

Thornton Heath Early Years Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131723
Local Authority	Croydon
Inspection number	341205
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Wendy Forbes

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 of pupils on the school roll	108
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Caroline Davies
Headteacher	Linda Bellhouse
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2007
School address	Nursery Road Thornton Heath CR7 8RF
Telephone number	020 86840494
Fax number	020 86840494
Email address	head@theyc.croydon.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed all the teachers, practitioners, specialist support providers in both the indoor and outdoor learning areas, for a total of around four hours. Inspectors talked to governors, staff and parents and carers. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's safeguarding procedures, its tracking of children's progress, the school development plan, documentation to support children with additional needs, minutes of the governing body meetings, curricular planning and the 43 questionnaires submitted by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the effectiveness of support for children and families in ensuring children's personal development, particularly those at the early stages of learning English and those children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the extent to which all groups of children make equally good progress in their learning and personal development
- the effectiveness of teaching and the curriculum in ensuring improvements in children's communication, language and literacy and numeracy skills.

Information about the school

Of the two- to four-year-old children on the school's roll, 19 stay all day in the Nursery and the rest attend either morning or afternoon sessions. Most children come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The largest groups are of Black Caribbean or African origin. The main languages spoken by children at an early stage of learning English are Tamil and Urdu. Approximately 25% of children have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with personal and social, severe or moderate learning difficulties. In 2007, the centre was redesignated as a nursery school and children's centre, providing a wide range of extended services to children and their families, and has recently benefited from refurbishment. The centre's provision currently provides care for two- to four-year-olds before- and after-school care, occasional crèche facilities for nought- to eight-year-olds whose parents and carers attend centre courses and child sessions, including Toddle Time, Baby Explorers and Stay and Play. The numbers on roll for holiday care depend on uptake but the school is staffed to take up to 12 children and registered for 68.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Thornton Heath Children's Centre provides a good start to children's education and has improved since the last inspection, most notably in the good quality of teaching and the progress that children now make in their learning. The Nursery's own assessments, supported by the evidence seen during the inspection, show that the children begin at the centre with levels of skills and abilities that are well below those expected for their age. This is especially so in relation to their communication, language and literacy and numeracy skills, as well as aspects of their personal, social and emotional development. Because of the very effective teaching, assessment procedures, curriculum and support, most children make good progress in their learning and leave well prepared for primary school, having developed sound basic skills in early reading, writing and phonic skills, as well as a secure grasp of numbers. Many opportunities are provided to help children to practice counting but there are fewer opportunities for developing their calculation skills, which are weaker as a result. Staff prompt and encourage children to explore and solve problems, though sometimes they miss opportunities to ask more probing questions. A stimulating range of indoor activities provides a good range of learning opportunities; however, the outdoor provision does not always extend children's learning so well.

Parents and carers are very supportive of all that the centre offers. As one said, 'My child just loves everything and runs into the Nursery every day, staff are fantastic.' Throughout the inspection, children were seen enjoying the range of stimulating activities on offer. Aspects of their personal development are particularly good. For example, they have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and how to stay safe. The quality of care is good and is sensitively provided so that all children, particularly those with very specific needs, are included in all activities and encouraged to develop independence but have help close at hand should they need it.

The headteacher provides a clear sense of direction and, working in close partnership with staff and the relatively new governing body, ensures that Nursery and centre staff are both working towards commonly understood goals. Accurate self-evaluation based on information gained from a range of monitoring activities means that senior staff are well informed about the strengths in provision and children's outcomes and where improvements are needed. Given the accuracy of self-evaluation, the rigorous monitoring, improvements since the last inspection and the effectiveness of senior staff, there is good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide more opportunities for children to extend their thinking and vocabulary by:

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- ensuring teachers ask more open and probing questions and follow up answers with further questions
- developing greater use of 'pair talk' during adult-led sessions, so that more children are actively involved in discussion and in developing their ideas.
- Develop the curriculum to include:
 - more day-to-day activities that help children to develop their calculation skills
 - an extended range of outdoor learning opportunities that complement the purposeful and well-developed inside activities.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of children

2

Children begin at the centre with a broad range of skills. They make good progress in their learning and develop skills that are broadly in line with the levels expected for their ages in most aspects of learning. Children develop a good knowledge of the world around them and their physical and creative development often exceeds age-related expectations. Children demonstrate good levels of curiosity and enthusiastically explore the world around them. For example, children were seen enthusiastically looking with a magnifying glass at tiny creatures in the earth tray outside and building designer towers out of large wooden bricks to test for balance. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and achieve well as a result. Those who speak a different language at home develop their English rapidly because the practical nature of the work means they can join in equally with others.

Children's social development is good. They contribute to the smooth running of the school through their good behaviour and consideration for others. Parents and carers do much to enhance children's knowledge and understanding of the world by visiting the school to share their traditions and backgrounds with them, as part of learning projects. The youngest children develop good skills through activities in the sandpit, with the water tray, using the large play structure, and painting. Also, the children develop sensible eating habits through the healthy snacks provided. Children are safe and encouraged to think about how to be safe. Regular attendance supports their learning. Children in the before- and after-school provision and those babies in the centre, also, enjoy their time in care.

These are the grades for children's outcomes

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
Children's achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Children's attainment ¹	3
The quality of children's learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which children feel safe	2
Children's behaviour	2
The extent to which children adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which children develop skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Children's attendance ¹	2
The extent of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Activities provided are practical in nature and structured to promote children's learning and independence. Staff maintain careful notes of observations of each individual child and use this information well to plan the next steps in their learning. The staff prompt and encourage the children to explore and solve problems, though sometimes the staff miss opportunities to ask more probing questions. Adult-led sessions are brisk and of well-judged length. Questioning is used to involve children in their learning during these sessions, but opportunities are sometimes missed to engage more children and develop their ideas by asking them to discuss questions in pairs. Children are carefully monitored to make sure that they work across different learning and development areas. They have exposure to a wide range of learning experiences, both indoors and outside, which provides a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities. However, the planned outdoor activities do not yet provide the same level of challenge as the stimulating and well-designed indoor provision.

Children are provided with enriching experiences such as weekly music and movement and specially planned events such as '□Music Week', which many enjoyed, with visiting Bollywood dancers. Resources are used well to stimulate children's creativity and effective use is made of computers and technology to enhance learning. Specialist resources, such as the '□sensory room', provide good support for children with more complex emotional needs. Children use computers confidently. Many were seen independently matching shapes, ordering pictures, using a CD player and headphones, and deciding what came next in a '□Bob the builder' story. Fun role-play activities engage children well and adults readily model role playing to encourage and show

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children what to do. Improved opportunities for literacy are leading to better reading skills and understanding of letter sounds. Although teaching is good overall, a more robust approach to teaching simple calculation has yet to be fully developed. Staff provide exceptionally good care and support for individual children. This is the case both in the extended provision and the Nursery. Children who become upset or tearful, as they do on occasion, are skillfully managed so that, in no time at all, they are again engaged in fruitful activities.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Strong leadership and management underpin improvement in the centre since the last inspection. Developments in provision contribute to the centre's good overall effectiveness and positive outcomes for all children. The headteacher's good leadership skills and determination to improve provision have ensured that monitoring systems are rigorous and impact positively on teaching. The centre has an accurate overall understanding of itself and knows what is required to create the highest quality of provision overall.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors are relatively new to their roles and are making good strides towards developing their capacity to monitor and challenge due to the good leadership of the very knowledgeable chair. They are fully supportive of the centre and aware of the strengths and areas for improvement. Safeguarding procedures meet all requirements and risk assessments for the safety of the children, both on site and when they go out on visits and trips, are regularly carried out.

Good links with external agencies support the centre's commitment to a 'holistic' approach to developing all aspects of children's learning and personal development and support for families. The strong relationship between home and centre begins when staff visit children's homes before the children start to attend the centre. This first-hand knowledge is used well to engage children in learning from the moment they start. It is also used well to support differing family needs. The centre has a strong and effective commitment to ensuring that all children have equal opportunity to thrive and that there is no discrimination. This is why all groups are making similar progress over time and every child has the same opportunities to join in with activities and make a contribution to the school community. Good planning ensures that community cohesion is promoted

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actively within the centre and in reaching out well into its local community. It is not complacent, however, and is ambitiously developing links at United Kingdom and global level.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are very positive about the centre and appreciate the high quality of care and teaching their children receive and the good range of services and support provided. A very few felt that they were not receiving enough information about their children, or that their child was not making enough progress. The inspection did not substantiate these concerns; however, the centre continues to monitor the progress of children and continually review its systems to ensure that children are making enough progress and that parents and carers receive timely information about how well they are doing.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of children registered at Thornton Heath Children's Centre to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 43 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 108 children registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	35	81	8	19	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	63	13	30	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	25	58	13	30	4	9	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	60	15	35	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	24	56	16	37	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	26	60	16	37	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	53	19	44	1	2	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	21	49	17	40	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	47	18	42	2	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	47	19	44	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	44	19	44	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	20	47	17	40	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	28	65	12	28	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its children's needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its children well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its children.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its children. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a child in their learning and development.
Attainment:	in other phases of school, for example primary schools, attainment is the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. However, there is no national average for three- and four-year-olds. Therefore, in inspections of nursery schools, inspectors take account of expectations in the age-related bands of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well children acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of children. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets children's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which children are learning in nursery sessions and over longer periods of time.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



11 June 2010

Dear Children

Inspection of Thornton Heath Children's Centre, Croydon, CR7 8RS

We enjoyed visiting you recently. We should like to thank you for making us feel so welcome. You get off to a good start to your education which helps you to get ready for primary school.

These are some of the best things we saw.

- Your headteacher and staff work well together to make sure you have a good Nursery and children's centre.
- You are well looked after so that you feel very safe.
- You use the computer well on your own.
- You enjoy your time at the Nursery and get on well with one another.
- There are lots of exciting and interesting activities for you to do.
- You are good at keeping fit and know a lot about foods that are good for you.
- You enjoy planting and growing vegetables.
- You enjoy singing and dancing.
- You enjoy playing on the large outdoor play structure, particularly the slide.
- Your art work is bright and colourful and shows good skills.

There are just a few things that we would like the staff in the Nursery to do next to be even better:

- make sure the staff ask you more questions to make you think hard and also give you a chance to talk to a friend before giving an answer
- give you more activities that help you to work out number problems
- develop the outdoor area so that you enjoy it as much as the activities inside.

I hope you continue to work hard, play well and enjoy your learning.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Forbes

Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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