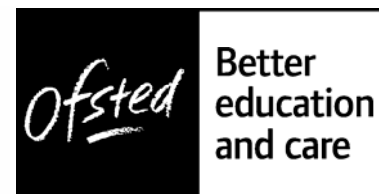


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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr David Martin
Executive Director for Social Care &
Supported Housing
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Mr David Brown
Executive Director of Children's Services
Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

1 December 2005

Dear Colleagues

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 21 June 2005 to assess the performance of the education and social care services within your authority. We are grateful for the information, which you provided to support this process, and for the time made available by you and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Being healthy

Outcomes in this area are good, particularly in the way that healthy lifestyles are promoted through partnership between key services. It is evident that the local authority contributes well to the promotion of health across the borough. Teenage pregnancy conception rates are reducing although they remain higher than the national average. Good strategies address substance misuse and smoking. A satisfactory proportion of schools have achieved level three of the Healthy Schools Standard with a challenging target set for next twelve months. The health needs of looked after children are met effectively with very good outcomes being consistently achieved for the last five years.

Further investment has been made in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) with a clear strategy for improvement which involves bringing the services for schools and children looked after together and the co-location of the team in September 2005. The service has recently been enhanced by the recruitment of additional social workers. The promotion of children's and young people's mental health is effective.

Staying safe

Outcomes overall are good with children and young people being provided with a safe environment to which they are entitled. Effective collaborative working ensures that the incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised.

There are effective child protection policies and procedures with mechanisms in place to monitor compliance and ensure that these are adhered to. These policies have been enhanced over the last 12 months and have raised community awareness of vulnerability. Child protection arrangements have been further improved with the authority demonstrating clear systems for assessment, planning and review with good quality preventative support. All serious case reviews have been undertaken in line with national guidance.

There has been an improvement in the support for looked after children with the number allocated a social worker exceeding the national average. The project work that has taken place over the last 12 months to reduce the numbers of children looked after has been successful. However, as numbers remain above the national average it remains a high priority alongside the return of children in care from outside the borough. There is good diversity of placement choice for children and young people with effective use of foster care and consistently well-managed adoption processes.

The Authority has acknowledged the need to improve services for children with disabilities, beginning with a multi-agency review that will identify development work required to improve support for their carers.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory overall. Children are well supported in enabling them to meet early learning goals with the majority of nursery education settings judged to be good or very good. More actions than the national average are raised at Children Act Inspections, with more providers being graded as satisfactory rather than good. The Authority has recently appointed a key strategic leader post in early years and is confident that this should begin to effect positive changes.

Results at the end of Key Stage 1 and 2 demonstrate that children are making progress and whilst results are largely in line with statistical neighbours, trends over time demonstrate that Walsall's rate of improvement in some areas has been significant. For example, In Level 4 English, Walsall has improved by 5.88% points since 2000/01 as compared with 2.09 by statistical neighbours and 2.71 nationally. Level 4 Maths has improved by 6.29% points since 2000/01 as compared with 2.57 by statistical neighbours and 3.52 nationally. Progress at the end of Key Stage 2 and 3 is

satisfactory. Whilst there has been a dip in results for science across both stages this is in line with the national picture. The council is aware of this and has undertaken analysis to enable targeting of pupils, particularly those from ethnic backgrounds, to improve their literacy levels and therefore help to raise their attainment. Provisional results for 2005 indicate that progress in Key Stages 2 and 3 is being sustained.

Performance of young people gaining 5+A*-C GCSE's remains in line with that of statistical neighbours but below the national average, although a steady improvement has taken place over the last few years. There has been a decrease in the numbers of young people gaining one or more GCSE grades. However, the council has strategies to develop a more suitable curriculum for Key Stage 4 and it is reported that all schools are committed to this. Results are improving for the numbers of looked after children leaving care with one or more GCSE grades and there is improved performance for children leaving care with five or more GCSE grades at A* to C. There has been increased focus in secondary schools on leadership and management. Overall, attainment remains below the national average.

The Authority has made significant progress in improving school attendance and performance in this area is good. Absence of looked after children is monitored and well managed. The council has ensured that there is suitable educational provision for all teenage mothers.

The Authority has been very effective in supporting schools causing concern, with only two schools being placed in categories in the last three years, with seven schools taken out of categories. The effectiveness of this work was noted in the recent LEA Inspection report.

There is a coherent and feasible special educational needs (SEN) strategy, with a number of processes for tracking the achievement of pupils with SEN using comparative data across schools. The Authority is beginning to undertake analysis of results for these pupils at each key stage in order to set targets for children and young people with SEN.

Following a poor youth service inspection, there have been considerable efforts to implement the post inspection action plan. A new head of service has been appointed and qualified staff have been recruited. Progress is being monitored with both strategic and political resolve and improvement is highlighted as a priority in the Children's and Young People's Plan.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good, with children and young people actively supported in managing changes in their lives. Looked after children participate in their reviews and there are sound transition plans to support children and young people through key points in their lives.

Rates of participation and other data show a positive picture of children and young people being assisted in developing their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, along with freedom from bullying, racism and other forms of harassment.

Children and young people participate in decision making and supporting the community through forums such as Youth Opinions Unite and the Youth Parliament. After consultation with young people the revised summer programme of activities now reflects their views and wishes. However, it is not yet clear how vulnerable groups of young people, for example, children with learning disabilities or young carers, are consulted with opportunities to influence policy or re-shape services.

Youth offending levels are satisfactory with good numbers of juveniles engaged in education, training and employment. There is also good management to reduce the number of looked after children receiving final warnings and convictions. A recent inspection of the youth offending service showed a good basis for development.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. There are strong collaborative partnerships in place to deliver the 14-19 strategy. The average point scores for pupils in schools with sixth forms are lower than statistical neighbours and the national average. The number of young people who are not engaged in education, employment or training (NEET) is comparatively high, although the Authority is addressing this issue and has set challenging targets to improve performance. The Authority plans, in partnership with the Learning and Skills Council, to build a new college in 2007/08, to develop stronger links with colleges, to broaden the curriculum, to identify those young people who are NEET and to provide alternatives for them through modern apprenticeships and vocational courses. Looked after children are well supported in moving into education, training and employment when leaving care and young people with special educational needs/or disabilities receive suitable help through transition phases from Year 9 upwards.

Summary

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the promotion of healthy lifestyles for children and young people. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> none.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing children and young people with a safe environment child protection procedures and interagency arrangements support for looked after children (LAC). 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> number of LAC number of LAC placed out of borough services for children with disabilities.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> outcomes for nursery education attainment across Key Stages 1 and 2 educational attainment for looked after children. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> retained functions for early years (reduce numbers of actions made and improve gradings) raising attainment across Key Stages 3 & 4.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> participation of children and young people LAC Reviews transition plans. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> involvement of vulnerable groups of children and young people in decision making.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> partnerships to take forward the 14-19 strategy education, training and employment for young people leaving care. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> post-16 education young people who are not in education, employment or training.

Service management

There has been good corporate support for children's services that has led to improvements across both education and social care. The authority has collaborated closely with relevant partners in analysing need, identifying ambitions and setting appropriate priorities.

Good progress has been made in moving towards the production of a single children's and young people's plan. The appointment of the Director for Children's Services indicates a clear intention of tackling the *Every Child Matters* agenda.

The Authority's self-assessment demonstrates a clear knowledge of strengths and weaknesses in its education and social care functions. In recognising their weaknesses, they have targeted energies and resources to enable them to make progress in making a difference and improving standards for children and young people. For example, improvements in results at Key Stage 2 and making significant improvements in school attendance. The self-assessment is, however, too descriptive rather than evaluative of outcomes. The Authority fully acknowledges the need to develop evaluative skills, in particular, by attending and responding to the voices of children and young people.

The authority has developed strong partnerships and there are many examples of services already effectively working together, such as strong, collaborative partnerships in place to deliver the 14-19 strategy, the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) and the project work to reduce the numbers of children looked after.

In recent years, the authority has experienced difficulties in recruitment and retention with a dependence on agency staff. This issue remains a key risk to the continued improvement of services, in particular, in social care. Initial work has begun on a workforce strategy to integrate social care and education structures. The council acknowledges that this needs to be acted upon to ensure progress and sustainable performance.

The Authority's capacity to improve is good.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Staying safe

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

- looked after children.

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities live in safe environments and are protected from abuse and exploitation:

- children with disabilities.

Enjoying and achieving

Early Years provision promotes the children's development and well-being and helps them meet early learning goals:

- retained functions regarding early years.

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

- raising attainment.

Making a positive contribution

Children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making and in supporting the community:

- involvement of vulnerable children and young people in decision-making.

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:

- post-16 education and young people who are not in education, employment or training.

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: Walsall 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