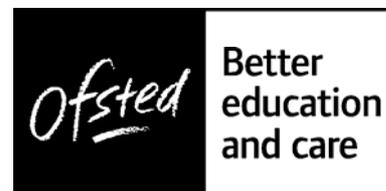


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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Ged Rowney
Director of Children's Services
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Rowney

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF WIGAN METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises our findings following the meeting held on 6 July 2005 to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your authority. We are grateful for the information that you provided to support this process and for the time made available by yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Being healthy

Outcomes in this area are good. There has been strong development of partnerships locally to build integrated services for children and young people and good local analysis, involving young people, on their health care needs. There is evidence of some encouraging progress to develop healthy schools, for example, almost all schools are involved in the National Fruit Scheme and several schools have achieved the Healthy Schools Standard. There is progress in supporting specific groups, such as teenage parents. There are also improved immunisation rates.

Despite a range of initiatives across agencies, teenage pregnancies remain well above the average for similar councils, although the council reports that 2004/05 performance data show a gradual downward trend.

Child and adolescent mental health services were identified as an area for improvement in 2004 and there is some evidence of improvement in staffing, coverage and responsiveness of both acute and lower tier support services.

While still rated as good, the proportion of looked after children having their health care needs assessed and met has fallen for the second year running. The council reports it is developing a new healthy care programme to try to encourage young people's involvement.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are good. The council attaches a high priority to ensuring children's safety and well-being and is working with Primary Care Trust partners to raise awareness among children and parents about safety in the home. It has made good progress in promoting the safety of children while in school and other settings and meeting statutory responsibilities. Child protection data suggests further improved performance in key areas such as ensuring all children on the child protection register (CPR) have an allocated social worker and the timeliness of children's reviews. However, a third of childminders inspected by Ofsted did not meet all the necessary standards at their first inspection. The council confirms it is now providing training and support for providers at the pre-registration stage, so that registration can be achieved more effectively.

The responsiveness of initial assessments, following referrals of requests for children in need of family support, has slightly improved but remains well below the average for similar councils, as do response times and coverage of core assessments. The council reports that this was in part due to last year's difficulties in recruiting front-line staff and in part to problems of recording; both of these issues have now been addressed.

There has been continuing progress in improving the proportion of looked after children placed with foster or adoptive parents and to secure the stability of those placements. Inspections have identified a need to ensure all relevant staff are aware of requirements to provide notification of significant events and that residential staff are trained in managing young people's behaviour.

There is also a need to improve the active involvement of looked after children and young people in their statutory reviews. The council confirms that the data for 2004/05 only included those children and young people who attended their reviews and not the larger number who contributed in advance. It has commissioned Barnardo's to deliver a children's rights and advocacy service. This is now operational and should deliver improved outcomes for 2005/06.

There has been a strengthening of the quality assurance function, to monitor and support best practice in relation to safeguarding children. To support this, a shadow Local Children's Safeguarding Board and development programme are in place. There is a strong focus on supporting teenage parents and on safe parenting more generally. The council has also worked hard to increase the level of children in need and family support referrals from black and minority ethnic families. There has been a reduction in child protection activity, such as conferences, registrations and re-registrations, which reflects the refocusing of preventative support for vulnerable parents.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are good overall, although action is needed on some weaker areas.

Inspections give a picture of generally good provision and standards that are in line with, and sometimes above, national averages. Comparisons with statistical neighbours often show the borough is doing relatively well. However, exclusions have been too high for pupils with special educational needs though these have now reduced. Weaknesses in the special school sector are now being addressed. Overall, the provision and outcomes for the majority of children and young people in terms of quality of the schools and the standards achieved is keeping pace generally with the national picture. For children with special educational needs and for looked after children the picture has compared less well but is improving.

Early years settings provide an acceptable quality of provision that promotes children's well being and helps them to meet early learning goals. There has been a better than average overall increase in the number of providers and places. There are fewer recommendations for actions than nationally. The quality of childminding in the settings inspected is better than average.

Among the primary and secondary schools, and special schools inspected, most schools have good overall effectiveness, good teaching and pupils' attitudes are good or very good, as are enrichment opportunities and support for learning outside the school day. The proportion of schools categorised as in special measures has been in line with that nationally. The two special schools currently in this category are reported to be making reasonable progress.

The data on tests and examinations give a generally positive picture.

- Results in reading in Key Stage 1 are better than the national average and in line with similar authorities; writing is in line with the national average and with similar authorities; mathematics is above the national average and similar authorities.
- In Key Stage 2 there is average performance in English and science, both are consistently higher than statistical neighbours; in mathematics, standards achieved are above and well above the national average and similar authorities.
- In Key Stage 3 English and mathematics is in line with the national average and better than statistical neighbours; science is generally in line with the national average. The value added between Key Stages 1 and 2 is as expected but the value added between Key Stages 2 and 3 is below expectation.

- In Key Stage 4, performance is keeping pace with the national trend. The percentage achieving five or more higher general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grades is consistently in line with the national average and above statistical neighbours; the percentage achieving one A* to G grade is above statistical neighbours and in recent years above or in line with the national average; there is varying performance across the secondary schools in the borough, several achieve well below the average percentage for five higher grades; and the value added between Key Stage 2 to GCSE is as expected.
- The standards achieved at the end of Key Stage 5, measured by average points score, has recently fallen to below average, generally it has been at the national average.

Authorised absence in primary schools is in line with national figures, while unauthorised absence has been lower than average for three years and better than similar authorities. In secondary schools, authorised absence is in line with the national average and similar authorities. Exclusions from primary schools are higher than statistical neighbours and the national average, but in secondary they are in line with both.

The percentage of surplus places in primary schools is higher than the national average and similar councils. The council is taking action to reduce the number of places and in recent years several hundred have been removed. It is reviewing secondary school provision and plans to reduce surplus places in that phase.

There are a higher number of pupils with statements of special educational needs than average, and the timeliness of completing them is less than average. There has been a steady reduction in the number of statements issued over several years.

The percentage of exclusions from special schools is much higher than nationally; the council reports that the number of these exclusions has reduced recently.

The percentage of children receiving alternative tuition because of exclusion is higher than national but is lower for tuition that goes on for more than a year. Reintegration into mainstream schools is better than national and similar councils' average.

The council has a range of initiatives underway to provide additional support for looked after children. Despite this, there has been a recent decline against local and national targets in the proportion of care leavers achieving at least one GCSE grade, against local and national targets. However, levels of those achieving five or more higher grades continue to improve above those in similar areas.

School absences of 25 or more days remain high for this group, although there is modest improvement in 2004/05. More work is being done with parents and foster carers to try and increase the level of support they are able to provide. There is also a dedicated education officer with the remit to provide more effective personal education plans. There has been significant progress in increasing the proportion of care leavers at 19 in education, training and employment.

Spending on youth work is low, but there has been a rise in the number of young people participating and this is now average. The proportion involved in activities that will lead to accreditation is lower than average. The council has introduced a programme designed to increase the scale of accreditation. Youth workers work with education welfare officers and geographically to have greatest impact.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory.

There has been some improvement in levels of children looked after receiving cautions and convictions and recidivism rates remain acceptable and are below the average of those in similar areas. The council reports that juvenile nuisance remains an issue. It has introduced a youth inclusion project to prevent persistent offending and sought to reduce the number of first timers coming into contact with the criminal justice system, although its impact is not marked because of improved detection rates.

Coverage of services for disabled children and their parents/carers, including take-up of direct payments remain comparatively low and have been slower to develop. Inspection by Commission for Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) found that all children were involved in contributing to their placement plans. However, overall placement plans were found to be less satisfactory. Involvement of looked after children in their statutory reviews has fallen and is well below the average for similar councils and this is an issue that needs to be addressed urgently.

The council has taken gathering the views of children and young people seriously but there is scope to develop the process further. Most secondary schools have a school council linked to a borough-wide school forum; there are also youth councils that have borough-wide links. The council is now taking steps to enable young people to better inform decision-making, and has begun this work.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are good overall, although there are features which need improvement.

The council and its partners have delivered significant improvement in the percentage of care leavers in education, training and employment and it is now well above the national average. The proportion of youth offenders involved has been consistently below the national average. The outcomes for disabled children and young people and their parents/carers are not so encouraging, and coverage of services for this group, including for direct payments remains comparatively low. The council is reporting some recent improvement and confirmed that additional resources have been put into the 'In Control' project to improve performance in this respect.

Post-16 provision consists of two schools with sixth forms, a denominational sixth form college and two further education colleges. Performance varies across the institutions and overall has recently fallen below the national average, but one institution performed well above the national average. There has been good progress in the outcomes for care leavers. Based on inspection evidence, post-16 effectiveness is unsatisfactory in those special schools inspected in the borough.

The percentage of care leavers who achieve five or more higher grade GCSE passes is above the average for these children. The percentage who sat one GCSE has increased to above the average for similar councils, although those who achieved one pass at GCSE has fallen to below the average.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • well-founded needs analysis involving young people • developing healthy schools • improving immunisation rates • multi-agency support services for teenage pregnancy and teenage parents. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teenage pregnancy rates are high.

<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • progress in promoting the safety of children • strengthened quality assurance in relation to safeguarding children • strong focus on supporting teenage parents and on safe parenting • higher proportion of looked after children placed with foster or adoptive parents. • increased level of children in need and family support referrals from black and minority ethnic children and families • reduction in child protection activity. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • timescales for initial and core assessments • increase active involvement of looked-after children and young people in their statutory reviews • improved understanding by staff of requirements to provide notifications of significant events. • some residential child care staff not trained in managing young people's behaviour • one-third of childminders inspected did not meet the standards at their first inspection.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • above average increase in early years provision • generally positive picture of achievement in tests and examinations • the improved performance of looked after children in achieving GCSE higher grades. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exclusions from special schools and from primary schools • high proportions of statements of special educational needs and slow preparation of them • surplus places in primary schools • the achievement of one grade at GCSE and school attendance of looked after children.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all children are involved in contributing to their placement plans. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coverage of services for disabled children and their parents and carers, including the percentage receiving direct payment • involvement of looked after children in their statutory reviews • develop ways to gather and use the views of young people.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • progress improving care leaver involvement in education, training and employment at 19 • the proportion of care leavers 16 or more who achieve five or more GCSEs. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outcomes for post-16 • the percentage of care leavers achieving one GCSE grade • overall standards post-16.

Service management

The review carried out by the Audit Commission and the Social Services Inspectorate, and the Audit Commission annual letter, commended the council's vision and track record of effective prioritisation and performance management. The council also invests in quality management and monitoring arrangements so that it has a good awareness of its own performance and challenges. In general the authority knows its weaknesses, has them on its agenda for action and there is a good match between the areas still requiring improvement and the council's priorities for children's services. Its self-assessment was clear on the issues to improve, based on good use of indicators and clear on the actions it was taking to tackle them.

The council has increased its investment in children's social care to a level more in line with other councils and has also increased the proportion it will spend this year on family support and services for children. This is intended to support delivery of key local priorities of prevention and social inclusion. However, the council faces ongoing demand and financial pressures, in part due to the number of children in out-borough placements; it has a strategy in place to tackle this. There is also a mixed picture of delivering on improvement targets in key areas during 2004/05. Expenditure on children in need is good and on homes and foster care is acceptable.

There has been a modest improvement in recruitment and retention of staff in recent years although, as in other authorities, the council is reporting some difficulties in recruiting some front-line staff. The percentage of residential workers gaining qualifications is excellent, at twice the national average and is in line with the average for post qualifying awards for children's social workers. The percentage of teachers leaving is lower than the national figure and the figure in similar authorities. The number of unfilled vacancies is in line with these comparators.

The council has a strong vision for its children's services. It focuses distinctly on vulnerable groups and considers the wider issues facing them. In many areas there is significant activity taking place with partners to deliver improved performance. There is good progress in implementing new arrangements for the delivery of children's services, including the appointment of a director of children's services and a new management structure, a children's plan for 2004/06 and a shadow Local Safeguarding Board. There is a need to develop more rapidly the gathering of, and response to, the views of children and young people. This is developing, for example in the health needs survey. However, fewer looked after children are actively contributing to their statutory reviews.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Healthy lifestyles are promoted for children and young people:

- teenage pregnancy rate.

Staying safe

Looked after children live in safe environments and are protected from abuse and exploitation:

- how views of young people are gathered and used to make improvements at both an individual and service development level
- the involvement of children and young people in their statutory reviews.

Agencies collaborate to safeguard children according to the requirements of current government guidance:

- management of response to referrals and assessment timescales and coverage.

Enjoying and achieving

Children and young people who are looked after are helped to enjoy and achieve:

- education and school attendance of children looked after children.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to enjoy and achieve:

- exclusions of pupils with special educational needs, and in special schools.

Action is taken to ensure that educational provision 5-16 is of good quality:

- significant variation between schools in performance at GCSE.

Children and young people are enabled and encouraged to attend and enjoy school and to achieve highly:

- progress in reducing surplus places.

Making a positive contribution

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to make a positive contribution:

- quality and coverage of services for children and young people with disabilities, including use of direct payments.

Achieving economic well-being

Action is taken to ensure that 14-19 education and training is planned and delivered in a coordinated way, and to ensure that education and training (16-19) is of good quality:

- the overall effectiveness of post-16 provision.

Final judgements

Please see your final annual performance assessment judgements attached at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely



FLO HADLEY
Divisional Manager
Office for Standards in Education



JONATHAN PHILLIPS
Director – Quality, Performance and Methods
Commission for Social Care Inspection

APA final judgements 2005: Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

Areas for judgement	Final judgements ¹
The contribution of <i>the local authority's social care services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people	3
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	3
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	3

1

Grade	Service descriptors	Capacity to improve descriptors
4	A service that delivers well above minimum requirements for users	Very good
3	A service that consistently delivers above minimum requirements for users	Good/promising
2	A service that delivers only minimum requirements for users	Adequate
1	A service that does not deliver minimum requirements for users	Inadequate