

18 January 2010

Dr Deborah Absalom  
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Dear Dr Absalom

## **Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within the London Borough of Bexley's 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 Bexley which was conducted on 9 and 10 December 2009. 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:

- Clear procedures and practices are in place to ensure that statutory requirements to safeguard children and young people are met.
- Systems for receiving referrals are well structured and effective. Administrative processes within the referral and assessment teams efficiently support work within the service.



- Screening of contacts and referrals, and decisions on action to be taken are effectively undertaken by experienced managers.
- Thresholds for access to children’s services are clear, agreed by partner agencies, and in most cases are consistently implemented across the referral and assessment service.
- All cases held within referral and assessment services are allocated to suitably qualified staff. Child protection referrals are responded to promptly and are assessed by suitably experienced qualified social workers.
- Children are routinely seen during assessments; their views are recorded and taken into account when making plans for their future.
- Equality and diversity issues are satisfactorily addressed in casework assessment and planning.
- Arrangements for transfer of cases to long term teams are clear, flexible and effectively implemented.
- Communication and liaison with partner agencies are satisfactory. This results in prompt referral and exchange of information.
- Out of hours services are well co-ordinated with day time services.
- Managers at all levels routinely analyse performance information, audit cases, and ensure that casework and decision making are well informed and robust.

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

<b>Strengths</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Staff have good access to regular supervision and value the professional advice and support provided by managers, who are readily accessible for formal and informal consultation.</li> <li>▪ Staff are provided with good quality induction and training opportunities to develop their professional skills and knowledge.</li> </ul>
<b>Areas for development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Case supervision is regularly undertaken both formally and informally. However, the recording of case discussion and personal development undertaken in supervision is variable in quality and frequency across the teams.</li> <li>▪ The quality of assessments is too variable. Most are satisfactory. Some are too</li> </ul>

descriptive and some lack sufficient analysis which results in the needs of children not being sufficiently identified or met in some cases.

- Systems for recording initial and core assessments, which are held separately to the central case files, are not sufficiently robust. This results in a lack of clarity about whether assessments have been completed in some cases.
- Recording of managerial oversight and case planning is not sufficiently robust or consistent across the teams.
- Plans to involve service users in developing referral and assessment services have yet to be fully implemented or are yet to demonstrate impact.

Yours sincerely



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Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Will Tuckley, Chief Executive, London Borough of Bexley  
Dr Deborah Absalom, Chair of Bexley Safeguarding Children Board  
June Slaughter, Lead Member for Children's Services, London Borough of Bexley  
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families