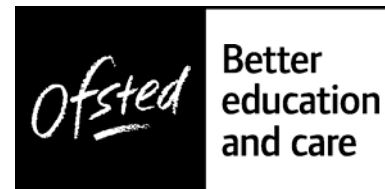


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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Eric Griffiths - Strategic Director for Education and Children's Services
Mr Mark Roberts - Head of Childcare Services
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Griffiths

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on 20 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

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. Within the authority there is a co-ordinated approach to healthy lifestyles for children and young people. A range of initiatives are in place to promote well being in schools such as healthy schools programme, healthy schools award and the uptake of sport in schools has improved. The incidence of drug abuse in Sandwell is below the national average. However the reduction of smoking and alcohol misuse in children and young people remains a challenge. The rate of teenage pregnancy has reduced over the last twelve months but remains above the national average; the council have a multi agency strategy in place and have set a challenging target for the future. Adequate arrangements are in place to meet the health needs of looked after children however performance is below that of similar authorities.

Appropriate arrangements are in place to promote children and young people's mental health. The authority has recognised that in order to make further improvements it will need to employ more qualified social workers to work closely with the multi disciplinary Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) team. The council has acknowledged the need to improve access to CAMHS for children and young people from black and minority ethnic communities.

Staying safe

This area of authority's work is weak; outcomes in this area are unsatisfactory. Children and young people are not consistently provided with a safe environment. There are serious concerns regarding the effectiveness of the systems in place to ensure the incidence of child abuse and neglect are minimised.

Whilst child protection policies and procedures are in place, systems to monitor and review their application and effectiveness are not consistently applied. All child protection cases have an allocated social worker and the number of child protection reviews completed has improved over the last 12 months. The Area Child Protection Committee has not fully delivered all its responsibilities. Actions remain outstanding from the Victoria Climbié Audit and serious case reviews.

The emergency threshold criteria that was applied for a period within the last twelve months has resulted in a considerable reduction in the number of referrals for children in need, well below levels of similar authorities. In contrast there has been an increase in the number of re-referrals. As only minimal improvements are planned for next year, the appropriateness of the current threshold criteria is brought into question. Whilst the completion of initial assessments is in line with similar authorities, the number and timeliness of the completion of core assessments is unsatisfactory.

The number of children looked after remains in line with similar authorities. The use of foster carers and kinship carers is appropriate; steps have been taken by the council to enhance capacity further. Overall stability of placements for looked after children is good yet challenges remain in the management of the adoption service where performance is well below that of similar authorities. There is insufficient diversity of placement choice as evidenced by the high numbers of children looked after who are placed outside of the borough. The completion of the commissioning strategy is crucial in addressing this issue.

The council has recognised the breadth of improvement work needed to ensure the safety of children in Sandwell. A comprehensive improvement plan has been developed and is in the early stage of implementation.

Enjoying and achieving

Outcomes in this area are unsatisfactory. Standards in schools are too low; they are below those of statistical neighbours and well below all schools nationally. The authority has recognised this and through careful targeting of resources and other measures it has begun to strengthen its educational provision. However, these improvements are not yet impacting across all schools and across all key stages of pupils' education

Provision for early years is satisfactory overall and helps children to meet their early learning goals. Standards of attainment at Key Stage 1 are unsatisfactory in writing, mathematics and reading assessments. Schools are not doing as well as those in similar authorities and significantly underperforming when compared to all schools nationally. The authority has recognised Key Stage 1 as a key area for improvement and is developing an appropriate multi-agency strategic response.

Although results at all key stages remain below those of statistical neighbours, at Key Stage 2 the authority is making progress on some key indicators. In 2004, it improved its results faster than its statistical neighbours in English and science. Early indications show that improvements have been sustained in 2005. At Key Stage 3 in 2004, test results in English and mathematics improved but there was a slight decline in science. The rate of improvement in 2004 at Key Stage 4 in the proportion of children achieving five or more GCSE at grades A* to C placed the local authority in the upper quartile of the most improved authorities for this indicator. The proportion gaining one or more GCSEs at A* to G also rose faster than that of statistical neighbours. The progress that pupils make between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 is uneven and unsatisfactory overall. Progress is slightly better between Key Stages 3 and 4 but nevertheless is lower than that found in most secondary schools. Some individual schools do better than others but the picture overall is too uneven.

The local authority has made good progress on outcomes for children who are looked after. Targeted action to support them, centred on personal education plans, the setting up of a 'virtual school' and residential experiences have supported improved attendance rates and achievements at GCSE, which are good compared to national comparators.

Exclusion rates for this group are low. There is under-performance of some minority ethnic groups, and in particular those of Pakistani and African Caribbean origin. Action that has been taken, including close tracking, supported significant improvements in 2004 of the Key Stage 2 mathematics and GCSE results of those from Pakistani heritage. There remain weaknesses in the attainment of minority ethnic groups, and in particular in their writing skills.

The overall attendance in primary and secondary schools in 2003-04 was unsatisfactory. The figures for both authorised and unauthorised absence were higher than those of statistical neighbours. Addressing this has been given a high priority through the deployment of the 'pupil engage' team. Data (not yet validated) for the 2004-05 year shows that the local authority has significantly improved attendance in both phases and that it is likely to meet its LPSA targets. Although there has been a slight reduction, the number of pupils permanently or temporarily excluded from their secondary school remains high.

The authority's support for those schools identified as causing concern has improved significantly and is now effective. The legacy of past underperformance has proved challenging but the number of formally identified schools has fallen. The authority had a low proportion of schools placed in a category in last 12 months compared to other authorities. Currently there are no secondary schools, special schools, PRUs or sixth forms in a formal category. The rate of removal of schools from formal categories is faster than is found in statistical neighbours and nationally. Currently, three primary schools are in special measures, but all have had positive outcomes from recent HMI visits. The school improvement team has been significantly strengthened by recent appointments from outside the authority.

Participation by children and young people in enrichment activities is good. Many take part in the wide range of music and residential experiences available to them, some through the full-service extended schools provision. Rates of participation by young people in youth service activities are high.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory overall. The authority has worked hard and effectively to encourage the involvement of young people in decision making processes, for example: the creation of the shadow youth cabinet; the youth parliament; involvement in 14 to 19 strategic planning; and each town now has a youth forum. However, opportunities for young people who are looked after or have special educational needs or disabilities remain underdeveloped.

Low proportions of children and young people who are looked after communicate their views to statutory reviews or take up advocacy services. Attendance at reviews of looked after children is poor. Although children with special educational needs or disabilities are invited to contribute their views at reviews, and they and their parents have had some involvement in service design, developing their voice remains an area for improvement.

All recent inspections of secondary, special schools and pupil referral units have shown good development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and a high proportion have good procedures for monitoring and elimination of oppressive behaviour. For some time the youth offending team has not had a manager in place and although there are examples where targeted actions have led to improvements in outcomes, there remain areas requiring significant improvement.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are unsatisfactory overall. The 14 to 19 strategy has not yet had sufficient impact on the outcomes for young people: participation rates at the age of 16 in further learning are rising but remain well below national rates; standards in school sixth forms are too low; the average points score of students aged 16 to 18 in schools are below the national average; and progression rates to higher education, whilst rising are also low. A low proportion of care leavers have a pathway plan. Compared to similar authorities, a low proportion of young people with disabilities receive services. These groups, therefore, are not adequately supported in making transitions. There has been some progress on establishing the collaborative post-16 model and entitlement for education and training. All three area consortia will offer joint provision from September 2005. The local authority has worked well in partnership with the University of Wolverhampton to improve progression to higher education, and latest data shows increased applications and uptake of offers. The University is also the lead partner in the authority's academy proposals, which, along with the successful specialist school developments, have an appropriate strong focus on vocational provision.

Summary

Strengths	Areas for Improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engagement in healthy schools initiative • support for schools form schools sport partnership • drug education advice service. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAMHS • teenage pregnancy • health needs of looked after children.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of kinship and foster carers • care of pupils in school. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • child protection arrangements including implementation of the Victoria Climbié Audit and actions from serious case reviews • care management • services for children with disability, looked after children and family support.

<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • broad range of improvement strategies • faster rate of improvement than statistical neighbours in some key attainment indicators at 11 and 16 • rapid rate of removal of schools from formal categories • high rates of participation in enrichment activities • successful strategies for the improvement of achievements of children who are looked after • high rates of participation in youth service activities. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • achievements of school pupils at all key stages and in particular at KS1 • the remaining primary schools in formal categories • sustained improvement in attendance and permanent exclusions in secondary schools • the achievements of some minority ethnic groups • proportion of statements issued within 18 weeks.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • progress on aspects of involvement of young people in decision-making and planning good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and procedures for monitoring and elimination of oppressive behaviour in secondary and special schools and PRUs. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attendance of children and young people who are looked after and reviews and their take up of advocacy • corporate parenting responsibilities • the voice of children with special educational needs or disabilities.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some progress on developing the collaborative post-16 model • specialist schools strategy well on target • good uptake of direct payments for carers of disabled children. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation rates in learning at 16 • standards of attainment in school sixth forms • translating planning into implementation of the 14 to 19 entitlement curriculum • the proportion of young people progressing to HE • the proportion of care leavers with a pathway plan.

Service management

There has been corporate recognition and support of the challenges within social care and the scale of issues in educational attainment; both have been given appropriate priority. There are clear and appropriate ambitions for children's services with priorities and targets set for each service area. These have been identified following a process of needs analysis and from a recent children's services inspection report. A comprehensive improvement plan has been developed for social care.

The Children and Young Persons Plan is currently being developed. The strategic leadership of children's services have shown commitment to improvement by the development and implementation of a new strategic management structure and have enhanced senior management capacity through interim arrangements.

The council plan to move to permanent appointments when the new Director of Children's Services comes into post, which is imminent.

Effective management of resources to secure improvement is evident across education but this is not replicated in social care. Improvements are required in the systems of performance and data management in social care.

The council is aware of the need to improve the pace of change across a number of key areas. The council has adequate capacity to improve.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Healthy lifestyles are promoted for children and young people:

- progress of strategies to reduce teenage pregnancy.

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

- child protection arrangements
- care management.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- the effectiveness of the school improvement strategy, and in particular at Key Stage 1
- trends in the achievements of minority ethnic groups.

Making a positive contribution

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

- corporate priority for developing voice of young people with special educational needs.

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

- management and performance of the YOT.

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 is of good quality:

- standards and progress in school sixth forms
- implementation of the sixth form curriculum and progress on other recommendations in the 14 to 19 area inspection report.

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: Sandwell 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	1
The contribution of <i>local authority's education services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	2
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	1
The council's overall capacity to improve its services for children and young people	2

1

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Service descriptors</i>	<i>Capacity to improve descriptors</i>
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