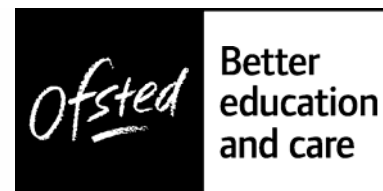


Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045
Email edhelpline@ofsted.gov.uk



Making Social Care
Better for People



Mrs Liz Nicholson
Director for Children and Young People
Shropshire County Council
Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury SY2 6ND

1 December 2005

Dear Ms Nicholson

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES 2005

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 25 July 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 yourself and your colleagues to discuss relevant issues.

Being healthy

The outcomes for children's health in Shropshire are very good. A high proportion of schools are re-committing to the healthy schools initiative, and there are innovative schemes to introduce local and organic produce into children's diets.

Teenage pregnancies are reducing in the county and the council is committed to further reductions as a priority. The authority has identified under-age drinking as a problem, and is focusing resources on this as a priority area.

Monitoring of the health needs of looked after children is better than average, although there was a slight decline in checks completed in the year. The authority is confident that the appointment of a dedicated nurse to the looked after children's team will ensure that the challenging Local Public Service Agreement target, of 85% of checks completed, will be met in 2005/06. An inspection of fostering services found that there were some weaknesses in translating information about children's health needs to an appropriate action plan for each child. The authority is implementing a response to this inspection.

Children who need the support of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are seen rapidly. CAMHS workers are located within the looked after children team to provide for this group, and the authority has good levels of resources compared with other councils.

Staying safe

Outcomes in this area are good. School inspections showed that most schools are good or very good at promoting children's care, welfare, health and safety.

Referrals of children in need are assessed in similar numbers to other councils, and the percentage of re-referrals has fallen. Numbers on the child protection register (CPR) have risen each year for five years. All are allocated to a qualified social worker, and all cases were reviewed within required time limits. Re-registrations on the CPR have fallen for the fourth successive year. The proportion of initial assessments completed within seven days, and of more detailed core assessments completed within 35 days, are both very good and well above the average. The authority carries out serious case reviews appropriately.

Shropshire has maintained a lower proportion of looked after children than similar councils. All children have an allocated qualified social worker. All relevant children have a pathway plan to independence. The stability of looked after children's placements improved in the year, and performance was better than most councils. The authority's performance in adoption of looked after children was good. The quality of service provided by the authority's own children's homes has improved in the last two years and is now good.

An inspection of the fostering service found that the authority had a difficulty in providing appropriately matched placements for young people, because there were insufficient carers. In addition, one situation occurred where the authority had insufficient residential care places available to provide for a child in an emergency. The fostering team has been strengthened in order to enhance the support to existing carers and to undertake recruitment of new carers. There has been a net increase in the number of carers. Additional residential care resources are under development, in partnership with other councils.

A high proportion of children with disabilities have a transition plan to support their move to adult services. The authority provides residential respite care services for disabled children through service level agreements with two child care charities. Management of family based respite care services and provision of family support to disabled children has been transferred to another charity. These services are of good quality.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are very good. The quality of Early Years' provision is good and children are well supported in enabling them to meet early learning goals. More nursery education providers are judged to be "very good" than the national average. Improvements in educational attainment have been made across all Key Stages and although there has been a dip in science at Key Stage 3, the authority have strategies in place to improve this performance. Looked after children have personal education plans in place and are well supported to attain educational achievements. There has been an increase in the numbers of young people gaining 5+ GCSE's with a high percentage gaining 1+ GCSE's upon leaving care.

Attendance in schools is good with very low authorised and unauthorised absences. Looked after children are encouraged to attend school and performance in this area is satisfactory, the authority are aware of the cohort of children involved and have measures in place to improve performance.

Exclusion levels are low and action is taken to ensure that children and young people who are excluded from school are provided with a range of alternative educational options, including other school placements or alternative provision. Re-integration of pupils is closely managed and young people who are excluded and in alternative provision remain on the register of their mainstream school to ensure that integration is managed effectively.

There are a very small number of schools in a formal category (2) and action is taken to ensure that schools are monitored, challenged and supported in improving their provision, with three schools being taken out of a formal category within the last 12 months.

Children and young people have good access to a range of recreational and voluntary learning provision through opportunities within schools and through the youth service provision.

There is a coherent and feasible special educational needs (SEN) strategy in place to enable children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities to enjoy and achieve. Tracking measures are used to evaluate success and analysis of performance is undertaken across key stages to identify trends over time and to be able to target individual children to ensure their curriculum needs are met. Performance in the completion of SEN statements within 18 weeks is good.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are good, with children, young people and their parents being supported through key transition points in their lives. A voluntary provider has been commissioned to support young carers, but evidence needs to be collated and monitored to demonstrate how this is promoting positive outcomes to allow young carers to lead as normal a life as possible.

There is a good range of opportunities in place to encourage children and young people to contribute to decision making and participate in the planning and management of services. Transport and library plans have been changed following consultation with young people. Progress is being made in developing consultation processes to ensure that the views of vulnerable groups of children and young people are included and the outcomes recorded.

There has been a slight increase in re-offending rates of juveniles and performance in this area is below the national average, though the authority is confident that recent performance will show an improvement. Offending rates amongst looked after children have remained above average, though very small numbers of children are involved. Timely referrals are made for juvenile offenders manifesting acute and non-acute mental health needs, and performance is better than the national average.

A high number of looked after children attend and contribute to their reviews when key decisions are being made about their lives. Looked after children are also routinely engaged in the appointment of staff and the approval of carers. Formal reviews now take place for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and mechanisms are in place to ensure that they are involved in consultation when key decisions are being made about them.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are very good. Shropshire is a national pathfinder for 14-19 education. There are strong collaborative partnerships in place to help deliver the key strategic aims of the 14-19 action plans, including the local Learning and Skills Council and Connexions. There are very low numbers of young people who are not in employment, education or training and Shropshire's aim is to continue to reduce this target through regular monitoring.

Looked after children and young people are helped to achieve economic well-being, they have pathway plans in place and are helped to live in suitable accommodation. Personal and welfare support is available to care leavers through the multi-agency care leavers' team. The numbers of care leavers in employment, education and training is very good in comparison with the national average. However, the authority have set themselves a further challenging target as part of their Local Public Service Agreement and are confident of reaching it.

Transition reviews take place for all Year 9 pupils with special educational needs and transition plans are produced with input from Connexions to ensure that targeted advice is provided for further education or training.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • healthy schools programme. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • individual health planning for looked after children.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assessment of children in need • the authority's own children's homes • allocation of social work staff to children on the CPR and who are looked after. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the development of sufficient residential care homes and foster homes to ensure placement choices are available for children looked after by the authority.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improvements in performance across all key stages • good attendance figures • the monitoring of individual children with SEN to ensure life chances are maximised • coherent and feasible SEN strategy. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the management of absences by looked after children.

<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support to children and young people in contributing to decisions that affects their lives • timely referrals made for juveniles manifesting mental health problems • looked after children's contribution to their reviews. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rates of offending by looked after children.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very low numbers of children who are not in employment, education or training, and whose destination is not known • collaborative partnerships to deliver the 14-19 strategy • high number of care leavers engaged in employment, education and training. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p>

Service management

Service management in the authority is a strength and there is excellent capacity for further improvement.

The authority has a strong Children and Young People's Partnership, and has created a Children's Trust with effect from 1 April 2005. A large scale review was undertaken of children's needs in the county, through a series of multi-agency conferences in each of the five district council areas. This has led to agreement to a set of priorities for the Children's Trust which have a high degree of commitment from all agencies. Work on each priority is being led by a champion from the Board of the Children's Trust. The framework is clearly linked to the corporate plan and establishes a strong foundation for the production of the Children and Young People's Plan by April 2006.

The authority has made very positive progress in the establishment of a Children and Young People's Services Directorate, this coming into being on 1 April 2005. There is strong leadership within children's services, and the changes have been achieved with staff support. The benefits of strong joint commissioning arrangements for children's services with Shropshire County PCT have been preserved through these changes, and partnership and multi-agency working is co-ordinated at a strategic level. Appointments have been made within new management structures, and care has been taken to ensure that safeguarding arrangements are not jeopardised.

The authority has a clear understanding of its strengths and of areas for future development. For instance, resources have been committed to the fostering service to underpin the requirement to improve placement choice. The self assessment was a clear and realistic assessment of the authority's position.

The authority has effective budget and performance management systems in place.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Looked after children's health needs are addressed:

- the translation of health monitoring into effective health improvement plans and better outcomes for looked after children.

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

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

- the range and availability of placement choice for looked after children.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- management of level of absence by looked after children.

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:

- monitoring of and improvements in the outcomes for young carers.

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: Shropshire County 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