

# Inspection report for Tree House Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Lambeth
<b>Inspection number</b>	383358
<b>Inspection dates</b>	31 January—1 February 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Kath Beck

<b>Centre leader</b>	Phyllis Hayden
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Holmewood Nursery School
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Tree House Children's Centre

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

An inspection of the maintained nursery school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and one early years inspector. Inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, headteacher, deputy headteacher, children's centre teacher, outreach workers, and parents and carers using the service. They also met with representatives of the local authority, key partners and advisory board. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Tree House Children's Centre is a phase one centre located on the same site as Holmewood Nursery School, in Brixton, London. It serves the Brixton Hill and Tulse Hill wards. This is one of the 20% most deprived areas in the country. The local authority has delegated responsibility for the leadership and management of the centre to the governing body of the nursery school. The advisory board includes representatives from the school's governing body, as well as parents and carers.

The centre was designated with the full core offer in March 2009. It provides childcare, family support, child and family health, job and benefits advice. The school and centre share some of the accommodation and staff. Services are delivered by employees, or by providers commissioned by the local authority. Outreach workers serve several centres.

The area includes private developments, but mostly it consists of social housing and flats. The number of lone and workless families on benefits is well above the national average. Families come from diverse cultures with the largest groups coming from White British, Black African and Black Caribbean backgrounds. Children's level of development when they first start in the Early Years Foundation Stage is well below national expectations. The centre accommodates the school's breakfast and after-

school club, and this provision was inspected as part of the nursery school inspection.

## Inspection judgements

**Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate.**

### Overall effectiveness

**The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families**

**1**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

**The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management**

**1**

## Main findings

Tree House Children’s Centre is outstanding. Inspirational leadership and management are highly successful in ensuring the centre plays a key role in the community. High-quality, targeted and universal services attract over 85% of families in the reach area because they are found to be enjoyable, easily accessed and based on in-depth knowledge of the community and its needs. Staff welcome, support, motivate and empower parents to share the vision that ‘every child and every family really matters’, and that improvements can be made to their lives. As a result, parents, carers and children make excellent progress in their personal, social and educational development.

Safeguarding parents, carers and staff in the community, early intervention and reducing the risk of harm to children at home are vital to the centre’s work. Excellent care, guidance and support provided by the centre, not only in times of crisis, enhance the well-being of families by raising aspirations, and increasing confidence and self-esteem. Equality and diversity are major strengths. In the past year, over one third of dads and male carers have taken part in an initiative to involve them more in their child’s upbringing. Members of the National Theatre have worked with the group to enhance positive involvement of adults in children’s play. One said, ‘I really love coming to the group. It has shown me what to do and I can replicate it at home. It has made a real difference to my life and my relationship with my children.’ Multilingual staff ensure that families for whom English is an additional language are included fully in all that the centre offers.

The centre works closely with its key partners to ensure support, especially for teenage and lone parents, and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, is personalised. Outreach workers liaise with housing managers and this is extremely successful in seeking out harder-to-reach families to access the services they need. For children living in workless households, the centre took part in a pilot project to reduce child poverty. It involved an innovative approach that

engaged Jobcentre Plus directly in the centre and its provision. Many families accessed benefits to which they are entitled, training in skills to enter the workplace and assistance to find and secure employment. This had a significant impact on the economic well-being of many families. The pilot project finished recently. This means Jobcentre Plus representatives no longer visit the centre, to some extent thereby limiting opportunities for more families to access the in-depth knowledge and precise information they require easily.

The pursuit of excellence in all of the centre's activities and its work with key partnerships has led to notable improvements over the last four years. Consequently, provision and outcomes are outstanding. Sophisticated self-evaluation that takes into account robust analysis of data, the views of parents and the advisory board enables leaders and managers to identify very clear areas for improvement. These factors, together with challenging targets that are included in the sharply focused development plan, demonstrate the centre's outstanding capacity to improve still further.

## **What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- In partnership with the local authority, make arrangements to ensure that families can access Jobcentre Plus services easily.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>1</b>
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The behaviour of the children in the centre is excellent and they help to keep each other safe. Parents are clear that they too feel very safe and secure in the centre. Risk assessments are thorough and adults using the centre are made fully aware of their responsibilities to protect the children. Holiday clubs, home visits to advise on safety, child safety week, and visits to the centre by the fire service enable children and parents to minimise the risk of harm. Data show that the centre has made an important contribution to the reduction in the number of children admitted to hospital within the area.

Staff are quick to identify the range of family concerns early and intervene rapidly in managing the different issues arising in families from all backgrounds. Meetings with other professionals ensure a fully integrated approach to children subject to the Common Assessment Framework or a child protection plan. These partnerships result in very effective customised approaches that help to resolve problems. Intensive support in raising parenting skills through trusting relationships between staff at the centre means that some children are no longer a cause for concern.

All meals and snacks provided by the centre are healthy. Such good examples, individual advice and courses about food hygiene and healthy diets enable families to lead healthier lifestyles. The dads' and male carers' group has established a garden

where children grow healthy food, cook and eat it. A high number of mothers attending the centre initiate and continue to breastfeed their babies beyond eight weeks because of excellent advice from a midwife. 'Jazzamatazz' promotes understanding of the need for healthy exercise for carers of all ages in a fun way. The importance of opportunities for children to play outside in all weathers is demonstrated by staff during a range of activities.

The wide range of activities on offer is very effective in promoting mental health and positive relationships between parent and child. They reduce the sense of isolation as parents make new friends from different backgrounds and share their experiences of bringing up young children. Tailored support for families with concerns about relationships, housing or finances empowers them to make informed decisions.

Families make excellent progress educationally and in their personal and social development through captivating and enjoyable activities. They appreciate fully the ways their children are prepared for their transfer into the nursery school, especially if they have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The centre shares exceptional outdoor provision with the nursery school that allows their children to become curious, to explore and to develop their physical skills. The 'Book Crawl' and other sessions promote strongly children's early communication and literacy skills. One parent wrote, 'Our boys' concentration, communication and language skills have benefited immeasurably from their attendance at these entertaining sessions.' Consequently, children achieve very well in these aspects of national assessment at the age of five.

Adults and teenage parents take courses that lead to accreditation and qualifications including finance and childcare. These help them into employment. Effective guidance in accessing benefits to which families are entitled is improving their economic stability. This is particularly supportive for those in greatest need. That said, the availability of this information is to some extent limited now that Jobcentre Plus representatives no longer provide appointments at the centre.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for families:*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships, and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future, and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>stability and independence including access to training and employment.</b>	
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### **How good is the provision?**

<b>1</b>
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The centre manager, together with the local authority, makes excellent use of data, feedback from parents and other initiatives to plan an enjoyable programme that is tailored to meet individual needs. An excellent practical programme enables parents to understand how their children learn through play. Sessions provided for targeted families offer intensive support in enhancing relationships and improving children's social skills. They take place at times when it is easier for most parents to attend. Among the hard-to-reach groups, outreach workers promote strongly the importance of sharing books with children at an early age. They provide packs of excellent story books and skilled volunteer support to those who find this difficult. As a result of this work, the percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest is reducing significantly.

Parenting, health, computer and dance courses are very popular and engage carers from all backgrounds and all ages. Older carers particularly spoke of their pleasure at being able to help their grandchildren when using a computer at home. A programme for childcare providers and associate carers enhances the skills of childminders and improves outcomes for children in the community. 'Face to Face' courses help adult learners to set personal goals and negotiate the manner in which the centre can help them to achieve their aspirations. Adult achievements are celebrated with the presentation of certificates at awards ceremonies, sometimes in the Town Hall. These are highly valued. The 'New Year New You' project with Jobcentre Plus was particularly successful in raising the financial awareness of those most in need, as well as increasing confidence and skills needed in the workplace. Consequently, 22 adults, including teenage parents, gained work in schools, financial administration and retail.

Families are confident to ask for help in times of difficulty as they receive excellent care. Personalised support from commissioned services, staff and outreach workers helps them to access specific advice on a wide range of issues including smoking, alcohol, sexual health, drug abuse and domestic violence. Childcare provided by the centre is high quality.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision:*

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are the leadership and management?

<b>1</b>
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The centre manager is very successful in inspiring a shared sense of purpose among other leaders, managers, staff and parents to make a difference to children's lives. In the last four years, the centre has gone from strength to strength. Initially, it focused on play activities for the children. Now it covers its full core offer in depth and engages very successfully with most families within the reach area.

Roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability are very clear and understood by all. Robust self-evaluation procedures include the rigorous monitoring of the provision of all services and analysis of high-quality data from the local authority. It also includes the views of the advisory board, staff, parents, carers and children. The information collected contributes very effectively to decisions that bring about rapid changes to further improve outcomes across all target groups. Progress towards longer-term challenging targets and their intended impact is checked thoroughly by the advisory board.

The centre exemplifies high-quality practice in safeguarding. Robust policies and procedures for safer recruitment, Criminal Records Bureau checks, and health and safety are implemented fully. Outreach workers and staff in the centre are highly trained in recognising symptoms of abuse and matters that impact on the well-being of individuals or their families. They follow up all concerns meticulously. Assessments carried out under the Common Assessment Framework and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well informed. Case studies confirm that the centre works with key agencies to identify and protect children and vulnerable adults from all forms of abuse, including domestic violence, very effectively.

Inclusion, equality and diversity are promoted strongly enabling excellent levels of user engagement. Strong partnerships mean the centre offers a highly cohesive package of integrated services, especially for teenage and lone parents. Users are supported fully in training through the provision of crèche facilities. Innovative initiatives have increased the number of dads or male carers attending the centre, and of adults in work. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive very effective support. The carer of a child with special educational needs said, 'I was lost before I came here, but with help, I know what to do.' Parents or carers with skills in literacy enjoy the opportunities they receive to support families in helping their children to read.

The centre provides excellent value for money. High-quality provision identified in the nursery school inspection is mirrored in the centre. Shared accommodation and staffing means resources are deployed to best effect. Weekend events and holiday clubs benefit the community. One carer, reflecting the views of many, wrote 'Staff at the centre have created a unique and wonderful oasis for parents and carers in the area.'

*These are the grades for leadership and management:*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>1</b>

## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection**

The inspection of Holmewood Nursery School was used to inform the judgements made during this inspection. The nursery was inspected on 30–31 January and its effectiveness was judged outstanding.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaints procedure: raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted* which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Tree House Children's Centre on 31 January and 1 February 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Thank you for meeting with us and contributing to the inspection. You told us that the centre plays an important role in your community. You said that the centre

manager and her staff always give you a warm welcome. They make you feel special, that your views matter and that you can make changes that improve your lives. This is why it is very successful in attracting most of the families with children under five living close by.

The centre provides you with excellent care, guidance and support when you have problems that are hard to deal with on your own. It also helps you when you want to work out the steps you need to take to help your children at home or gain the skills you need to have to go to work. With the support of the centre, you achieve your ambitions, regain confidence and make changes for the better. You like the way that the centre introduces you to new friends from all backgrounds so that you do not feel isolated. This helps you to understand that many parents have similar experiences to you in bringing up their children. Your safety and that of the children is paramount and staff step in quickly if they think the children are at risk of harm. You mentioned that you feel very safe when you are in the centre, and that you are provided with very good advice about how to keep safe at home and when you are out in the community. Together with the children, you really enjoyed the visit of the fire brigade and the fire engine. You received good advice about fire prevention and the children learned a lot about the power of water when it is put under pressure.

Everyone, regardless of their background or need, is welcome at the centre. The dads' and male carers' group is very popular. You told us you like all the activities, but especially those that are led by a member of the National Theatre who helps you to make up plays with your children. One of you said, 'I really love coming to the group. It has shown me what to do and I can do the same at home. It has made a real difference to my life and my relationship with my children.' The centre appreciates the help of this group in making the allotment for the children to grow healthy foods. Most of you speak English or know someone who can help you translate, but if you need assistance, multilingual staff are on hand to ensure that you are included fully in all that the centre offers. A carer of a child with special educational needs is grateful for the help the family has received; 'I was lost before I came here, but with help, I know what to do.' Parents or carers with skills, particularly in literacy, are pleased to volunteer and help families in sharing books with their children.

Staff at the centre know a great deal about how to help you with your children. They do not always have the in-depth knowledge to overcome major issues with health, housing and finance. Instead, they support you very well when they put you in touch with the right organisation so that you receive help that meets your specific needs. Outreach workers are extremely successful in helping those of you who might be sensitive about contacting the centre to get in touch and receive the advice and support you also need. To help those of you who have been unable to find work, the centre took part in a pilot project with Jobcentre Plus. Their representatives worked in an office on the site and played alongside you with your children. This helped many of you to access the benefits to which you are entitled, training in skills you needed to work and assistance to find and secure employment. This, together with the 'New Year New You' project, ensured many of you achieved the goals you set

yourself. The pilot project finished recently. This means Jobcentre Plus representatives no longer visit the centre, limiting opportunities for more of you to improve the finances in your family.

The staff at the centre want everything to be the best. Those of you who have been involved in the centre over a period of time have seen huge improvements over the last four years. All the activities you take part in with your children or with other adults are high quality. This is because the centre manager, the members of the advisory board and senior leaders in the nursery school check everything that is provided meets your needs. They know you very well and enable you to make important contributions to the design of the programme of events. The recent inspection of the nursery found that it, too, was outstanding. One carer, speaking on your behalf, summed up the provision at Tree House by saying, 'Staff at the centre have created a unique and wonderful oasis for parents and carers in the area.'

Even an outstanding centre can improve. We have asked the leaders and managers to work in partnership with the local authority to make arrangements to ensure that families can access Jobcentre Plus services easily.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).