

9 June 2011

Mr Alan Wood  
Director of Children and Families  
London Borough of Hackney Council  
The Learning Trust  
TLC Building  
1 Reading Road  
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 May 2011. 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.

The areas of development identified at the previous inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements have been addressed.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Senior managers are facilitating innovative ways to reshape services for children and families, encouraging a more collaborative approach with partner</li></ul>



agencies, new procedural systems, small social work units which have a shared understanding and responsibility for all cases and a robust quality assurance framework that ensures social work practice is focused on working directly with children and families.

- Highly motivated and enthusiastic staff are supported by knowledgeable, experienced and accessible managers. Good quality supervision is provided which is supporting professional learning and development. Training opportunities are well regarded by staff and offer them opportunities to reflect on their social work practice. Social workers demonstrate a good understanding of legislation and guidance and ensure effective intervention in safeguarding children and young people.
- The quality of core assessments is consistently high and thorough analysis of the risk and protective factors enable effective planning for children and families. The contribution made by qualified clinicians located in each of the social work teams has increased professional insight and depth to the assessment of need and risk.
- The ethnic, cultural and religious needs of children and families are strongly reflected in assessments and casework leading to effective interventions. Specific services are provided to meet the ethnicity and cultural needs of children and young people based on robust assessments.

#### **The service meets the requirements of statutory guidance in the following areas**

- The social work team structure within the contact and referral team has improved the management of caseloads and supervision of social work practice through weekly unit meetings.
- Early interventions are timely and strengthening the focus on children and young people and their families. There is a clear understanding and use of the child wellbeing threshold model across the contact, referral and assessment team.
- Appropriate decisions and management oversight about contact and referrals are made by the first response team with a seamless transfer of referrals to the access and assessment team. This has led to more control over the volume of work within the access and assessment team enabling social workers to provide a more focused and timely service to meet the needs of children and young people.
- Child protection enquiries and assessments are thorough and timely, risk and protective factors are appropriately identified and are embedded in practice. All child protection investigations are carried out by qualified and experienced social workers.
- An appropriate range of performance information is collected with clear and

well established audit processes in place. Performance information is being used well to enhance and develop services. Systems for auditing case files and management oversight of case work is effective in identifying any gaps or difficulties in planning and delivering appropriate services.

- Children and young people and their families are fully involved in their assessments which support a shared understanding of their needs, risks and protective factors.
- A system is in place to ensure there is feedback to referrers regarding children and young people and to inform them how any concerns have been pursued.
- Out of hours services are suitably robust and include protocols that support the sharing of information with the daytime services. Although information is exchanged promptly the quality of information is variable.
- The Common Support Framework brings together a number of assessment tools for children and young people to facilitate early access to a comprehensive range of preventative and support services. Clear arrangements are in place to monitor and review assessments and support children and young people in need of more intensive help or intervention.
- Learning from serious case reviews is disseminated to staff with lunchtime seminars proving an effective way of discussing issues and sharing information on the outcomes.
- A system is in place to ensure there is feedback to referrers regarding children and young people and to inform them how any concerns have been pursued. The police and council need to continue to keep under review the referral process for cases of domestic violence to ensure all cases are actioned within agreed timescales

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

Yours sincerely

**Helen Norry**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Tim Shields, Chief Executive, London Borough of Hackney Council  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education