9 September 2010

Mr Alan Wood  
Director of Children and Families  
London Borough of Hackney  
The Learning Trust  
TLC Building  
1 Reading Lane  
London  
E8 1GQ  

Dear Mr Wood

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Hackney 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 the London Borough of Hackney Council which was conducted on 10 and 11 August 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 satisfactory practice, with some areas for development.

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

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<th>Strengths</th>
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<td>- A good and effective range of preventative services are provided to ensure vulnerable children and their families are well supported and not inappropriately referred to children’s social care.</td>
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- Social workers are well supported by accessible managers, resulting in high staff morale and professional commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

- Good training and development opportunities for social workers are actively promoted by the council and the Local Safeguarding Children Board and are well regarded.

### Satisfactory practice

- Thresholds for access to children’s social care and protocols for collaborative working are clearly defined and understood by partner agencies.

- Appropriate decisions about contacts and referrals are made in accordance with statutory timescales with effective managerial oversight and decision making. There are no unallocated cases.

- Child protection enquiries are thorough and timely and are always carried out by a qualified social worker.

- Effective partnership working across all agencies, including the police child abuse investigation team, results in timely and planned action to protect children and young people.

- When completed, assessments are detailed and thorough. Risk and protective factors are appropriately identified.

- The ethnic, cultural and disability needs of children and their families are well identified and appropriately addressed within assessment and casework.

- Children and young people are seen alone and involved appropriately in assessments. Their views and those of their carers are taken into account when making plans for their future.

- Completed assessments and cases to be transferred to other teams are audited and signed off by managers enabling a smooth transition of cases between teams.

- Social workers have manageable caseloads, receive regular supervision and good case direction from their managers and from weekly group discussion within teams.

- An appropriate range of performance management information is collected to support operational management of the access and assessment service. Audit processes are clear, established and contribute to service development.

- Links between the emergency duty service and daytime service are clear and co-ordinated. Appropriate information is shared promptly.
## Areas for development

- Case chronologies are not always accessible or recorded on the electronic information system to enable a clear overview of intervention with a family to be obtained.

- Information gathered for the purpose of an assessment is sometimes inappropriately recorded on the case record rather than as an initial assessment. When the case record is occasionally used in this way, this results in insufficient analysis, recommendations and action plans.

- Assessments of children in sibling groups are included within one assessment document and not recorded separately, which may result in incomplete consideration of their individual needs.

- The quality of referrals from other agencies is inconsistent. Some insufficiently define risk for the child and therefore place additional demands on the access and assessment service.

- The common assessment framework is not well understood by partner agencies resulting in confusion about when to use it and how it works with other assessment processes.

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

Yours sincerely

**Derek Churchman**  
**Her Majesty’s Inspector**

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Copy:  Tim Shields, Chief Executive, London Borough of Hackney  
Fran Pearson, Chair of Hackney Safeguarding Children Board  
Clare Chamberlain, Interim Independent Chair of Hackney Safeguarding Children Board  
Rita Krishna, Lead Member for Children’s Services, London Borough of Hackney  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education