

4 June 2010

Mrs Moira Swann
Corporate Director of Children's Services
Cumbria County Council
5 Portland Place
Carlisle
CA1 1PU

Dear Mrs Swann

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Cumbria 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 Cumbria County Council which was conducted on 4 and 5 May 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:

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Experienced staff on duty and in assessment and safeguarding teams operate within an effective multi-agency framework and provide good advice and support to external agencies and professionals on issues raised about the care and welfare of children.▪ The electronic recording system is used effectively by staff and provides a coherent structure for case recording and data collection. Chronologies and



case histories are particularly strong features.

- The quality of recording and planning is consistently good with clear aims and objectives which are routinely monitored for outcomes and impact.
- Audit systems are robust and include single agency, multi-agency and thematic reviews. Action plans arising from audits are closely monitored within localities and at county level.
- Duty, assessment and safeguarding staff communicate clearly with parents and carers regarding plans and actions needed to safeguard children's welfare. A good level of contact is maintained by social workers with children and their families during assessments and planning.
- Clear systems and processes are in place to ensure that all staff receive feedback on learning from serious case reviews and national enquiries.
- The children's services locality model is clear and facilitates the effective processing of contacts, referrals and assessments.

Satisfactory practice

- Contacts in respect of children in need or those considered to be at risk of harm are suitably prioritised and processes for decision-making are clear.
- All cases are allocated to ensure that initial and core assessments and investigations are undertaken in a timely manner by suitably qualified social workers.
- Social workers receive regular supervision and support from their managers who maintain an effective day to day overview of incoming contacts and work progress.
- Duty, assessment and safeguarding workforces are stable with minimal reliance on the use of agency staff. Staff value being members of cohesive teams and are positive in the work they undertake and about the training and support they receive.
- Most children and young people are routinely seen alone during assessments and investigations and their views are considered in care planning.
- Appropriate consideration is given to the diverse needs of children and their families and this is reflected in the quality of work with children with disabilities and children from minority groups.
- The emergency duty team provides an effective out of hours service. Communication processes between emergency duty team members and the day duty and assessment services, the police and health services are clear.

- Feedback following contact is routinely provided to referrers on actions to be taken and the outcome of assessments and investigations.
- The development of local partnerships supported by integrated working coordinators is facilitating the early filtering of cases to appropriately support children and families and reduce the need for higher level interventions.

Areas for development

- The specific recording of the views of children and young people is not given sufficient prominence within the electronic recording system to ensure this aspect is more readily accessible to practitioners and managers in assessments and planning.
- Plans to establish a comprehensive and integrated out of hours service have not yet been implemented; this is reducing the potential for stronger harmonisation with currently successful developments for localised working.

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 Ayres
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: Jill Stannard, Chief Executive of Cumbria County Council
Anne Ridgway, Chair of the Cumbria Safeguarding Children Board
Duncan Fairbairn and Anne Burns, Lead members for Children's services,
Cumbria County Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education