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Executive Director of Children's Services
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Dear Martin,

Focused visit to Camden children's services

This letter summarises the findings of a focused visit to Camden children's services on the 15 and 16 of May 2018. The inspectors were Andy Whippley, HMI, and Anne Waterman, HMI. The quality assurance manager was Sean Tarpey, Senior HMI.

Inspectors considered the local authority's arrangements for children who need help and protection in accordance with the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services framework. Specifically, they considered contacts, referrals and decision-making within the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). They also considered transfers to and from early help services, the effectiveness of child protection enquiries and the quality of assessments for children in need of help and protection.

Inspectors gathered evidence following case discussions with social workers, managers and from meetings with partner agencies based in the MASH. They also reviewed the local authority performance management and quality assurance information, as well as the case records of children.

Overview

Within Camden, there is strong corporate leadership to improve outcomes for children and their families who are in need of help or protection. Since the previous inspection of children's services in 2017, there has been a continued commitment to sustain the quality of social work practice at the 'front door'. Senior leaders know the service well, as evidenced within their recent self-evaluation. This knowledge is further informed through the use of relevant performance data. Inspectors found evidence of sound social work practice in the MASH as well as in the brief intervention team. The MASH works effectively to safeguard children. Partners are

well engaged. This ensures that there is timely information sharing, and also ensures the consistent application of thresholds and an appropriately proportionate response for children and families who need help and support. In the cases audited, and in all work considered during this visit, inspectors found the local authority had acted appropriately to safeguard children and keep them safe. Child protection concerns are quickly identified and lead to timely interventions to safeguard children and reduce risk.

The local authority and its partner agencies have clear strategies in place to promote early intervention. This approach is strongly embedded and there are a wide range of services to support families when their needs are first identified. The co-location of early help provision within the MASH is a strength as it actively facilitates the identification of, and provision for, families in need of early help provision.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice

- The quality of referrals from partner agencies in a small minority of cases does not make the level of professional concern sufficiently clear.
- In a small minority of cases, supervision records do not provide sufficient clarity as to future actions required, particularly in relation to the timescales for the completion of actions.

Findings

- Decision-making following contacts, including those out of hours, is appropriate and results in the timely progression of referrals for statutory services. This ensures that children and families receive appropriate help and support at the right time. The rationale for decision-making is clearly recorded. Social workers ensure that they gain parental consent to make further enquiries in their initial management of referrals, unless there are overriding safeguarding concerns.
- Most information sharing by partners is prompt and of good quality and is supported by the co-location of partners in the MASH. Timely and effective information sharing ensures that there is effective risk analysis and appropriate decision-making. This is informed by robust consideration of history to identify patterns and risks, to safeguard children from further harm.
- Thresholds are appropriate and well embedded in practice. Child protection concerns are quickly identified. When appropriate, they progress to timely strategy discussions. These decisions are mostly well-recorded and the planned interventions to safeguard children are clear. Review strategy meetings are consistently held. This ensures that progress against actions is considered and multi-agency information updated to inform plans. These review strategy meetings positively impact on the quality of safety planning for children. The

proactive use of child protection conference chairs to independently chair these meetings, where risks are complex, enhances decision-making for these children.

- Child protection investigations are timely and thorough. They evidence clear information sharing and an appropriate focus on risk. Decision-making ensures that there is clarity regarding professional responsibilities and timescales for actions and contingencies.
- Children and families experiencing domestic abuse have access to a broad range of intervention and support services. The domestic abuse adviser is integrated into the MASH and effectively promotes and supports safety planning and risk assessment for children and their families.
- Management direction for the undertaking of assessments is a strength. Case allocation notes are clear and relate to the needs of the child.
- Written assessments are consistently of a good standard. They include effective consideration of children's histories to inform analysis of risk and analysis of what parents need to do differently in the future. Children's lived experiences, including their family dynamics, their needs and relevant issues of culture and identity, are explored well. Appropriate consideration is given to the needs of other brothers and sisters in the context of the assessment.
- In most cases, recording is up to date. Visits to children are consistently well recorded, giving insight into children's lived experiences. In most recording, there is an analysis of the visit and findings to enhance future planning for children.
- Children who are the subject of early help intervention are appropriately stepped up to statutory interventions when their circumstances change. Inspectors found appropriate escalation from referral to MASH, with new information thoroughly discussed at the daily meeting, including the threshold for intervention. A strength of such discussions is the representation of the voice of the child through a worker presenting their perspective. In response to new information, assessments occur swiftly, and children are seen in timescales proportionate to the level of need or risk.
- In most of children's cases seen by inspectors, decisions to 'step down' to early help services were appropriate, with clear next steps for ongoing support to children and their families identified. Such decisions are well evidenced, with appropriate management oversight.
- Direct work with children is well embedded. Inspectors found consistent examples of sensitive direct work being undertaken with children. The outcome of this work is enabling social workers to have a better understanding of

children's lived experiences. This information is used well to inform planning for children.

- Social workers who spoke to inspectors report regular, reflective supervision and good access to managers, including senior managers, who support them in their work. Inspectors saw examples of reflective supervision impacting positively on the work that social workers are undertaking with children and their families. Social workers particularly value the monthly reflective practice sessions, which enhance their understanding of how they can improve outcomes for children. While generally consistently good, in a small number of cases seen, supervision was insufficiently clear in providing case direction, particularly in terms of the timescales for actions to be completed.
- Staff have access to a wide range of induction and training opportunities. They report that they are supported and encouraged to engage in training and development programmes. These events provide them the opportunities to reflect and focus on practice improvement and give them space to think creatively when facing new challenges.
- A wide range of performance data is used effectively to monitor and scrutinise front door workflows, including timeliness of decision-making, assessments and staff workloads. This, combined with a clear quality assurance framework, ensures that managers are able to understand the quality of practice and the impact of how this is improving children's outcomes. Qualitative information and audits are used effectively to monitor and drive practice improvements.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning your next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Andy Whippey
Her Majesty's Inspector