

# Inspection report for Gospel Oak Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Camden
<b>Inspection number</b>	362974
<b>Inspection dates</b>	7–8 November 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Susan Walsh

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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Gospel Oak Early Years Provision

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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**361**

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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.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers, outreach workers, health and education professionals, and representatives of the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation and spoke with families who use the centre

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## Information about the centre

This is a phase one centre which was designated in 2003. It is one of 15 children's centres in Camden organised in five distinct localities. Each locality includes several centres offering integrated care, health services and education. The centre meets its core purpose. Gospel Oak Children's Centre falls under the Kentish Town West locality, which is comprised of four wards and has 2,908 children aged under five, with 683 living in the reach area for Gospel Oak Children's Centre. The centre is managed by Camden local authority. Leadership arrangements are jointly overseen by a children's centre head, who manages the integrated care and early years education aspects, and a children's centre locality manager responsible for ensuring delivery of all other locality services, either directly or through partnership or commissioning arrangements. Harmood Children's Centre is the other children's centre located in the Kentish Town West locality and shares many of the same staff including the locality manager and family support workers. Governance arrangements reflect this model, with one advisory board representing the Kentish Town West locality. The advisory board consists of key partners including agency representatives, parents and the local authority.

A similar proportion of families that live in the locality are from White European, Bangladeshi and Black African heritages, but slightly more come from White British backgrounds. There is an increasing number of families from Somali and the Congo.

The area served by the centre has 43% of its children living in poverty and 38% of children live in workless households who claim benefits. There are large housing estates in the locality with many low income families living in council tenancies. Overcrowding and a scarcity of outdoor space, plus a lack of reasonably priced accommodation, are important issues that are faced by families in the reach area.

The centre has on-site early years provision which is registered for a maximum of 73 children aged from four months to four years. This is reported on separately. Children in the centre's reach area are entering early years education with skills that are below those expected for their age.

## 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**

**2**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**2**

## Main findings

Gospel Oak Children's Centre provides a good service for its families. It provides outstanding care, guidance and support, especially in times of crisis. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used very well to ensure that families can access appropriate help for their individual requirements. Leaders, managers and staff understand the needs of the local area. For example, a close partnership with the local authority housing department guarantees that family support workers are knowledgeable about housing issues and that parents are able to talk to experts who can help them to resolve their problems. Similarly, families who are concerned about changes to benefit systems are given good access to specialist advice. The employability service is very much appreciated by parents who describe how workers have helped them to strengthen their curriculum vitae, enhance their interview skills and improve their qualifications. Many parents have been able to gain employment and improve financial security for their families. One parent spoke for many when she said, 'It has changed everything for the future.'

Other strengths include the support provided for mothers who wish to breastfeed, the promotion of oral hygiene, immunisation and the provision of emotional support for families including those whose children have disabilities or special education needs. The number of families accessing the centre is improving, but centre

managers know there is more to do ensure that all families take full advantage of the good quality provision on offer. The centre is not always aware of the exact location of families with children under five. Although the range of services is good, many are offered elsewhere and the Gospel Oak building is difficult to locate because of a lack of signs. The good quality drop-in sessions are generally enjoyed by parents and children and promote good learning. However, there is a lack of an established routine to welcome new families to these drop ins. Consequently, a small number of less confident parents feel awkward when attending sessions.

Staff are enthusiastic and committed and share the managers' ambitious vision for the future. The centre uses the data it has well but much of this data relates to the whole of Camden local authority rather than the specific area served by the centre. This makes it difficult for managers to set numerical targets when planning for improvements and for them to measure the impact of the centre's work. In particular, the centre lacks local data relating to outcomes for health and the level of children's skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre knows its own strengths and weaknesses well but the timetable for annual conversations with senior managers in the local authority has been delayed. . The centre meets safeguarding requirements and promotes equality and diversity well.

There have been improvements in many of the outcomes for families, including increasing rates for sustaining breastfeeding and children's skills at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. High-quality staff training, especially relating to promoting health, provision for early years education and understanding safeguarding issues, has underpinned these improvements. These, together with accurate self-evaluation and prompt action to tackle any weaknesses, illustrate the centre's good capacity to improve further.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Increase the number of families registering with the centre and attending activities by:
  - raising the profile of the centre including providing better signage
  - planning and providing more good quality activities in the Gospel Oak building that will meet the needs of local families
  - developing systems that make less confident parents feel more comfortable when attending activities
  - working with strategic partners to obtain accurate information about the location of families.
- Identify exactly where to target further services and improve the measurement of the longer-term impact of the centre's work by working with health partners, the local authority and neighbourhood schools to obtain more local information about outcomes for families.
- Ensure that discussions between senior members of staff in the local authority and managers in the children's centre takes place in the near future.

## How good are outcomes for families?

2

Good partnerships with health professionals, together with the hard work of the centre staff, ensure that parents of young children and babies are offered a good level of support. The excellent work of Camden Baby Feeding Service has ensured that mothers who wish to breastfeed receive high-quality peer support immediately after giving birth. It also ensures that this continues after they have brought their babies home from hospital. As a result, breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks are well above the national average at 76%. The centre is aware that about 11% of children in Camden are obese at the end of the Reception Year, which is above the national average. Parents have found courses such as Starting Solids, Next Steps and Fussy Eating very valuable in helping them to understand healthy eating and portion control. For example, one parent described how she now had a better understanding of the finger foods that could be introduced to her baby and others talked about portion sizes. Too few children were being immunised against disease but concerted efforts by family support workers, staff in the Nursery and health professionals have resulted in substantial improvements to immunisation rates. A similar effort has been made to make sure that children have access to good quality dental care.

The numbers of children who are subject to child protection plans is decreasing year on year. This is because the centre is good at identifying those who are find it difficult to cope with being a parent and provides timely support. The e-CAF (electronic Common Assessment Framework) system is used very well to ensure that parents receive a carefully tailored package of support that includes a wide range of external agencies. In particular, the centre staff works very closely with staff from social services to make sure that children are kept safe from harm and that looked after children are well cared for. The centre's good working relationship with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has resulted in staff being very aware of children's and parents' emotional needs and sensitive to the impact of social isolation and worries about housing and money on mental health. CAMHS has also contributed to the delivery of parenting courses, such as Incredible Years, which have helped parents to improve their skills. Good contact with support groups for families from a wide range of backgrounds including Somali, Congolese and Bengali traditions helps parents to improve their confidence and assists them to access local services. The concerns of parents of children with disabilities and special educational needs are taken seriously and early diagnosis means that any delays in children's development can be quickly addressed.

Children attending the centre's provision make good progress in their learning and behave well. Enjoyment levels are high and parents report that their children benefit from making friends and mixing with children with different backgrounds. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect, tolerance and understanding. The proportion of children who go on to reach expected levels in their personal, social and emotional development and in communication, language and literacy at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved significantly across the borough and the percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is closing swiftly and

securely. The two-year-old places scheme has contributed to this. Parents appreciate the centre's good links with the speech and language therapy service and say that swift referral to specialist help has resulted in their children improving their ability to communicate. Careful attention has been paid to meeting the needs of target groups including workless families and those living in poverty. Successful courses have helped parents support their children's progress in literacy and mathematics as well as improving their own skills, whilst other parents have been signposted to other suitable courses. The employability service has had a particularly good impact on improving economic outcomes for families and many parents have high aspirations that they are striving to meet.

*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>2</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>2</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>2</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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment</b>	<b>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

The needs of families are assessed sensitively and appropriately via a combination of welcome phone calls, visits and the use of parent friendly CAFs. Staff were aware that until recently only 62% of local families had registered with the children's centre. Close work with the housing department has identified families who may not have registered with the centre and provided help for families who frequently move home. Well-targeted events, such as the one at the local city farm, have increased registration to 72%. However, over a quarter of local families are still not accessing the good quality services that are provided by the centre because of a lack of specific data from health partners. This continues to hamper the centre's sterling efforts to increase registrations. That said, those families who do register make good use of what is on offer.

The good quality activities provided by the centre are varied, well matched to local needs. They promote purposeful learning, enjoyment and development; ultimately, they successfully improve parenting and outcomes for children and their families. Although the centre is located in the heart of the local community, it is difficult to

find, prompting one parent to describe the centre as a 'well kept secret'. Occasionally, parents feel awkward when attending sessions and do not return for a second time.

The outreach provided by the centre is of exceptional quality. Parents frequently report that support from family support workers has had a significant impact on their lives. Staff from a wide range of backgrounds speak many different languages and can engage with families from many ethnic heritages and understand the cultural identity of families such as those from Somali, Congolese and Bengali backgrounds, as well as those from White British backgrounds. Potentially vulnerable families are swiftly identified and receive high-quality individual support particularly in times of crisis. The centre ensures that high-quality information about many aspects of parenting, including advice about how to keep children healthy and safe, is freely available to parents and carers.

*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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>2</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?**

**2**

Leadership at all levels is focused clearly on providing a good range of services that are well matched to the needs of the families in the reach area. Leaders are passionate about improving the lives of their families, but they are also reflective and keen to develop practice within the centre constantly. Teamwork among staff is very good and contributes well to the positive ethos and warm welcome that are provided for visitors. Rigorous professional supervision has been pivotal in ensuring that the performance of the family support workers is exceptional. The local authority provides a good level of support. Its careful monitoring of the quality of drop-in sessions and early years provisions has encouraged staff to continually develop their skills. Systems of accountability are clear. Managers in the local authority have a very clear understanding of the centre's strengths and where improvements could be made, but the timetable for the annual conversation has been moved from October to January due to changes to the most senior staff within the authority. The development plan for the locality sets out priorities clearly but lacks numerical targets against which outcomes could be measured. Much of the data relate to outcomes for the whole borough and not just Gospel Oaks. In particular, the centre lacks local data for key performance indicators relating to health and outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. This makes it difficult to set specific targets and to measure the impact of their efforts. Nevertheless, the advisory board is increasingly



able to provide a greater level of challenge and the centre does seek regular feedback from parents and carers about the quality of its services and makes considerable use of this information to continuously refine what it offers.

The centre's safeguarding arrangements, policies and procedures are good. Staff training is thorough, and ensures that staff are sensitive to child protection issues, including problems arising from domestic violence and mental health issues, and are able to intervene at an early stage. The centre promotes equality and diversity well. The inclusion of all children and families is central to its work. The centre caters particularly well for parents and children with disabilities or special educational needs. For example, the on-site childcare provides early education and child care places for children with autistic spectrum disorder. It also works very closely with homeless families. Staff know where to target services. Case studies provide many examples of good outcomes for children and their families. Staff from many agencies work exceptionally well together in order to help and support families, but communication at strategic level about sharing important data is not always as effective. The locality model helps to ensure that the day-to-day management runs smoothly and that good use is made of resources, especially staff. Consequently, the centre offers good value for money.

*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>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>2</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>2</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>2</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>2</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>2</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>2</b>

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

Inspectors took into account the inspection report relating to Gospel Oak Early Years Provision which was completed in November 2010. This inspection report judged childcare to be good. The inspection also took into account the inspection of Harmood Children's Centre which was completed in September 2012.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Gospel Oak Centre on 7 and 8 November 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all the people who spoke to us when we visited the centre. Many of you told us what you thought about the centre and its activities. Your views were very helpful. It is clear that you are pleased with what the centre has to offer. This is because the children's centre provides a good range of services that are helping to improve the quality of life for children and families in the Gospel Oak area. The centre welcomes families from a very wide of backgrounds and it is great to know that you all get on well together and are able to learn from each other's experiences. In particular, the centre is good at helping families whose children who have disabilities or special educational needs and those who are homeless.

We were pleased to hear that you find the help of the family support workers so valuable. We agree that the quality of care, guidance and support provided is outstanding. We were particularly pleased to see the parent friendly common assessment forms that link pictures to smiley faces so you can easy record where you have concerns. This is very helpful for all parents, including the ones who are just beginning to speak English. You told us that the centre often helps you to manage the problems you have with housing. This is because the centre has a very useful partnership with the local authority housing department. We know that many of you are very concerned about how changes to the benefit system will affect your income and it is good to know that workers in the centre have made sure that you get timely and accurate advice. It was wonderful to hear that many of you have improved your qualifications and skills. You value the employability service because it helps you to fill in job applications, improve your interview skills and even helps to fund clothing so that you can dress appropriately for interviews. This, together with your own rising levels of confidence, has helped many of you gain employment.

The centre has done a lot to improve health for children and families in the area. Camden Baby Feeding Service ensures that mothers who wish to breastfeed are very well supported and, as a result, breastfeeding rates in Camden are well above the national average. Dental health is improving and more children are being immunised against infectious diseases because of the hard work of the workers in the centre. Too many children in Camden are overweight, but the centre is providing courses that are helping parents to understand healthy eating and portion control. Many of you told us that activities in the centre had helped you to feel less isolated and resulted in you and your children making new friends. The centre works hard to make sure children are safe and to provide good quality emotional support to children and their parents. It works closely with social services and, when necessary, takes swift action to prevent children being placed in danger.

Children's confidence and their communication skills are improving. You told us that you were particularly pleased with the centre's close links with the speech and language therapy service. Although many of you really value the drop-in sessions because they help you to understand how your children learn through play, a small number of parents feel awkward when they join new sessions, so we have asked managers to develop systems that will help improve this.

The centre has recognised that not enough families were registered, and therefore able to attend activities, and has worked hard to improve this. Consequently, registration has increased by 10% in the last year. However, the centre knows that there is more to do to make sure that all the families in the reach area have access to the good quality activities on offer. Many of the activities are run at the neighbouring centre or in the local community and there are limited activities in the Gospel Oak Children's Centre building. Although the centre is located in the heart of the local community, it is difficult to find and a number of local families are not aware of its existence. We have asked the centre to improve this and to work with their health partners to make sure they get detailed information about where families with children under five are located.

The centre is well managed by experienced leaders who are supported by a skilled and enthusiastic staff. They work well together to make sure that activities are of a good quality and effectively improve outcomes for children and their families. Managers listen carefully to the feedback given by those who attend activities and use that information to enhance the quality of provision when necessary. Although they get good support from the local authority, the timetable for the annual conversation, when the centre managers and local authority staff talk about the strengths of the centre and help pinpoint the areas for development, has been delayed. This is because of changes to senior staff within the authority. We have asked the local authority to rectify this. The centre plans carefully to make sure that it continues to develop; however, it finds it difficult to set sharp targets for improvement and to measure the impact of its work. This is because much of the information it receives is about the outcomes for families across the whole of the borough of Camden. We have asked the centre to work with senior staff from health and education to improve data, including making sure that there is enough specific information about key outcomes for local families. Working partnerships that affect the day-to-day well-being of children and families are especially good and ensure that families are able to access high-quality help, advice and support.

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