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6 January 2014

Ms Sally Rees
Interim Director Children and Education
Mill House
North Street
York
YO1 8RF

Dear Ms Rees

Ofsted thematic inspection – early help

Ofsted is currently planning to undertake a thematic inspection examining early help arrangements. We plan to visit local authorities across the country and we would like to visit York on 4 and 5 February 2014. The lead inspector will be myself, Pauline Turner and I will be accompanied by a team inspector, Lolly Rascagneres.

We conduct thematic inspections under section 136 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. We will not be making judgements regarding the quality of work in individual authorities, although we will give you informal verbal feedback at the end of our visit. Instead, we will be identifying common themes and highlighting good practice and possible thematic areas of development in a published report. The final report is due to be published in the summer of 2014.

The thematic inspection will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on this subject and showcase and disseminate good practice nationally. We hope and expect that local authorities who participate will find the process useful in their work with children.

Key questions that the survey will be asking are:

- Is there a clear offer of early help understood by the family?
- Identification - how do the local authority and partners ensure that children who would benefit from early help are identified at the earliest point?

Annex C

- Assessment – is assessment used consistently with children and families to engage with them and to analyse their needs?
- To what extent do professionals seek to understand the individual experiences of the child living in the family?
- Planning – do multi-agency plans to support children and families clearly identify risk, next steps and do they set out what needs to change, with clear escalation response if they do not?
- Is there a named professional supporting the early help plan and offer?
- Review – is early help provision routinely reviewed to ensure that individual children's outcomes are improving and risk is reducing?
- How do LSCBs assure themselves that robust arrangements are in place to ensure that all professionals working with families appropriately work to locally agreed thresholds and provide effective early help?
- Does the early help offer, involve professionals in direct and regular engagement with families?
- Does the locally agreed threshold document set out a clear framework for giving an effective response to concerns about children?
- Do other professionals working with families understand their role and how to escalate their concerns? Is this effective?
- Have local authorities with their partners agreed an early help strategy that results in an effective early help offer to children and their families?
- How do local authorities and their partners monitor and evaluate the impact of early help services for individual children and how is this information used to inform strategic plans?
- Does the local strategic analysis (eg. JSNA) identify the needs of vulnerable children and are those needs reflected in commissioning arrangements for early help service provision?
- What are the current pressures on resourcing early help that local authorities and partner agencies face and is there evidence of long term financial savings for providers from effective early help?
- Do social work professionals receive training to help identify early concerns? Is this effective?
- What enables or prevents children and families receiving effective early help?

Annex C

Two inspectors would undertake the survey fieldwork. The programme will involve, depending on availability:

- Case tracking and sampling (a minimum of 5 tracked cases in each local authority area and sampling of referrals to the local authority) via case records and interviews with named professionals, managers, children and parents
- Interviews with key stakeholders including those involved in the quality assurance of early help work, multi-agency commissioning managers, LSCB multi-agency senior managers

We are mindful of the need to keep any burden on the authority as light as possible and would not expect you to produce any new or additional documentation to present to us. We can tailor the programme to the availability of staff on the planned dates.

I am the overall lead for this thematic inspection. If there is anything you would like to clarify, I will be happy to assist. My contact details are:

- pauline.turner@ofsted.gov.uk
- Telephone 03000 130 987
- Mobile 07876 650521

We would be grateful if you could identify an appropriate link person for this thematic inspection and let me have their details as soon as possible. I will then contact the link person to discuss the inspection in more detail and answer any questions that you may have. We will also send you an indicative timetable and more details about the questions that we will be asking.

All Ofsted inspectors undergo regular enhanced CRB checks and therefore you do not need to ask individuals for proof of this. All Ofsted inspectors carry photo identification which you will wish to check, on their arrival, in accordance with your own security procedures. Further details can be found by following [this link](#).

We will look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Pauline Turner
Her Majesty's Inspector