

17 February 2010

Ms Eleanor Schooling
Director of Children's Services
Islington Council
159 Upper Street
London
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Dear Ms Schooling

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within London Borough of Islington children's services

This letter contains the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in the London Borough of Islington which was conducted on 19 and 20 January 2010. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to Ofsted's annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services.

The inspection identified no areas for priority action but some areas for development, which are detailed below.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising the incidence of 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. I am grateful to you and your staff for your help and the time given during this inspection.

From the evidence gathered, the inspection identified a number of areas where the contact, referral and assessment arrangements were delivered satisfactorily in accordance with national guidance, in particular:

- The referral and advice team is staffed by experienced social workers who have specialist knowledge and experience in key areas of practice.
- All cases are allocated to suitably qualified social workers.



- Child protection practice and procedures are compliant with statutory requirements. Child protection enquiries are timely and are carried out by suitably experienced social workers and the majority of child protection plans sampled are of good quality.
- Initial and core assessments undertaken by children in need teams are timely and reflect the views of children and their families.
- Record keeping is generally up to date and in most cases demonstrates effective case management.
- Social care staff are supervised regularly and are well supported by managers.
- There is appropriate consideration of the identity, ethnicity, religion and cultural needs of children and their families in assessment and planning.
- A robust quality assurance framework has recently been implemented which includes case auditing, evaluation of casework and direct observation of practice. It is, however, too early for the effectiveness of this approach to be demonstrated.
- An experienced hospital social work team responds effectively to referrals and there is good communication between partner agencies.

From the evidence gathered, the following strengths and areas for development were also identified:

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Morale is high and social workers have access to a range of training and development opportunities which are highly valued and are of good quality. ▪ The level of social worker retention is good as is the effectiveness of recruitment. Newly-qualified social workers report that they are well supported with a good induction and development programme. ▪ The majority of initial and core assessments are of a good standard. ▪ There is good thematic auditing, leading to clear action plans and evidence of the learning being effectively implemented in practice. There is effective monitoring of key performance indicators by senior management and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. ▪ Arrangements for assessment and safeguarding of disabled children are effective and reflect good partnership working.

Areas for development

- The common assessment framework is under-developed. There is a high number of contacts and too much responsibility for managing concerns is undertaken by children's social care, which leads in some cases to a delay in response. In some cases, information gathering and assessment work undertaken by the information and advice service lead to avoidable delays in assessments and service provision.
- Child protection strategy discussions always involve the police but do not consistently enable information from other partner agencies to be taken into account in the decision making process. There is no evidence that the minutes are shared within timescales.
- The majority of assessments of children in sibling groups are included within one assessment document, which in some cases leads to incomplete consideration of their individual needs.
- The quality of chronologies on case files is variable and makes it difficult in some cases for new staff and managers to ascertain the family history quickly from reading the file.
- Children in need plans are in place but the plans are not always specific, measurable and supported with clear targets, and in some, management oversight is inconsistent.

Yours sincerely

Paul d'Inverno
Her Majesty's Inspector

Copy: John Foster, Chief Executive, London Borough of Islington
Janet Mokades, Chair of Islington Safeguarding Children Board
Paula Belford, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Islington
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families