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Mr John Coughlan CBE  
Director of Children's Services  
Children's Services Department  
Hampshire County Council  
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The Castle  
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Dear Mr Coughlan

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Hampshire County Council children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Hampshire County Council which was conducted on 3 and 4 November 2010. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to the annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year. I would like to thank all of the staff we met for their assistance in undertaking this inspection.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising any child abuse and neglect. Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including: electronic case records; supervision files and notes; observation of social workers and senior practitioners undertaking referral and assessment duties; and other information provided by staff and managers. Inspectors also spoke to a range of staff including managers, social workers, other practitioners and administrative staff.

The inspection identified areas of strength and areas of practice that met requirements, with some areas for development.

Three of the areas for development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in August 2009 have been met. Managers' decision making in relation to initial contacts and referrals is now evident on the electronic file, supported by a clear rationale. A system to ensure that receipts of referrals are sent to referring agencies is now in place. Work on two areas for development is continuing. Although the council has put in place a range of measures to improve the quality of assessments and record keeping, securing consistency across all teams must remain a key focus.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

The area of priority action identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements in August 2010 has been addressed. The council has restructured the contact and referral service effectively.

From the evidence gathered, the following features of the service were identified:

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Senior managers took decisive action after the last unannounced inspection and following a rigorous review of performance and service provision, child protection services have been strengthened. Considerable additional resources have been committed to front line services and strategic oversight now provides effective challenge.</li> <li>▪ The emergency duty team continues to provide a well resourced, robust and assured service for children and their families. Excellent communication and handover arrangements ensure child protection concerns are managed effectively.</li> <li>▪ The arrangements for screening initial contacts through the Hantsdirect call centre are particularly effective and efficient. The social work team operating from the centre respond rapidly to all contacts, they assess these fully and provide good quality background information and recommendations to the referral and assessment teams. This enables efficient, effective and timely assessment of risk.</li> <li>▪ Staff have access to quality training, enabling particularly effective learning from serious case reviews, with strong systems for dissemination.</li> </ul>
<b>The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Section 47 investigations are thorough and effective. The action needed to ensure the safety of children and young people is identified and implemented promptly. Efficient collaborative working between partner agencies ensures that needs and risks are identified appropriately.</li> <li>▪ Agreed inter-agency thresholds are in place for services to children in need. These are consistently applied. Practice and procedures conform to statutory requirements and guidance in key respects.</li> <li>▪ Appropriate arrangements for case file auditing are in place. In this way individual and team practice is effectively monitored. The lessons learnt are then disseminated between teams and used to improve practice.</li> <li>▪ Effective management information systems are in place and facilitate closer monitoring of the quality and timeliness of work. Significant additional and dedicated administrative resources have been provided within each team to</li> </ul>

support managers and improve efficiency.

- Children and families are routinely involved in assessments and their views are appropriately recorded and taken into account when planning how to meet children's needs.
- There is an effective working relationship between referral and assessment teams and the children with disability team; this ensures a timely response to requests for services for disabled children.

#### **Areas for development**

- Caseloads for some social workers are too high, as a result timely assessment and service provision is not provided for all children and young people.
- Some aspects of record keeping remains inconsistent across the county. While there is a clear instruction that chronologies must be on file, in accordance with standard practice, there has been delay in completing these in too many cases. This has prevented social workers from closing or transferring work to other teams. This was an area for development at the previous inspection.
- In too many of the cases seen by inspectors, equality and diversity issues were not explored effectively and the relevance of these issues was not applied appropriately to the assessments made.
- The quality of core assessments remains too variable with some lacking sufficient rigour and analysis across the county. Despite progress since last year, this remains an area for development.

Any areas for development identified above will be specifically considered in any future inspection of services to safeguard children within your area.

Yours sincerely

**Martin Davis**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Andrew Smith OBE, Chief Executive, Hampshire County Council  
Claire Chamberlain, Chair of Hampshire Safeguarding Children Board  
Councillor Roy Perry, Lead Member for Children's Services, Hampshire County Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education