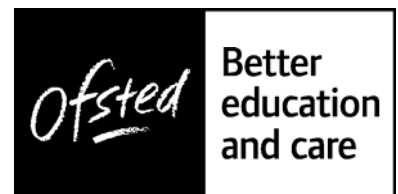


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Making Social Care
Better for People



Mr Steven Beynon
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1 December 2005

Dear Mr Beynon

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

This letter summarises the findings of the meeting held on June 27th 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 the way the health of looked after children is promoted. Services to support Being Healthy initiatives are well coordinated and are having a strong impact. The significant increase in the number of Primary Mental Health workers has been well received by schools along with the plans to develop Tier 3 and 4 services. The joint structure for commissioning Child and Adolescent Mental Health services is effective. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) is responding well to youth offending team referrals and the appointment of a social care manager for the Child and Adult Consultation service has been timely. The emerging links with the Emotional Literacy programme are a positive development although diagnostic and treatment response times are still too long. Good progress is being made in several priority areas, for example in reducing teenage conceptions and pregnancy rates, in the rate of take up of the Healthy Schools programme and in developing participation in sport.

Although a wide variety of multi- and single-agency initiatives have been undertaken, in some cases insufficient note has been taken of the findings from pilot projects. Management information is still used inconsistently to ensure each initiative has the maximum impact. The health of children in Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups requires closer scrutiny in relation to that of the wider population.

Staying safe

Outcomes are good. Children are very well protected and Thurrock's performance is good in relation to most of the main Staying Safe indicators. Planning is coherent and detailed. Actions to promote child protection have increased significantly over the past two years, for example, the numbers of conferences, in-year registrations and the increase in total number of children on the child protection register. Risk assessments are robust, social work practice is improved and there are better working relationships with schools and other agencies. The number of children from BME groups in the system has fallen to a more proportionate level and the Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) training programme is wide-ranging and effective.

A steady and sustained decrease in the number of looked after children has occurred, assisted by the steady rise in the rate at which looked after children are adopted to a very good performance level. So far the stability of both short and long-term placements for this vulnerable group has been high. The success in recruiting foster carers and adopters over the past year is impressive. Wide ranging and well judged services are in place for looked after children and working relationships with the courts and the Children and Family Courts Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) are strong.

There are some weaknesses to address. Improvement is needed in the response time for initial assessments. The number of children with disabilities aged 14 receiving transition plans is too low and the housing options for displaced adolescents too restricted. More importance needs to be given to the views of children and young people when services undertake self evaluations especially in those areas relating to community safety initiatives, domestic violence and bullying at school.

Enjoying and achieving

Although outcomes in this area are adequate overall there are some important weaknesses to be addressed. Most children's achievements are unsatisfactory in relation to national averages although they are satisfactory in relation to most of the borough's statistical neighbours and most children make satisfactory progress over their time in school. While many of the issues impacting on children's and young people's achievements are long standing and deep seated, over the last two years the strategies to address these problems have been fundamentally re-appraised. Significant improvements have been made in the way the council is working with its schools.

The good quality of early years' provision is not yet enabling children to meet national expectations on entry and the relatively low standards reached at the end of the Key Stage 1 mean that most children have a significant amount of ground to make up in later years. In Key Stages 2 to 4 the size of the deficit compared with the national

average in each of the core subjects fluctuates but the pattern of under-performance is consistent. Achievement in mathematics is much lower than in English and boys underachieve in relation to girls by almost twice the national figure by the end of Key Stage 4. Looked after children achieve poorly and very few leave school with five or more good GCSE's. On a positive note, care leavers' educational qualifications have improved significantly in the past year and most pupils with SEN make progress that is at least satisfactory.

Attendance across the borough is improving slowly from an unsatisfactory level although it is still below the national average in the primary phase. Support for schools with an above-average number of unauthorised absences is effective. These schools frequently show rapid and sustained rates of improvement.

Most children and young people have access to a suitable range of good educational provision and the number of surplus places is relatively low. The number of schools with serious weaknesses or in Special Measures is also low. There is however a significant number of relatively low-achieving schools that are not in a formal category, particularly in the primary phase. Only one secondary school is not reaching its floor targets. Support for schools in a formal category is very effective. However, the borough recognises the need to make more effective use of the management information it generates to track, monitor and support children and young people.

Thurrock has developed good partnership working arrangements with its schools and most of its other key partners to deal with common problems. However this good practice does not extend to school/college working. The development of a joint 14-19 strategy has so far proved an intractable problem, with limited progress due to the failure to gain full collaboration from all partners.

Making a positive contribution

Outcomes in this area are satisfactory. The rate of youth crime is in line with statistical neighbours but above the national average. The authority has a wide range of projects and initiatives to combat re-offending which have so far met with mixed success. Recently there has been a sharp increase in the rate of first-time offending and looked after children show relatively high rates of offending.

Most children and young people are given good support in managing changes in their lives. The support provided for vulnerable groups is particularly good and reflects some effective multi-agency work. Children and young people are now being given appropriate help to make a positive contribution and children with SEN have responded especially well.

Good progress is being made towards involving young people in helping to decide upon the range of services that are to be put in place. They are widely consulted and

many can express their views through a range of forums including a youth parliament. However, although steps are being taken, they are not yet involved sufficiently in any strategic decision making to help shape priorities through their involvement on the board of the local Connexions partnership and other service providers.

Achieving economic well-being

Outcomes in this area are adequate. The quality of education provided for 14-19 year olds is satisfactory but the proportion of young people progressing to higher education and training is low. Educational achievements as measured by accreditations are well below national averages. Many young people continue to benefit from good guidance and support from Connexions and the Youth Service and a high priority is being given to developing provision for students with SEN.

Participation in post-16 education and training is low and 14-19 provision is not well thought through. It is neither planned coherently nor as part of a clear strategy for improvement. A particular concern is the low participation in post-16 education and training by girls. The partnership working with the Local Learning and Skills Council and between the college and the borough's schools is unsatisfactory.

Despite the low overall rate of participation in post-16 education, employment and training, over three quarters of care leavers are appropriately engaged. However, there is still a need for more supported lodgings and the availability of direct payments to young people with disabilities needs to be widened. Unaccompanied asylum seekers need to be better supported if they are to achieve economic independence.

SUMMARY

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> health of looked after children reducing teenage pregnancy diversity of innovative projects good CAMHS commissioning. 	<p><i>Being healthy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> faster CAMHS diagnosis and treatment better evidence of impact and outcomes.
<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> evidence of safer child protection practice falling numbers of looked after children good community projects to reduce domestic violence. 	<p><i>Staying safe:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> better response times for initial assessments transition plans for all young people with disabilities.
<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> most children make satisfactory progress good partnership working with schools improving attendance. 	<p><i>Enjoying and achieving:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> overall achievement in each key stage achievement of boys achievement of looked after children attendance in primary schools.
<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> good support for children and young people in most settings young people are helped to make a positive contribution. 	<p><i>Making a positive contribution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> uneven progress on co-ordinating and acting upon young people's views action to reduce offending and re offending rates.
<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> good support from Connexions and the Youth Service initiatives to deal with known areas of need and/or weakness good participation by looked after children. 	<p><i>Achieving economic well-being:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the low participation in post-16 education and training the low participation in post-16 education and training by girls slow progress of the 14-19 strategy.

Service management

The council has a good knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. This is reflected in the quality of the self-assessment which is generally accurate in identifying areas for improvement. There has been a significant progress over the last three years in the

way the council is addressing those areas where it knows improvement is required. Its work is now better coordinated. Over the last year, where the authority has taken action it has been timely and has, in most cases, brought about significant improvement; for example in reducing the number of looked after children or in improving attendance in those schools where it is a particular problem. Work on needs assessment is generally well developed and there is good multi agency support for children who are underachieving. Thurrock has achieved success in the recruitment and retention of social work staff and vacancy and sickness rates compare favourably with adjacent councils.

There are still areas where more work is needed nearly all of which the self assessment has identified. No joint priorities with the health service and police are in place and action still needs to be taken to measure the impact of the initiatives taken and to judge their cost effectiveness. Effective partnerships have yet to be formed with the local college and the local Learning and Skills Council. Better value for money needs to be achieved in residential care provision along with sustained investment in family support services.

Given the progress described above the council has demonstrated that it has a good capacity to improve further.

Areas for exploration in the joint area review

Being healthy

Action is taken to promote children and young people's mental health:

- impact of increase in CAMHS investment.

Staying safe

The incidence of child abuse and neglect is minimised:

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

- progress in the quality of assessment work in social services.

Enjoying and achieving

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

- progress made in narrowing the achievement gap with national averages.

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

- attendance levels in primary schools.

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

- the achievement of looked after children.

Making a positive contribution

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

- the range of activities and support to assist children and young people in leading law-abiding and constructive lives.

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

- progress in enabling children and young people to shape provision.

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:

- progress on raising staying-on rates, particularly among girls.

Children and young people who are looked after are helped to achieve economic well-being:

- the impact of the 14-19 strategy on accommodation for care leavers and displaced young people.

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: Thurrock 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.	2
The contribution of <i>the local authority's children's services</i> in maintaining and improving outcomes for children and young people.	2
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