

St Thomas Centre Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103124
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308226
Inspection date	24 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Deana Holdaway HMI

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3-5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	80
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jackie Edwards
Headteacher	Fran Munby
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 0001
School address	Bell Barn Road Lee Bank Birmingham B15 2AF
Telephone number	01214 640003
Fax number	01214 640002

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school, and investigated the following issues:

- the progress children make during their time at the Nursery
- the effectiveness of assessment and tracking
- how well senior leaders evaluate and plan further improvements.

Evidence was gathered from a range of sources, including observation of lessons, discussion with the children and staff, and analysis of school documents. The views of parents and the children themselves were taken into account. Other aspects of the school were not investigated in detail, but the inspection found no evidence to suggest that the school's own judgements, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified; these have been included, where appropriate, in this report.

Description of the school

St Thomas Centre Nursery is part of a Children's Centre providing care and education for children from birth to five years of age. It is situated in the city centre in an area undergoing major urban renewal and development. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than that found nationally and more children than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A high proportion of children are from minority ethnic groups and a fifth of these children are learning English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

St Thomas Centre Nursery is an outstanding school. Every child is valued and the school's depth of care extends beyond the children to their families. The children enter the nursery with standards below those expected for children of their age and leave well on their way to achieving the goals expected of them in all areas of learning. They make good progress because teachers and teaching assistants plan exciting experiences and activities for the children to explore, investigate and consider as they broaden their knowledge, develop their skills and deepen their understanding. All children succeed from their given starting points and there is no significant difference in the achievement of different groups.

Teachers quickly identify children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities by careful observations in lessons and regular reviews of individual needs. Lesson plans integrate specific support, and the specialist knowledge of the staff ensures that all children continue to achieve. A small group of children is taught by a higher ratio of adults. This arrangement has helped children with significant difficulties to improve their concentration, social and communication skills.

Personal development and well-being are excellent. From the very beginning, children are introduced to healthy behaviours and routines. Lessons extend outdoors each day and many visits are planned during the year which introduce the children to different environments and settings, including one week-long residential visit to a farm. The children's faiths and customs are represented well in events across the year. Musical instruments, art and textiles reflect a variety of cultures. Children are expected to behave well and they quickly learn how to share and work together in pairs and groups. Swimming lessons, some lunches and Friday activities include parents, who have welcomed learning alongside their children and expressed some surprise on witnessing them enthusiastically eating a range of fresh fruit and vegetables at lunchtime. Excellent links with health workers successfully extend the school's support to families. Parents overwhelmingly praise the school. One parent commented, 'It's excellent. I recommend the Nursery to everyone I meet!' Another described it accurately as 'a happy, fun-loving educating community'.

The Nursery environment is one of care and security in which carefully planned experiences encourage children to develop their confidence and meet new challenges. As the children play, ride, climb and balance, they too consider their own safety and that of others. They are learning to share and take turns: adults deal swiftly with any upsets. Children enter the Nursery first thing in the morning and settle straight away into their routines. They leave their parents and carers confidently, take off their own coats and choose an activity. There is never a time when children have nothing to do and they approach each activity with enthusiasm and confidence.

Teaching and learning are good overall, though teachers' classroom management, relationships with children and care for their well-being are outstanding. Activities are imaginative, varied and fun. Daily lesson plans respond directly to the previous day's observations, evaluations and conversations with parents. This cycle of assessment and planning ensures that the activities regularly respond to the children's needs, emerging interests or recent local events such as the pantomime, Peter Pan. One daily session is organised in groups according to ability and this arrangement ensures that teachers target their teaching to the children's specific levels of understanding. Whilst this level of assessment leads to imaginative and exciting learning experiences, it is not sufficiently robust to track each child's development and progress in detail

and plan incremental steps of development. The school has also identified this as an area for improvement.

The curriculum is exemplary. The staff plan collaboratively, successfully capture the children's imagination and purposefully engage them in learning. A recent curricular innovation, 'Popular Culture', further captured the children's interest with engaging stimuli. The excellent range of visits adds enrichment to the children's experience of life and learning. By visiting shops, clinics, libraries and building sites, they learn about different models of employment.

The leaders and managers of this successful school are not complacent. Even where the school judges itself as outstanding, it has identified further improvement. The governors commented, 'There is a culture of always looking forward, never a sense of standing still, whether it's responding to children's needs or national initiatives. Change is seen as an opportunity.' The headteacher, in partnership with the deputy headteacher, has a very clear vision for the future. However, the school does not yet have sufficiently robust systems to record evaluations and commit to measurable outcomes when planning future improvements. The headteacher's ability to engage others, including governors, in contributing to decisions has created a united workforce with an excellent ability to achieve in the future.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

As the school only has children aged 3 to 5, there is no requirement to complete this section. The report covers, in full, the Foundation Stage.

What the school should do to improve further

- Introduce robust assessment procedures which track individual children's progress so that steps in learning can be planned incrementally.
- Ensure that evaluations are recorded accurately and that school improvement plans include measurable outcomes.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

25 January 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of St Thomas Centre Nursery, Birmingham B15 2AF

I really enjoyed visiting your excellent school and thank you for showing me the many interesting things you do. I particularly enjoyed being invited to read to you or play along with you in your activities and wasn't that crocodile naughty chasing you around the pirate ship? Please say 'thank you' to your parents and carers for filling in the questionnaire because this helped me to know what they thought of your school.

I was impressed to see how busy you are during the day. From the moment you enter to the moment you leave, you have many exciting things to do. Your toast smelled so inviting first thing in the morning and what wonderful lunches you have! You were eager to show me the books you have in your rooms and I was very pleased to see you knew how to handle books carefully, which way up to hold them and that the story was told in the print. You built some fantastic structures with wood and you confidently used the computers and interactive whiteboard.

I was glad to see that you behave well and help each other out. Always remember to be kind and caring, like the adults in your school. All the staff take care of you really well and want the best for you each of you. They have good plans to make the school even better and I suggested two things to help them with this. One is to write down what you can do so that teachers can see what you should learn next. The other thing is to plan ahead and say clearly how improvements will make things better for you.

Good luck for the future, and remember always to try your best.

Best wishes

Deana Holdaway HMI