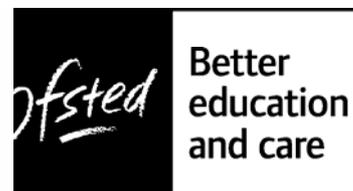


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Making Social Care
Better for People



Ms Christine Gilbert
Chief Executive
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Mulberry Place Town Hall
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London E14 2BG

1 December 2005

Dear Ms Gilbert

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 6 July 2005 to assess the performance of the education and children's 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 yourself 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. Inspection data shows that the proportion of primary schools where pupils participate in two hours of sport each week is lower than national levels. However, the authority has developed a range of actions to improve this position including a programme in partnership with the primary care trust (PCT).

There is a good strategy to promote healthy school meals and almost 80 per cent of primary pupils and 50 per cent of secondary pupils have school meals which is higher than the 2003 national average. The incidence of teenage pregnancy has declined considerably over the last two years, significantly exceeding the national rate of decline. Teenage pregnancy rates are now in line with national levels. Take-up of drug treatment services by young people has increased by 18 per cent. Schools' compliance with sex and relationships education is good and there is a clear focus on the particular needs of vulnerable and faith groups. The health needs of looked after children are met effectively and the referral of vulnerable young people to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is timely.

Staying safe

The outcomes for the safety and care of children and young people are very good, with a number of indicators well above the national average. The council has clear policies for promoting safe environments and the implementation and impact of these policies is reviewed regularly. There are strong multi-agency partnerships, particularly with health service workers and community groups, for example in the assessment process. This has resulted in an increase in those making use of respite care and breaks and the numbers of children being cared for and supported by friends and relatives.

All child protection cases have an allocated social worker and all reviews are completed within required timescales. There is a clear and effective referral system. The council, through a multi-agency team, acts quickly to make assessments of children in need, including children with disabilities and those with mental health needs. There is continued good performance in the care and support provided to children looked after but the number of adoptions is low. There has been an increase in the number of foster placements. However the use of residential accommodation and the long-term stability of placements require further focus to ensure that more children have the experience of family life and that older children achieve permanent placements. Although the numbers are small, performance remains low, albeit in line with comparators.

The number of black and minority ethnic children and families who access services has risen in response to a continued focus on this area of work. For example, the authority has undertaken innovative work with mosques and African churches to raise the profile of safeguarding issues. A Safe Parenting handbook translated in community languages has been produced for families in the borough. There are effective protocols between education and social care to support children.

Recent inspections of children's services and adoption services have commended their very good quality. The Youth Offending Team inspection has identified risk management and enforcement as areas requiring increased attention, which has been responded to promptly by the authority.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are very good. The overall quality of early years provision is very good and supports children well in enabling them to meet the early learning goals. There has been a rise in the extent of childcare provision, especially childminders. The weaknesses identified through nursery inspection are being addressed. The Foundation Stage team are training nursery staff and a quality assurance process has been established; as a result overall effectiveness is improving.

Attainment at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 is well above that of statistical neighbours as is the proportion of pupils gaining one or more GCSEs at A*-G grades. However, attainment at Key Stage 3 is relatively low and is below statistical neighbours in respect of English attainment. The education service has recognised the need to provide a more rigorous challenge to its secondary schools in raising attainment at Key Stage 3 and is using a range of interventions to support improvement. Support for schools causing concern is good and the number of schools in a category of concern has reduced from 40 in 1994 to three in December 2004; the authority has established robust systems of monitoring and supports its schools in proportion to identified needs

The level of authorised absence from school is low but the level of unauthorised absence is high. This is due, in part, to the rigour demanded of schools in recording absence data accurately so that, for instance, guidance to schools is that holiday absence is always recorded as unauthorised and education social workers check schools' compliance with this. Strategies to improve the attendance of minority ethnic groups and of looked after children have been effective and attendance rates are high. The number of pupils excluded from secondary schools is above the national average and the borough is implementing innovative procedures to address the problem. Individual schools are required to produce reports and action plans to reduce exclusions; this strategy is likely to lead to a reduction. Although the number of pupils receiving tuition out of school is high, many of them are on short-term placements; the authority has a very good record in respect of reintegrating these pupils.

The number of young people leaving care at age 16 with a qualification is relatively high. However, there remains a significant proportion of this group who do not achieve qualifications. The authority maintains a relatively high proportion of children and young people with statements of special educational need but is reducing this level through ceasing to maintain some and reducing the number of new statements issued. This is part of an improved strategy to delegate more resources to schools.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good overall. There is a good participation programme in operation, which promotes the consultation and involvement of children and young people, for example, through school councils and the youth parliament. The number of offences committed by young people has declined since 2002. The range of diversionary activities to engage young people likely to offend has improved. Insufficient priority has been given to victim support and restorative justice work and there is a lack of effective partnership working in these areas. The recent Youth Offending Team Inspection identified the need for action to be taken to promote youth inclusion and work with the anti-social behaviour unit. A protocol for joint working has been finalised and presented by authority in response.

There are successful arrangements to support pupils' transition from primary to secondary education including the effective use of learning mentors. Increasing numbers of young people reaching school leaving age are in education post-16. There is also a very effective 'leaving care service' which promotes the participation of looked after children in post-16 education and social care. A very high proportion of reviews of looked after children are completed within statutory timescales and more children and young people are contributing their views. The Commission for Social Care Inspection's (CSCI's) Children's Services Inspection of Tower Hamlets found that the quality and numbers of assessments of young people who are carers have improved, as has the support available to them. An internal audit by the authority has identified the need to improve the access of young people to the complaints procedure and is being promptly addressed.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are very good. The recent 14-19 inspection reported very positively about the borough's work, grading leadership and management of the 14-19 strategy as outstanding. There is a clear focus on young people not in education, employment or training and the result has been a significant increase in the take-up of post-16 opportunities. The borough has a successful 14-19 Pathfinder project which is focused on finding employment for young people from disadvantaged communities.

There is a relatively high proportion of care leavers who are in education, employment or training at age 19 and the borough is undertaking a series of actions to further improve this figure. The 'leaving care' service has been very effective in supporting young people in making the transition to adult life and economic independence. The service is developing appropriately its expertise in working with care leavers with mental health problems and learning disabilities and it has been active in seeking out missing young people; this is commendable. A recent inspection of the Youth Offending Team found that education to employment support for this vulnerable group was good for young people under 16 but only just satisfactory for those over 16.

Tower Hamlets college has increased its range of specialist courses to improve provision for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities and the borough has recognised the need to improve the quality of advice and guidance to this particular group. Overall, standards of attainment in sixth forms in the borough tend to be below the average nationally and for sixth forms in similar circumstances. However, the 14-19 area wide inspection judged that A level results had improved for all groups.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promotion of healthy lifestyles • levels of teenage pregnancy • attention to health needs of vulnerable children. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in sport at the primary stage.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong child protection systems • sound and effective referral processes • use of relatives and friends to support and care for children. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • numbers of children looked after adopted • long term stability of placements • use of residential accommodation.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase in childcare • attainment at key stages 1, 2 and 4 • support for schools causing concern • achievements of looked after children. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attainment at Key Stage 3 • exclusions from secondary schools • reducing number of statemented pupils.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good practice in processes for children and young people to give their views • young people's participation strategy • decline in number of offences committed by young people • improvement in post-16 staying-on rate • transition support from primary to secondary stage • strong focus on encouraging pupils to remain in education or training • support for young carers • leaving care service • diversionary activities to engage young people likely to offend. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • victim and restorative justice work • satisfaction and choice of care levels of children and young people • access to the complaints procedure.

<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in post-16 opportunities • successful 'Pathfinder' project • proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality of advice and guidance to young people with learning difficulties or disabilities • education to employment support for young people over 16 who are known to the Youth Offending Team.
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Service management

The capacity to improve is very good, and has been described as "excellent" in recent social care inspections by the CSCI of Children's Social care Services and the Adoption Service. There is a clear strategic vision for children's services shared by members, senior officers and with partner agencies. A Corporate Director of Children Services has been appointed to take up post in September 2005. The human resource strategy is bringing improvement to the workforce with 96 per cent permanency among social workers who work with children. There is sound financial management, leadership and accountability. However, the Audit letter identified the need for further attention to be given to the development of unit costs and the joint commissioning strategy. Since then Tower Hamlets has developed a commissioning framework and principles agreed by the Children's Trust Advisory Board and a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to commissioning for children services is being established.

High quality data is further strengthening performance management across the service with good use being made of needs analysis to inform planning and priorities, which are both ambitious and challenging.

Significant progress has been made in the development of a Children and Young People's Plan for 2006. The current plan is guiding the direction of the service and is focused on improving outcomes for children and young people.

The education service has clear knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses and action is being taken to bring about further improvements. The borough is working collaboratively with partners to analyse needs and set agreed targets to bring improved outcomes and further the integration of services.

Tower Hamlets has been selected as a pilot authority for Local Area Agreements and has been awarded beacon status for supporting social care workers in 2004/05 and, in addition, has secured beacon status for 2005/06 in the areas of promoting race equality and getting closer to communities.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Healthy life-styles are promoted for children and young people:

- participation in sport at the primary school stage.

Staying safe

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

- out of Borough placements
- interface between children and adult services.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- attainment at Key Stage 3.

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

Educational provision is made for children who do not attend school:

- exclusions from secondary schools.

Making a positive contribution

Children and young people, particularly those from vulnerable groups, are supported in managing changes and responding to challenges in their lives:

Action is taken to prevent offending and to reduce re-offending by children and young people:

- youth inclusion and partnership working with the anti- social behaviour unit.

Achieving economic well-being

Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to achieve economic well-being:

- the quality of advice and guidance to young people with learning difficulties or disabilities.

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:

- education to employment support for young people over 16 who are known to the Youth Offending Team.

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

cc: Ian Wilson - Director of Social Care
Christine Whatford - Acting Chief Education Officer

APA final judgements 2005: London Borough of Tower Hamlets 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	4
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	4
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	4
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	4

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