

17 November 2010

Dr Deborah Absalom  
Director, Children and Young People's Services  
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Dear Dr Absalom

**Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Bexley 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 Bexley which was conducted on 19 and 20 October 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.

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

**Strengths**

- The design and delivery of the contact and assessment service ensures very effective and timely support from senior staff to front line practitioners. This enables robust decision making and prompt responses to referrals about the safeguarding needs of children and young people.
- The local authority gives priority to high quality training and induction. These developmental opportunities are valued by staff and they contribute to updating



and improving safeguarding practice.

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

- Assessments are clear and analytical, risk and protective factors are identified and effective plans implemented.
- Assessments demonstrate that the views of children are considered and their wishes and feelings are routinely taken into account.
- Child protection procedures comply with statutory requirements. They are understood and applied by staff consistently, with effective management oversight to ensure the safety of children and young people.
- Effective arrangements, such as good access to interpreters, are in place to meet the diverse needs of children with respect to race, culture, religion and disability. The relevance of equality and diversity is suitably addressed in assessment and case planning.
- Record-keeping is up-to-date and demonstrates effective management of the risk of harm, sound decision making and effective planning.
- Out-of-hours duty arrangements demonstrate effective responses and appropriate referral to the contact and assessment service.
- Workloads are high but staff report that they are manageable. Work is being completed in a timely way to safeguard children.
- Staff value and benefit from regular and consistent supervision. The effectiveness of supervision is evident in the quality of decisions recorded on case files.

**Areas for development**

- A disproportionate amount of management time is taken up in managing the high volume of notifications from the Metropolitan Police, the majority of which do not lead to intervention from children's social care services.
- Inter-agency thresholds were reviewed and agreed by the Local Safeguarding Children Board in 2009. However the use of the common assessment framework is still under-developed, and there is scope to improve the effectiveness of preventative practice and early intervention from universal services including schools and health visitors.
- The electronic information and communication technology used by children's social care services is unreliable and slow, and does not support front line workers to meet the needs of children and young people efficiently.

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

Yours sincerely

**Stephen Hunt**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

Copy: Will Tuckley, Chief Executive, London Borough of Bexley  
Brian Boxall, Chair of Bexley Safeguarding Children Board  
June Slaughter, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Bexley  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Education