have been tenacious in ensuring that the school continues to work in the best interests of the children and families who attend. All staff feel proud to work here and recognise that leaders consider their job satisfaction and welfare.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

When we have judged outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in June 2014.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use Ofsted Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further guidance on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for published performance information about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the definition of children in need of help and protection; pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's pupil premium funding (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	100005
Local authority	Camden
Inspection number	10345614
Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	136
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Lucy Razzall
Headteacher	Perina Holness
Website	www.thomascoram.camden.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 March 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses no alternative provision.
- The school provides full-time places for 46 weeks per year for three- and four-year-old children.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher and other staff. They met with a member of the governing body and spoke to the school improvement partner.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in communication and language, personal, social and emotional development and mathematics. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited classrooms and watched staff interactions with children. Inspectors reviewed children's record books and held meetings with children's key persons.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and children; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts children's interests first.
- The inspectors spoke to a range of staff members and reviewed the responses to Ofsted's online staff surveys. They also considered the views of parents who made responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Adam Vincent, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Curtis Sweetingham	Ofsted Inspector

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