

9 April 2018

Mr Ade Adetosoye  
London Borough of Bromley  
Civic Centre  
Stockwell Close  
Bromley  
BR1 3UH

Dear Mr Adetosoye

### **Monitoring visit of London Borough of Bromley children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Bromley children's services on 13 and 14 March 2018. The visit is the sixth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate for overall effectiveness in June 2016. The inspectors were Marcie Taylor, HMI, and Andy Whippey, HMI.

The local authority is making good progress in improving early intervention help and support for children and families in Bromley.

### **Areas covered by the visit**

During the course of this visit, inspectors reviewed the progress made in the delivery and effectiveness of early intervention help and support, including:

- the quality, timeliness and impact of early intervention and support
- the effectiveness of the multi-agency identification and response to risk and the application of thresholds
- the quality of assessments and effectiveness of early intervention planning
- the arrangements and assessment of 'step up' from early intervention to statutory services and 'step down' from statutory services to early help.

A range of evidence was included during the visit, including electronic case records, supervision files and notes, observation of the allocation panel and visits to two children's centres. In addition, inspectors spoke to a range of staff, including managers, social workers, family support and parenting practitioners and a number of parents.

## **Overview**

Based on the evidence gathered during the visit, the provision of early intervention services in Bromley is an area of strength. The local authority has prioritised and improved the range and quality of family support. This is effective and well established.

## **Findings and evaluation of progress**

Within the cases considered, children and families receive good early intervention, help and support. Their requests for help are quickly and effectively responded to and they are able to access a wide range of high-quality local services that are preventing the need for statutory services. This is a proportionate response to risk and is improving children's circumstances.

Integrated multi-agency early intervention services, based in localities around children's centres, offer parents a wide range of accessible services. These include an early intervention programme to support children who have witnessed domestic violence, early parent education classes and a 'parenting plus' programme. Family support and parenting practitioners also offer a range of workshops and one-to-one support in relation to the impact of domestic violence, parenting styles, housing issues, employment and access to education. Examples of work considered demonstrate that knowledgeable staff assist parents to focus on practical skills and solutions. These services help parents to understand the needs of their children and provide effective support to the whole family. Parents who spoke with inspectors report that they highly value these services. All parents spoken to on this visit were unanimously praising of the help they receive and the positive difference that services had made to them and their children.

Children's centres staff work effectively with social workers and parents where children are the subject of child protection or child in need plans. A range of bespoke programmes focus on teaching parenting skills and techniques to help parents better understand and manage their children's needs and behaviours. This helps to improve parental confidence, and helps them to be more effective in reducing risks to children. Children's centre workers demonstrate an appropriate understanding and response to risk. Timely and effective communication with children's social workers takes place should risks escalate. A small number of cases are held by family support officers, who offer additional support to parents to access help offered at the centres. Parents highly regard this 'light touch' support, which offers advice, guidance and practical help on a range of issues, including benefit applications and budget management.

The Bromley children's project links to the children's centres and works with private, voluntary and independent early years providers in the borough. The project is well resourced to offer both universal and targeted support from 25 skilled family support and parenting practitioners. Workers undertake early intervention assessments and

provide both practical and emotional support to families. Direct work with families is effective as it has a focus on improving resilience and finding solutions, and is reducing the need for the engagement with statutory services. When a more formal multi-agency response is required, this is progressed by the common assessment framework team. This team provides support via a 'team around the child', with a key agency taking on the role of the professional lead and thus ensuring appropriate multi-agency support and engagement.

At a weekly allocations meeting, managers identify and put in place appropriate and timely levels of support to families. Evaluation by family members at the end of a programme of support demonstrates that parents find the service to be highly valued, helpful and effective. While early intervention assessments focus on the needs of the family as a whole and identify achievable family 'goals', more work is required to ensure that there is appropriate focus on the specific needs of individual children.

The revision and re-launch of Bromley's 'threshold of need' document in June 2017 has ensured that partner agencies, including schools and health services, make appropriate referrals into the service if they consider the threshold for statutory services to be met. Contacts considered during this visit to the multi-agency safeguarding hub are appropriate and lead to the timely referral to the early intervention and family support service. This ensures that children and their families get the right help at the right time.

Effective early support to families is reducing the need for a number of children to receive statutory interventions. This is reflected in the reduction of children subject to repeat child in need or child protection plans. Regular meetings between heads of service result in timely and appropriate transitions between early intervention and family support and statutory services so that families continue to receive effective and proportionate help as required.

Senior management oversight of the quality of practice in the early intervention and family support service is good. Practitioners receive regular supervision, guidance and training. While regular audit of practice gives managers an overview of the quality of early intervention practice for families, the audit tool is insufficiently focused on the experiences of children. This misses an opportunity to identify and improve the positive outcomes of this help on their individual needs and circumstances. The local authority, aware of this practice deficit, is taking actions to improve performance in this area.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Marcie Taylor  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**